

Senate Appropriations Committee – Budget Hearing with DOH

02/19/2025, 1:00 p.m., Hearing Room 1, North Office Building

Pennsylvania Legislative Services

The committee held a budget hearing with the Department of Health.

The Department of Health (DOH) was represented by:

- Dr. Debra Bogen, secretary, DOH, and
- Kristen Rodack, executive deputy secretary, DOH.

Chairman Scott Martin (R-Lancaster) welcomed attendees and asked for testifiers to be sworn in. He noted DOH's budget of \$276.6 million.

Sen. Michele Brooks (R-Mercer), chairman, Senate Health and Human Services Committee, questioned Sec. Bogen about the regulatory flexibility for reopening closed hospitals in Pennsylvania, highlighting the issue with hospitals needing to fully correct deficiencies before reopening. Sec. Bogen responded by emphasizing DOH's focus on patient safety and regulatory flexibility, especially for rural hospitals. She mentioned the department's efforts to categorize issues for reopening hospitals safely, using Sharon Regional Hospital as an example.

Sen. Brooks inquired about the specific regulations or statutes differentiating between reopening a closed hospital and inspections for hospitals that are already open. Sec. Bogen stated she would provide specifics later but confirmed adherence to state and federal safety regulations.

Sen. Brooks stressed the General Assembly's desire for safe hospital re-openings and the balance between safety and urgent health care needs. She appreciated DOH's efforts to expedite re-openings and suggested working on weekends and holidays to achieve this. Sec. Bogen mentioned her staff's commitment to working daily, including weekends and evenings, to expedite processes without compromising patient safety.

Sen. Brooks expressed concern about residents seeking health care in Ohio due to local access issues and questioned rumors about federal cuts to programs and grants. Sec. Bogen explained that the budget was prepared some time ago and that the department is monitoring the federal situation, noting that many employees are funded through federal support and that there has been no evidence of federal cuts to DOH. She also detailed the governor's commitment to addressing health care workforce shortages with a request for \$10 million for new initiatives in behavioral health and \$5 million for rural community

workforce shortages, highlighting the effectiveness of DOH's loan repayment program in retaining health care professionals in underserved areas.

Sen. Brooks asked whether the program's focus was solely on loan repayment for long-term workforce solutions or if it included immediate strategies to assist health care providers with staffing levels. Sec. Bogen responded that while \$10 million is aimed at loan repayment, \$5 million should be flexible for discussions, especially concerning the rural workforce.

Sen. Art Haywood (D-Philadelphia), minority chairman, Senate Health and Human Services Committee, asked for updates on recent developments in the department since the last testimony. Sec. Bogen summarized the department's achievements, including the establishment of the maternal health office, expansions in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, distribution of grants by the Long Term Care Transformation Office, a successful return on investment analysis, efforts of the opioid response team, and the certification of over 1,000 new emergency medical services (EMS) providers.

Sen. Haywood raised concerns about the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) removal of web pages related to Project Equity and asked what actions could be taken in Pennsylvania to ensure clinical trials include a diverse range of participants. Sec. Bogen explained that while DOH does not oversee clinical trials, the importance of genetic variations in drug metabolism and the need for clinical trials to include a diverse population is critical for drug efficacy across different individuals.

Sen. Haywood mentioned the FDA Oncology Center of Excellence and asked about the impact of a potential stoppage of federal funding on the department. Sec. Bogen explained that about 60% of DOH's funding is federal, supporting essential public health services. She expressed concern over the potential lack of funding for immunizations, noting that nearly 1,000 people were turned away for vaccines due to insufficient funds.

Sen. Haywood asked for guidance on how the life sciences industry could survive National Institute of Health (NIH) cuts to research funding, emphasizing the industry's significance in Pennsylvania. Sec. Bogen discussed the importance of supporting biotech and life sciences, highlighting the advancements in basic science research and clinical trials funded by the NIH. She expressed concern over the potential impact of funding cuts on jobs and the global leadership position of U.S. and commonwealth institutions in research.

