Gov. Pritzker Announces Notice of Funding Opportunity for Community Organizations to Expand COVID-19 Contact Tracing Efforts

Press Release - Wednesday, July 22, 2020

CHICAGO - As the state continues to build out a robust COVID-19 testing and tracing infrastructure, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) today announced a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for public health organizations to assist with contact tracing efforts.

Through the NOFO, IDPH will award a grant to one organization in each of the nine regions outlined in Governor Pritzker's COVID-19 resurgence mitigation plan, with Cook County and Chicago standing up their own contact tracing programs with community organizations. Each of these nine organizations will serve as coordinators in their region, awarding sub-grants to community-based organizations in their region who can most effectively conduct tracing, education and outreach in their communities. The NOFO will be available on the IDPH website on Friday, July 24, 2020.

"Today I'm proud to announce that applications for community-based organizations to obtain funding through IDPH to collaborate with local health departments will open on Friday. This opportunity - called the COVID-19 Pandemic Health Navigator Program - is geared toward organizations able to serve as coordinators for their region, sub-awarding to other agencies, across three main areas of work: education and outreach, contact tracing, and resource coordination for those who need to isolate," **said Governor JB Pritzker.** "Because Chicago and its immediate suburbs are running their own community programs, these partnerships will be with regional leaders outside of Cook County. Most important to our ability to minimize outbreaks is the efforts of everyday people to do their part: if one of our statewide force of 1,600 contact tracers calls you, please answer."

The funding will assist organizations in contact tracing efforts through the following three areas:

1. Provide education and outreach to promote everyday preventive actions to help slow the spread of COVID-19, as well as identify populations at greater risk of infection, and provide information to breakdown myths and rumors.
2. Conduct contact tracing through interviews and provide follow up information for close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases.
3. Coordinate resources, such as food, laundry, and even housing if needed, for cases or close contacts of cases who need to isolate or quarantine.

Expanding contact tracing efforts on a regional level will allow local organizations to serve as coordinators for their community and give them the ability to grant funds to other local agencies. To apply, an organization must be a GATA (Grant Accountability and Transparency Act) certified tax-exempt organization.

"By working with established community-based organizations, we are hoping to reach people who may be at higher risk of infection, but hesitant to talk with health officials," **said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike.** "We need people who are trusted in communities across the state to let people who have been in close contact with a confirmed case know that they need to monitor their health and take steps to potentially prevent spread of the virus to their family, friends, co-workers, and other community members. This is how we will help prevent outbreaks and the need to close businesses or institute other temporary restrictions."

IDPH continues to work closely with local health departments in Illinois. Currently, the department has executed grant agreements with 57 local health departments across the state, about 60 percent of all local health departments, to enhance contact tracing efforts. These local health departments will receive $50 million in contact tracing funding over the next two weeks. IDPH is also finalizing agreements with the remaining 40 local health departments. In total, grants to local health departments for contact tracing amount to more than $215 million.

More than 1,600 contact tracers are currently available in Illinois. The number of staff needed to conduct contact tracing varies depending on several factors, including:

- Number of people seeking medical care or testing
- Number of new cases per day
- Amount of time that has passed from when symptoms start to positive test results
- Number of contacts identified of each confirmed case
- How quickly patients are isolated, and contacts are notified and advised to stay home, self-monitor, and maintain social distance from others

In addition to grants, IDPH has contracted with a software application platform to ensure contact tracers across the state are collecting all the same information and in the same way. A virtual call center is also being established to ensure critical call information is accurately conveyed. Additionally, IDPH has enlisted Partners in Health (PIH) as a consultant to help build the contact tracing program in Illinois. PIH has received acclaim for their contact tracing work in Massachusetts and is providing IDPH with technical assistance, including lessons learned through working with jurisdictions nationwide.

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