

2022 BUDGET PRIORITY: PROTECT MICHIGANDERS FROM ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH THREATS

LEAGUE RECOMMENDATION:

Invest more in public health infrastructure, including funding to rebuild local health departments' capacity to investigate child lead poisoning cases, and address drinking water infrastructure to reduce childhood exposure to toxins like lead and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

BACKGROUND:

State spending on public health has not kept pace with growing health concerns, leaving Michigan ill-prepared to address current threats and future crises. In recent years, Michigan has maintained one of the nation's lowest per-capita spending levels on public health, and as a result the state ranks poorly with regard to a number of serious but preventable health conditions. Exposure to environmental hazards in the air, water and homes is a factor in Michiganders' poor health, leading to avoidable healthcare costs, premature death, lost opportunity and a lower quality of life for adults and children alike. We must give our local health departments (LHDs) the resources to prevent toxic exposures and respond effectively, and address the aging drinking water infrastructure prevalent in settings where children spend most of their time.

Michigan must provide adequate funding for lead poisoning investigations. In budget year 2012, funding to states for lead poisoning prevention from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was cut by more than 90%, forcing many LHDs in Michigan to scale back elevated blood lead (EBL) investigations or discontinue them altogether. When a child has been poisoned by lead, an EBL investigation is crucial to identifying the source and preventing future poisonings in the same home. Currently, even though lead exposure is a serious problem throughout the state, response varies based on the resources individual LHDs are able to cobble together. A dedicated state-level revenue stream for local EBL investigations and other critical lead response activity would address the patchwork and ensure that all children affected by lead receive the attention they deserve. It is estimated that it would cost [a minimum of \\$86 million annually](#) to implement a comprehensive program for lead elimination and response in every LHD in the state.

Michigan Must Invest in Healthy Homes and Neighborhoods



- Michigan is the 13th-worst state for the generation of industrial toxins and health risks due to pollution
- PFAS have contaminated public drinking water supplies serving more than 1.5 million state residents



- More than 1,200 Michigan children ages 1-2 were confirmed to have elevated blood lead levels in 2019
- Michigan children born in 2012 will lose a collective \$171 million in lifetime earnings due to lead exposure

Sources: U.S. News & World Report; Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy; MLPP; Ecology Center

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Fund the installation of hydration stations and faucet filters to ensure safe drinking water in schools and child care centers. Amid concerns about aging infrastructure, lead in drinking water and COVID-19 transmission, touchless hydration stations and point-of-use filters are a cost-effective way to protect children from the harmful health and academic impacts of lead and other toxins like PFAS. Many factors affect the reliability of lead testing results and even faucets and drinking fountains that are certified lead free contain small amounts of lead, so widespread testing and replacement of fixtures where lead is detected can provide a false sense of security. A “filter first” approach for all drinking water sources in schools and child care centers would better assure parents that their children are safe and help mitigate the broader social and economic impacts of water contamination.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Environmental toxins carry a huge cost in terms of disease and lives lost: Lead exposure can have an irreversible impact on the brain, liver, kidneys and bones and contributes to anemia and high blood pressure. Similarly, PFAS are believed to be connected to significant health conditions such as kidney disease, thyroid problems, decreased fertility and autoimmune disorders. Both lead and PFAS are linked to heart disease and cancer, which are the state’s leading causes of death. Nationally, lead exposure is related to more than 400,000 adult deaths every year.

Children lose out on opportunity due to poor health: Because childhood is a crucial time for development of the brain and the rest of the body, exposure to toxins like lead is especially harmful during this period. The resulting physical health problems, cognitive impairments and academic challenges can affect children for the rest of their lives. Childhood lead poisoning is linked to a higher frequency of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and increased juvenile crime. Among Michigan children who were born in 2012, the collective loss in lifetime earnings due to lead exposure is expected to be \$171 million.

Our economy suffers because of lost worker productivity: Worker absenteeism costs U.S. employers an estimated \$1,685 in lost productivity per employee every year. With illness and injury among adults and children alike leading to many missed work days and reductions in worker output, it is imperative that the state invests sufficient resources in preventing exposure to harmful substances, identifying those who are harmed by exposure, and helping affected people recover or manage their conditions to minimize the impact on school and work.

Racial and geographic health disparities drive wealth inequity: Social and environmental factors affecting health, such as exposure to pollutants, vary drastically based on ZIP code, race and ethnicity. As a result, rural and urban residents experience worse health outcomes than their suburban counterparts, and even within the same community disease prevalence, mortality rates and life expectancy can be inconsistent from neighborhood to neighborhood. African Americans, Native Americans and Latinxs suffer from worse health overall than Whites and Asians. Through its impacts on education and employment opportunities, poor health is a key driver of systemic poverty and, consequently, avoidable government expenditures on healthcare and other services to meet people’s basic needs. A robust public health sector is crucial to protecting all Michiganders from environmental threats to their health and well-being, regardless of race, place or income.