Sen. Rosemary Brown (R-Munroe) raised concerns about the implementation of the Pennsylvania medical marijuana program, noting the low number of doctors certified to prescribe medical marijuana compared to the total number of doctors in the state. She questioned the specialties of the three doctors who issued a significant number of

certifications and asked about DOH's efforts to address issues within the program. Sec. Bogen responded that she could not provide specifics on the three physicians' specialties but explained the certification process for doctors. She acknowledged DOH's limited authority over physician licensure, which is under the Department of State (DOS), but expressed openness to discussing potential changes.

Sen. Brown inquired about additional actions being taken and how funding was being utilized for the medical marijuana program. Sec. Bogen discussed the medical marijuana assistance program (MMAP) program's role in supporting financially needy individuals requiring medical marijuana and emphasized the importance of safe packaging.

Sen. Brown asked for a summary of efforts to improve the medical marijuana program and expressed concern about prescribing and reauthorizing medical marijuana for individuals under 18, highlighting the distinction between patients under and over 18 years of age. Sec. Bogen specified that the program certifies users rather than issuing prescriptions and highlighted the involvement of pharmacists in choosing the right product at dispensaries. She expressed willingness to discuss program modifications to enhance safety.

Sen. Brown expressed a desire to have further conversations about prescribing medical marijuana to youth.

Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill (R-York) raised concerns about unauthorized access to sensitive information, referencing a data breach involving Insight Global that exposed the personal data of 72,000 Pennsylvanians. She inquired about the current status of the \$2.7 million settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and measures to compensate affected individuals. Sec. Bogen mentioned she did not have information regarding the settlement but emphasized the seriousness with which they take data security.

Sen. Phillips-Hill expressed concerns about third-party access to sensitive data, referencing past incidents and current agreements allowing Bloomberg Foundation staff access to state data. She inquired if DOH has any third-party entities accessing Pennsylvanian data. Sec. Bogen mentioned that her department adheres to all policies and procedures regarding data access and stated that any third-party agreements are ensured to meet specific criteria. Sen. Phillips-Hill asked for a list of third-party entities that can access Pennsylvania citizens' information.

Sen. Judy Schwank (D-Berks) asked for an update on the data collected and improvements in maternal mortality and morbidity. Sec. Bogen thanked the General Assembly for funding to address maternal mortality and morbidity, mentioning the funding of four regional health care coalitions and the support for various programs aimed at improving family health. She

acknowledged the disparity in mortality rates between Black and white women and noted the development of a maternal health strategic plan.

Sen. Schwank discussed the importance of interdepartmental collaboration and inquired if the upcoming \$5 million budget could support remote monitoring initiatives. Sec. Bogen emphasized the importance of addressing maternal mental health and substance use issues and acknowledged the significance of remote monitoring. She shared an example of monitoring mothers' blood pressure during pediatric visits. Sen. Schwank inquired about the inclusion of monitoring for postpartum depression in this year's budget, to which Sec. Bogen confirmed its inclusion and discussed the use of a tips line for health care professionals.

Sen. Cris Dush (R-Jefferson) revisited a question regarding the Pennsylvania constitution's requirement for a financial plan covering at least the next five fiscal years, highlighting a \$3.2 billion deficit and questioning the preparation of the budget. Sec. Bogen explained that they work closely with the Governor's Budget Office, accounting for statutory mandates and existing collective bargaining agreements, and strive to implement cost savings. Sen. Dush pointed out a 9.7% increase in the budget not projected the previous year and questioned the lack of five-year projections. Sec. Bogen suggested referring specific questions about budget projections back to the Governor's Budget Office but mentioned her department is seeking cost savings, specifically through space utilization efforts expected to save about half a million dollars next year for quality assurance.

