



# Public Health Can't Afford Another Decade of Underfunding

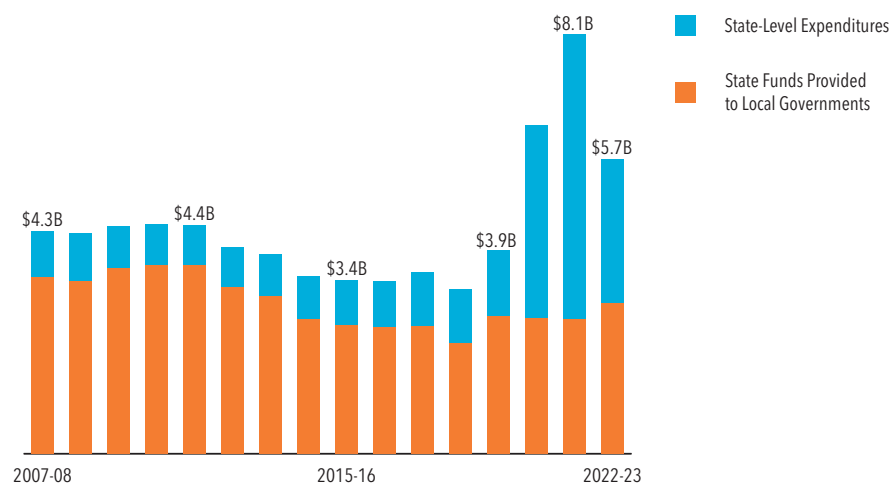
MARCH 2022 | BY ADRIANA RAMOS-YAMAMOTO

Everyone should have the opportunity to be healthy and thrive, regardless of their race, gender identity, sexual orientation, income, or zip code. The California Department of Public Health as well as local public health departments play a critical role in protecting and promoting Californians' health and well-being.<sup>1</sup> Their core functions include infectious disease control, chronic disease prevention, health promotion, and more. Yet despite these important responsibilities, funding has not kept pace with the cost of preparing for and responding to ongoing and emerging health threats that endanger Californians.

State public health spending was generally stagnant or declining prior to the COVID-19 pandemic – leaving Californians vulnerable. Spending only recently increased largely due to the pandemic. Due to chronic underfunding of public health systems, counties and cities across the state were not adequately prepared to respond to COVID-19 and many Californians suffered as a result. The virus disproportionately impacted Black and brown communities, exposing the damaging effects of racism in California.

## State Public Health Spending Was Generally Stagnant or Declining Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Inflation-Adjusted California Department of Public Health Expenditures, 2007-08 to 2022-23

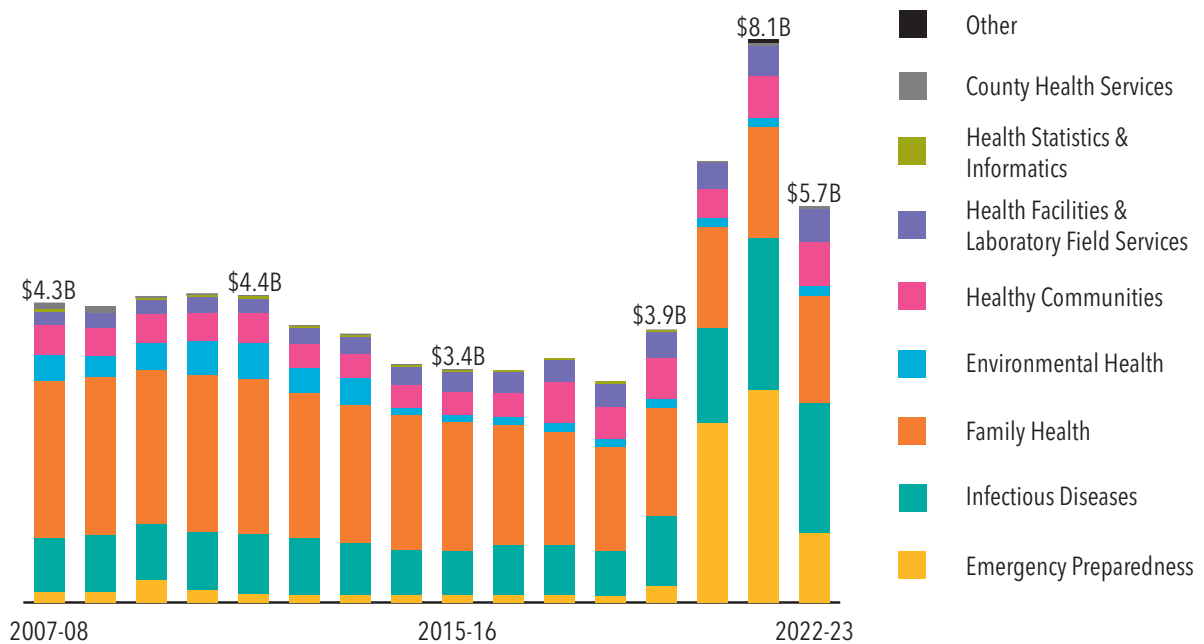


Note: 2020-21 to 2022-23 include funds associated with responding to and mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Figures reflect 2022-23 dollars. 2021-22 expenditures are estimated. 2022-23 expenditures are proposed. Source: California Department of Finance

The governor’s proposed 2022-23 budget includes a new investment of \$300 million for public health infrastructure at the state and local level, which would support workforce expansion, data collection, and more.<sup>2</sup> The budget also includes \$235 million for state-level disease surveillance and IT operations. This commitment is a critical first step in reversing the chronic underfunding of public health systems and ensuring that Californians, especially communities of color, don’t bear the costs of an unprepared state.

## Spending on Emergency Preparedness and Infectious Disease Control Increased Sharply During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Inflation-Adjusted California Department of Public Health Expenditures, 2007-08 to 2022-23



Note: 2020-21 to 2022-23 include funds associated with responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. “Other” includes Media Campaign, Evaluation and Committee, and Competitive Grants. Figures reflect 2022-23 dollars. 2021-22 expenditures are estimated. 2022-23 expenditures are proposed. Source: California Department of Finance

<sup>1</sup> State departments other than the Department of Public Health often contribute to efforts to protect and promote public health. For example, the Department of Toxic Substances Control protects Californians from toxic substances. This analysis excludes such expenditures.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Finance, *Governor’s Budget Summary 2022-23* (January 10, 2022), 132-134, <https://www.ebudget.ca.gov/2022-23/pdf/BudgetSummary/FullBudgetSummary.pdf>.