



**BARNSTABLE COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND
ENVIRONMENT**

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**Justification for the Expansion
of
The Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment
Public Health Nursing Division
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Overview:

Barnstable County was impacted greatly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that impact continues. This county has the oldest population in New England, and the devastating truth is that our elderly are the most vulnerable to COVID-19. We have a significant number of long-term care facilities and nursing homes. At this writing, we have had 1,819 cases of COVID-19, and 164 deaths, a nearly 10% death rate. Of these fatalities, nearly 70% were residents of skilled nursing and long-term care facilities.

As we approach seasonal flu season, and school departments work to reopen, we anticipate an increase of COVID-19 cases in Barnstable County. We are tasked with assisting schools to reopen as safely as possible, providing support with disinfection protocols, as well as COVID response, including education, testing, and contact tracing. We are also working closely with schools to come in compliance with the Governor's order that each school age child be vaccinated against the seasonal flu.

We may see a second devastating impact on long term care facilities this fall. We are also concerned with the constant stress and impact on our existing staff, who have been working around the clock since the outbreak began. This is a perfect storm scenario for our department.

One of our key vulnerabilities, is that COVID forces us to make difficult and necessary choices in the services and programs we perform and offer. This is unacceptable. For example, our wellness programs, like blood pressure checks, vaccinations, and outreach to vulnerable populations, have been curtailed.

Local Boards of Health are also stressed to the limits by COVID-19. Our department has supported and helped respond to every town on the Cape as needs arose. We know those front-line public health departments are anticipating more assistance from us as we go into the fall.

Rationale:

Facing the public health emergencies in our near future will only be possible with more staff support. We propose adding two 18-month public health nursing positions to our department. These positions would be evaluated and reviewed to determine if more

assistance is needed after that initial 18-month period. The focus of these nurses will be to address the aforementioned issues.

We see this as a two-pronged approach to the coming crisis. One of the nursing positions will work directly with long-term care facilities, and one will work with towns and schools.

The public health nurse who works with long term care will be tasked with several priorities:

1. Develop more comprehensive infectious disease control plans, working with both facilities and Cape Cod Healthcare.
2. Develop inventories of PPE
3. Develop staffing protocols to limit exposures during communicable disease incidents
4. Establish the use of the Incident Command System in these facilities.

The public health nurse who works with towns and schools will be tasked with different priorities:

1. Conduct flu vaccination clinics for school students and staff
2. Coordinate COVID education and testing programs for students and staff
3. Assist with case follow-up and contact tracing.
4. Coordinate with towns to be on site for a set number of days per month to assist them with all public health issues.

These positions do not supersede the ongoing efforts of the public health nursing leader. In addition to coordinating these positions, she will continue to provide public health nursing services to the 15 towns of the Cape, direct the COVID-19 testing rapid response team, supervise all vaccination program efforts, and reinstate some of our established wellness programs to help our vulnerable populations. She is also planning for a future COVID-19 vaccination program, including a drive-through flu vaccination clinic scheduled in September, which will serve as an exercise for when the COVID vaccine becomes available.

Closing:

One of the things we learned during our regional response to COVID-19 is that our Department did a good job pulling together and helping the community. We also learned that we cannot do it all in trying to maintain support to our vulnerable populations and respond to an ongoing pandemic. These two additional public health nurses are absolutely crucial as we move forward into an uncertain future, knowing we need to meet challenges in our long-term care facilities, in our schools, and in each of the 15 towns of the Cape.

Respectfully Submitted
Sean M. O'Brien
Director