Sen. Dush asked whether the department was not seeking cost savings last year, given the almost 10% budget increase. Sec. Bogen explained the increase included \$15 million for rural health and behavioral health initiatives. Sen. Dush raised concerns about the closure of labor and delivery services in his rural district in Pennsylvania, questioning why these areas are being excluded from assistance. Sec. Bogen responded that her administration has been working on rural health issues but lacks the authority to prevent hospital closures, mentioning efforts to provide exceptions to support facilities. Sen. Dush mentioned a lack of focus on rural maternal health compared to Black maternal health and stated he had not received information on assistance for rural maternal health labor and delivery centers. Sec. Bogen mentioned they have been discussing rural maternal health.

Sen. Tracy Pennycuick (R-Berks) asked why \$11.2 million in funding for biotech research was eliminated from the budget, despite its importance. Sec. Bogen explained the governor included biotech funding in various parts of the budget and expressed openness to further discussions. Sen. Pennycuick inquired if the perceived elimination of funding for biotech research was actually just a transfer to another department. Sec. Bogen deferred to the governor on funding specifics but knew money was allocated in multiple budgets. Sen.

Pennycuick asked about the current balance of the restricted account for the revenue of the vital statistics program and if the absence of entries for various special funds in the budget was an oversight or intentional. Sec. Bogen mentioned she would need to review the budget for details and investigate why information was missing from the budget book. Sen. Pennycuick expressed curiosity about the omission of revenue for vital statistics in the budget book. Sec. Bogen apologized for not having an immediate answer and promised to follow up. Sen. Pennycuick asked if the \$500,000 savings were due to consolidating because of teleworking or just a rearrangement of space. Sec. Bogen explained that some of it is teleworking and emphasized how DOH is trying to consolidate space. "We have been working particularly in our quality assurance office. Most of our folks are out in the field, doing surveys, doing things, and needing to reduce some of the space that they use," she said. "Some of it is that we have been moving our state health centers to co-locate with county assistance offices."

Sen. Pennycuick mentioned the renovation of a building at the old Harrisburg State Hospital for the Department of General Services (DGS) use. Sec. Bogen explained that the \$500,000 savings in space initiatives pertain to the laboratory, specifically mentioning that the current Bureau of Laboratories is located in an old building from the 1970s in Exton, Pennsylvania, and this project has been in development for some time. Sen. Pennycuick asked to confirm that the initiative being discussed is in conjunction with the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) laboratory, and Sec. Bogen mentioned that all the relevant entities are going to be together, indicating a consolidation effort. Sen. Pennycuick specified that there will not be a separate renovation of an old building on the grounds. Sec. Bogen mentioned that the joint laboratory space being renovated by DGS will include their Bureau of Laboratories, with an estimated move in 2028-2029.

Sen. Patty Kim (D-Dauphin) expressed disappointment with a colleague's comments about health equity and Black maternal health, emphasizing the importance of addressing these issues through organized efforts. Sec. Bogen mentioned that DOH's vision is "a healthy Pennsylvania for all," emphasizing the inclusivity of its mission. Sen. Kim asked about the measures being taken by DOH to prevent a measles outbreak, referencing 60 known cases in Texas. Sec. Bogen described measles as an extremely contagious infection, emphasizing the importance of vaccination and detailing the efforts of the infectious disease epidemiology team. Sen. Kim asked if there would be a collaboration with the new secretary of health and human services in D.C. regarding immunizations and vaccines. Sec. Bogen emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts in combating infectious diseases like measles through vaccination.

Sen. Elder Vogel (R-Beaver) asked about the allocation of \$8.2 million from medical marijuana funds for the patient financial hardship program in fiscal year 2025-2026. Sec. Bogen explained that MMAP offers financial aid to individuals who use medical marijuana and meet certain eligibility criteria. Rodack explained that the program, unique in the country, enhances accessibility for low-income individuals to obtain medical marijuana, collaborating with the Department of Aging (Aging) to provide eligible enrollees with reduced product prices and free cards, benefits that extend to caregivers as well. Rodack added that the \$8.2 million funding for the MMAP is allocated based on enrollment in the aging program, not geographic location. Those enrolled in the aging program are eligible for MMAP.

