

For Immediate Release
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Washington Poison Center Is In a Funding Crisis

Hidden within the proposed cuts to the Washington State's Department of Health is a \$1 million a year cut that would cost the state millions in additional health care costs and potentially endanger its citizens. The House of Representatives proposed budget has a 50 percent funding cut to the Washington Poison Center (WAPC), a slash that would cripple the WAPC's ability to continue providing its services to the citizens of Washington State. The Senate's proposed budget isn't much better with a proposed 37 percent cut.

"Such a cut would leave us unable to continue 24/7 operations and unable to maintain certification as a poison center. This would lead to our closure," said Dr. William Hurley, Medical Director of the WAPC. "This could not come at a worse time."

According to the State Department of Health's June 2008 Injury and Violence Prevention Guide, poisonings and drug overdoses are the leading causes of unintentional injury-related deaths in Washington State, surpassing motor vehicle crashes.

That same guide also states that "every call to a poison control center saves \$175 in other medical spending."

"Initial research from other states also indicates cost would be greater to outsource these services than the current funding for our local poison center," said Jim Williams, Executive Director of the WAPC. Williams estimates the state would need to spend about \$2.8 million a year to outsource Poison Center operations to another state.

In addition, Washingtonians would lose poison prevention education efforts, a statewide community resource and local expert treatment advice provided free -- 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and available in over 140 languages.

The WAPC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization that relies on the state funds that support approximately 80 percent of its core services. Its mission is to prevent harm from poisoning through expertise, collaboration and professional and public education. Staffed by paid specially-trained pharmacists, nurses and poison specialists and backed by physician toxicologist, callers get the expert help they need when they call **1-800-222-1222**. Over 17 percent of the nearly 100,000 calls placed to the WAPC last year were from medical professionals - including paramedics and emergency physicians - to get advice on patient treatment.

“We are asking everyone to contact their local legislator asking to reinstate full funding,” said Williams. “Our government owes it to the citizens of the state to have the services of a local poison center.” For more information, visit www.wapc.org.

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