Gov. Brian Kemp proposed a 2021 budget of $263.5 million in state general funds for the Department of Public Health. The agency is also set to receive $13.7 million from a tobacco industry legal settlement and $1.4 million from the Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund. In addition to these state funds, the proposed budget includes $395.9 million in federal funds. About 58 percent of the agency’s total budget comes from the federal government through programs such as Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant (TANF).

By the Numbers

The Department of Public Health first received funding as a standalone department in FY 2012. Prior to that, the state’s public health spending was part of a division within either the Department of Human Resources or the Department of Community Health. The Department of Public Health leads the state’s work in preventing disease, promoting population health and well-being and preparing for the response efforts to emergencies. The agency funds and collaborates with 159 county health departments and 18 public health districts.

The Department of Public Health also oversees two attached agencies. The Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission distributes grants to improve quality of life for Georgians with traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries. The Georgia Trauma Care Network Commission distributes money to stabilize and improve the state’s trauma care system.
Amended FY 2020 Highlights

The AFY 2020 budget, which started on July 1, 2019 and ends June 30, 2020, proposes a total reduction of $6.3 million in state general funds. Highlights include:

- $6.4 million cut to grant funds for county health departments
- $1.4 million cut to adolescent and adult health promotion programs, including a reduction of $300,000 for Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education, a reduction of $275,000 for five Coverdell-Murphy remote stroke readiness grants and a reduction of $265,000 for Sickle Cell Foundation of Georgia

FY 2021 Budget Highlights

The agency is facing proposed cuts of $13.6 million in state general funds, a 5 percent decrease from the prior year. Most of these cuts were related to reductions in grants for county health departments. The only increases to the budget were related to administrative changes that all agencies were required to include, such as a $1,000 pay raise for full-time employees with salaries of $40,000 or less. Most of the changes are similar to those seen in the AFY2020 budget. The 2021 changes include:

- $9.2 million reduction in grant funds for county health departments. Each of Georgia’s 159 counties has a local health department, serving as a frontline for accessing care in rural counties. They provide basic preventive care services such as immunizations, screenings, family planning, and case management services for pregnant women and people with infectious diseases. They are also responsible for conducting environmental health inspections for restaurants and hotels. All 159 health departments are connected to the state’s telehealth network to allow residents to see a provider through video conferencing. Local health departments are funded through a combination of state, county and private funds. The reduction in grant funds would require the health departments to seek additional funds from their county or private grants to make up for the loss. Since that funding may also be limited, some health departments may need to make cuts to existing or planned future programs and services.
- A cut of $2.5 million to eliminate 24 vacant positions across the agency. Although these positions are currently not filled, the loss of these roles could affect the agency’s ability to improve their service capacity.
• $1.9 million cut to adolescent and adult health promotion programs, including a reduction of $743,750 for Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education, a reduction of $275,000 for five Coverdell-Murphy remote stroke readiness grants, and a reduction of $265,000 for Sickle Cell Foundation of Georgia.

• A reduction of $197,792 in state funds that will be replaced with federal Maternal and Child Health Services block grant money to continue screening and treating maternal depression in rural and underserved areas of the state.