Sen. Vogel asked whether there was an age limit for MMAP. Rodack said MMAP is available through the Department of Aging, targeting older adults eligible for health care assistance through a specific health insurance program within the Department of Aging. The program aims to cover many people and reduce costs.

Sen. Vogel asked about the transfer of \$46.5 million from the medical marijuana program fund to fund tourism activities, the collaboration with the governor's office on this initiative, and the necessity of the funding within that specific fund. Sec. Bogen explained that the transferred funds come from the Medical Marijuana Act's research funds, which are unusable due to the federal scheduling of marijuana, and that the decision involved discussions with the governor.

Sen. Vogel expressed concern over the decrease in teenage smoking rates, contrasted with an increase in teenage vaping rates, asking about the state's efforts to address vaping among teenagers. Sec. Bogen acknowledged the high rates of vaping among teenagers, mentioning efforts to combat this through education funded by tobacco settlement funds and the success of the PA Quitline. She emphasized the need for regulations to keep pace with technological advancements in vaping products. Sen. Vogel emphasized the risks of vaping products, particularly to children.

Sen. Joe Picozzi (R-Philadelphia) asked whether Governor Josh Shapiro consulted Sec. Bogen while developing the proposal to legalize adult-use recreational marijuana, the structure of the program, and its impact on the medical cannabis program. Sec. Bogen confirmed discussions with the Governor's Office regarding the adult use marijuana proposal, focusing on its impact on the medical marijuana program. She emphasized the importance of maintaining the medical program and ensuring safety and access for vulnerable populations.

Sen. Picozzi asked for Sec. Bogen's opinion on legalizing adult use recreational marijuana and its public health impacts. Sec. Bogen mentioned the economics of an adult use marijuana program, noting cross-border purchases from neighboring states. She emphasized DOH's focus on safety, protecting vulnerable populations, and tracking the public health effects of the program. She also mentioned she has not reviewed recent marijuana studies but stressed the importance of providing education and accurate scientific information for informed health decisions. She highlighted DOH's role in ensuring this information is available for program implementation.

Sen. Picozzi expressed concern about marijuana's impact on neurological development and asked about medical considerations for the General Assembly when reviewing legislation. Sec. Bogen emphasized the need for safety through controlled packaging and labeling as well as monitoring public health measures.

Sen. Picozzi inquired about the accuracy of tests for cannabis influence, noting the lack of a sobriety test similar to alcohol. Sec. Bogen stated that law enforcement would be better suited to address questions about managing situations without a verified sobriety test for cannabis.

Sen. Picozzi asked whether DOH will need additional staff and resources for the adult use recreational program. Sec. Bogen noted the existing staff for the medical marijuana program.

Chairman Martin inquired if the governor consulted Sec. Bogen about the health implications of his proposal, following up on Sen. Picozzi's point. Sec. Bogen confirmed her department's involvement in discussions with the governor about the adult use recreational program.

Chairman Martin noted the unexamined studies and asked for clarification from Sec. Bogen if she read them or not. Sec. Bogen specified she hasn't reviewed all studies recently but assured her department would provide necessary information to the governor, with other staff members involved in the process. Chairman Martin asked if the governor requested information from Sec. Bogen's team. Sec. Bogen specified her involvement in discussions but had not recently reviewed data on the health implications of the governor's proposal. Chairman Martin explained his follow-up question, noting how other states have implemented adult use recreational programs. "There's certainly a lot of data and statistics that have been gathered through those states experience, and I'm we're just wondering how much that has played a role in influencing what this program the governor is proposing may look like, and if they've actually researched a lot of it," he continued.

Sen. Amanda Cappelletti (D-Montgomery) discussed maternal health and hospital closures due to inadequate insurance reimbursements, emphasizing the need for policy intervention to improve health care access, especially in rural areas. She highlighted disparities in health care access and called for enhanced health care funding and access to maternal health services. Sec. Bogen appreciated the senator's passion.

Sen. Cappelletti also stressed the importance of public health efforts and expressed concern over the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services' stance on vaccines. She highlighted recent disease outbreaks and advocated for science and evidence-based policies in Pennsylvania. She asked Sec. Bogen what DOH plans to do if federal funding is pulled from programs in the commonwealth. Sec. Bogen replied, "We continue to do our work every day to contact people who potentially are exposed to infectious diseases, to give them the best information we can on how to protect themselves, to reduce the risk to the community they are visiting, and to make sure people have access to treatment—we do that work every day." She emphasized a trusted relationship between patients and their primary care providers, stating, "If everyone has access to good primary care, it would change the world."

Sen. Sharif Street (D-Philadelphia) thanked Sec. Bogen and Sen. Cappelletti for their efforts on Black maternal health disparities and brought up the issue of period poverty, asking about the governor's proposal to provide feminine health products in high schools. Sec. Bogen responded that funding for period products in schools was provided last year, benefiting nearly every school in the state, and emphasized its importance in preventing girls from missing school. Sen. Street then asked for an update on the development and implementation of a two-way application programming interface (API) for the medical marijuana program, to which Sec. Bogen replied that there is an active procurement for the seed-to-sale system, preventing her from discussing details.

Sen. Jarrett Coleman (R-Lehigh) inquired about the reallocation of the department's \$5 million funding from operating funds to personnel and grants, asking for clarification on discontinued and new programs. Sec. Bogen could not provide further details but highlighted several budget initiatives, including \$15 million for primary care practitioner funding, \$10 million for behavioral health, \$5 million for rural health, a request for \$7.5 million for the Long Term Care Transformation Office, and a \$5 million request for neurodegenerative research. Sen. Coleman asked Sec. Bogen to clarify the goals outlined in a statewide health assessment letter regarding the Health People 2030 goal of reducing maternal mortality to 15.7 deaths per 100,000 live births, expressing concern over the goal suggesting an increase in the mortality rate for white women. Sec. Bogen explained that the goal is to adjust the charge to remove disparities in maternal mortality. Rodack specified

that the Healthy People 2030 goals are federal objectives, comparing Pennsylvania's current rates to these federal benchmarks. Sec. Bogen stated that Pennsylvania is performing better in some areas compared to the national goals set by Healthy People 2030.

Sen. Coleman noted the importance of showing declines in the health report to demonstrate improvement. Sec. Bogen explained that comparisons are made at the county, state, and federal levels to identify areas for improvement and success, mentioning the difficulty in reading the last column referring to Healthy People 2020 or 2030 goals. Sen. Coleman expressed satisfaction with the goal to improve health outcomes for all women, and Rodack stated their goal is to achieve zero maternal mortality.

Minority Chairman Vincent Hughes (D-Philadelphia) asked Sec. Bogen to repeat the disparity numbers concerning Black women in maternal health, to which Sec. Bogen responded that Black women in Pennsylvania are twice as likely to die during or in the first year postpartum compared to white women. She added that Black women are also twice as likely to experience severe maternal morbidity and that Black infants are twice as likely to die in their first year, often due to extreme prematurity.

Chairman Hughes emphasized the citizenship of Black women and the acute health disparities they face, highlighting the need for special attention and resources, referencing Gov. Shapiro's initiative to support the health department in addressing these issues. Sec. Bogen mentioned that her organization relies on data to guide decision-making and resource allocation, particularly for maternal health for Black women. Chairman Hughes stressed the importance of being alarmed by high mortality rates in certain communities and the necessity of efforts to address these problems. Sec. Bogen emphasized the comprehensive approach of the State Health Improvement Plan, which uses data and input from stakeholders to identify and address disparities in health issues across both rural and urban areas.

Chairman Hughes discussed the efforts of DOH in addressing health issues across Pennsylvania, emphasizing the importance of legislative and budgetary support for specific initiatives, particularly in rural health. He highlighted a \$10 million appropriation proposed by the governor for rural hospitals and questioned Pennsylvania's preparation to handle potential outbreaks, referencing health challenges in Texas. Sec. Bogen explained that Pennsylvania's response to health emergencies relies heavily on federal funding, with an emergency preparedness team, an immunization team, and epidemiologists ready to respond. Chairman Hughes mentioned a plan by the Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives to reduce financial support for various issue areas, noting that 60% of the operation he referred to is funded by the federal government.

Chairman Hughes expressed concerns about potential funding cuts to DOH in Pennsylvania, emphasizing the critical role of public health infrastructure in addressing challenges like decreasing vaccination rates and the importance of this issue over others, such as medical marijuana, in the context of discussions about cuts to Medicaid and Medicare. Sec. Bogen confirmed the concerns about funding for her operation. Chairman Hughes then highlighted the reliance of rural hospitals on Medicaid, with 95% of their funding coming from this source, and questioned the impact of potential Medicaid reductions on these hospitals and the community's ability to respond to public health outbreaks. Sec. Bogen acknowledged the difficulty of Chairman Hughes' questions.

Chairman Hughes emphasized the importance of vaccines, noting that everyone present has benefited from them. Sec. Bogen acknowledged the importance of maintaining a strong public health infrastructure in Pennsylvania to respond to emergencies and care for residents, expressing readiness to work together to ensure continued access to essential health services despite potential federal funding cuts. Chairman Hughes praised the health care achievements made through vaccinations, such as the eradication of measles and polio, and discussed the challenge of maintaining public health infrastructure in light of potential funding changes.

Sen. Brooks discussed the complexity of health care access in Pennsylvania, particularly the issue of long travel distances for maternity services in some areas. She inquired about discussions with hospital systems regarding safe travel distances for mothers. Sec. Bogen emphasized the critical importance of access to maternal health services and the challenges faced by rural areas, mentioning telehealth as a partial solution and the financial and logistical challenges of providing maternity care in rural communities. She suggested the Loan Repayment Program as a potential incentive for medical professionals to work in rural areas.

Sen. Brooks highlighted the issue of people in rural areas having to travel long distances for maternity services due to the closure of local facilities and stressed the importance of supporting health systems that continue to deliver babies, even if they do not meet the requirement of delivering 1,000 babies a year, mentioning efforts to reopen a closed hospital to improve access to maternity services.

Sen. Haywood discussed the need for health care for all, highlighting the failures in the private hospital and health care system and his efforts to improve health access through initiatives like mobile clinics. He also mentioned the issue of unregulated adult marijuana in Pennsylvania and requested an update on the effectiveness of mobile clinics. Sec. Bogen talked about her visit to Bucktail Hospital and the findings from a survey on mobile clinics, noting their wide range of services and presence in almost all counties. She mentioned the

challenges they face, including funding, and announced plans to convene with clinic operators to discuss better utilization and funding strategies.

Sen. Brown raised concerns about the modernization of midwifery, a backlog in death certificates, and the allocation of funds from the Juul settlement towards vaping cessation and prevention among high school students. Sec. Bogen acknowledged the importance of addressing vaping and deferred to Rodack for more details on the allocation of Juul settlement funds. Rodack explained that the Juul settlement funds are primarily used for education and media campaigns targeting individuals who interact with youth daily. She mentioned the department's efforts in prevention strategies and auditing stores to prevent sales of vaping products to underage customers.

Sen. Street inquired about the department's involvement in supporting the governor's proposed \$50 million investment in life sciences and asked about DOH's efforts in firearm injury prevention and addressing gun violence as a health problem. Sec. Bogen responded by highlighting the department's support for the advancement of biotech and life sciences and its involvement in firearm injury prevention through data collection and collaboration with other organizations to distribute gun locks and reduce impulsive decisions and access by children.

Sen. Phillips-Hill expressed her support for the medical marijuana program and discussed the challenges in accessing it, especially in rural areas. She referenced Act 63 of 2023, which provided additional permits for growers/processors and dispensaries, and asked about the number of permits awarded and DOH's plans for new dispensary permits. Sec. Bogen responded that under Act 63 of 2023, one additional grower processor permit, nine dispensary permits, and the last two clinical registrant permits have been awarded. Rodack added that the nine dispensary permits allow for up to three locations each and detailed the application phases for these permits, with plans to continue on a rolling basis. Sen. Phillips-Hill advised that entities interested in dispensary permits should monitor DOH's website for application windows, and Rodack encouraged directing constituents seeking information to their office.

Sen. Cappelletti expressed appreciation for the bipartisan support for increasing health care access and supported Sen. Brown's bill on modernizing midwifery to improve maternal health care access. She highlighted the bipartisan effort on maternal mortality, referencing the \$5 million budget allocation last year, and asked about the inclusion of postpartum psychosis in the maternal morbidity and mortality discussions. Sec. Bogen explained that postpartum depression and psychosis are part of a continuum of mood disorders that can increase during and after pregnancy, emphasizing the importance of access to psychiatric services and behavioral support.

Sen. Pennycuick expressed concern about the drop in tuberculosis (TB) immunization rates among immigrants and refugees, from 82% to 62%, and asked about strategies to improve immunization rates among these populations. Sec. Bogen detailed the role of state health centers and local health departments in combating tuberculosis, highlighting the importance of screening for and treating latent cases to prevent them from becoming active. Sen. Pennycuick then asked if immigrants and refugees undergoing tuberculosis testing are also receiving a basic set of inoculations commonly administered to children. Sec. Bogen noted there is no TB vaccine in the U.S.

Sen. Pennycuick asked whether, in addition to tuberculosis testing, other vaccinations are administered at the time of assessment and treatment in state health centers. Sec. Bogen explained that individuals are offered all available services if they are eligible and request them. Sen. Pennycuick then asked if immigrants and refugees are taking the opportunity to be vaccinated, to which Sec. Bogen specified that not all individuals with tuberculosis are immigrants or refugees, but those with active tuberculosis undergo directly observed therapy and are offered vaccines if eligible.

Sen. Picozzi inquired about the annual number of cannabis users in the state and the expected consumption per individual, referencing the Department of Revenue's (DOR) revenue estimates from recreational cannabis. Sec. Bogen deferred questions regarding the number of users and consumption to other agencies. Sen. Picozzi also asked whether the legalization of recreational cannabis would lead to a greater need for treatment or addiction services. Sec. Bogen emphasized the importance of awareness and availability of treatment for those at risk of substance use disorders. Sen. Picozzi further inquired about expanding treatment access in response to the projected expansion of the cannabis market and about the rise in highway traffic deaths in states that have legalized recreational marijuana. Sec. Bogen was unable to provide specific answers to these questions.

Sen. Dush raised concerns about tracking the mental health effects, specifically schizophrenia, related to medical marijuana card usage and asked about data tracking the difference in infant and maternal mortality rates between rural Pennsylvania and other areas. Sec. Bogen mentioned that the department's website provides data by county for various health metrics but did not have specific data on hand regarding schizophrenia or mortality rates, though she offered to follow up with mortality reports.

Chairman Martin highlighted the issue of shortages in allied health fields and questioned if measures, particularly regarding licensing, could make Pennsylvania more competitive in attracting workers to these fields. Sec. Bogen discussed the importance of training medical professionals in rural areas, suggesting funding opportunities to facilitate housing for

students during their rural training and advocating for training opportunities across the state. Chairman Martin then discussed challenges faced by Career and Technical Centers (CTCs) in Pennsylvania due to a lack of qualified trainers for nursing students and mentioned the Grow PA program as a potential solution. Sec. Bogen specified that the focus is not on growing alcohol agriculture. Chairman Martin talked about a program designed to provide grants to young Pennsylvanians entering high-demand fields, asking if the agency would partner to promote this initiative, to which Sec. Bogen agreed. Chairman Martin raised concerns about the medical marijuana program, specifically the use of dry leaf and public smoking, questioning the legality of dry leaf in Pennsylvania. