

CDPHE; State health officials brace for layoffs amid loss of funding

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Body

Colorado's health department is bracing for several layoffs early next month for workers focused on cancer and heart disease prevention, thanks to the apparent loss of nearly \$2 million in federal grant funding and the state's own bleak fiscal outlook.

The Department of Public Health and Environment initially said 11 positions would be eliminated through layoffs in its health data and prevention services divisions "because of delays and uncertainty" related to funding for the jobs. Federal money underwriting the positions hadn't been released, CDPHE spokeswoman Vanessa Bernal said, and the layoffs will become effective July 8.

Colorado WINS, the state employees' union, said it also received notification of another imminent lafoff in the state Department of Agriculture. The agency did not respond to an email seeking comment Friday afternoon.

Bernal said some of the money related to diabetes prevention had been released this week, but the terms attached to the grant were under legal review by the state. Still, if the money does become available, that would mean the state receives \$850,000 in funding that it was otherwise set to lose. That funding would save two of the 11 positions slated for elimination in the health department.

The state is still expecting to initiate layoffs for programs in cardiovascular health, colorectal cancer screening and a broader one for cancer prevention and control, amounting to nearly \$1.9 million in total. Some of the state employees in those positions may be moved elsewhere in state government.

"If the federal funding does not come through, **Colorado** will lose critical staff and services that prevent disease and reduce long-term health care costs," Bernal said in an email. "This is about uncertain federal funding not the value of our employees. We are doing everything in our power to minimize workforce impacts. But these changes, if required, won't just affect our staff they will affect the health of people across **Colorado**."

The cardiovascular funding supported a program that trains pharmacists to deliver "disease management programming," and it provided training so community health workers could help people with chronic disease. The colorectal cancer fund helped screen older adults for the illness, and the broader cancer program promoted health choices that lowered the risk of illness and improved early detection.

Cancer and heart disease were the state's leading causes of death in 2023, Bernal said.

Although the money represents a relatively small amount in a \$16.7 billion general fund budget, the state couldn't afford to backfill it, Bernal said. **Colorado** budget writers trimmed spending by \$1.2 billion this year and are bracing for more reductions next year.

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That outlook could worsen still including for the state's health programs if federal cuts to Medicaid and food assistance are signed into law.

Bernal said the "work required by these specific grants cannot continue" without the federal funding. Shelby Wieman, a spokeswoman for Gov. Jared Polis, said in a statement that the "reality is we cannot backfill the funding lost."

"We continue to closely monitor federal funding that is threatened by the (Trump) administration to understand its impacts on Coloradans, our communities, and state employees," Wieman wrote.

Hilary Glasgow, the executive director of Colorado WINS, said in a statement that she feared the specter of more layoffs caused by lost federal funding. The union said nearly 3,700 state employees' jobs are fully or partially paid for using federal dollars.

"We know they're going to hurt our members and Coloradans," Glasgow said. "Unfortunately, most people who rely on state workers for critical services like these don't realize the feds are shutting them down until they're gone."

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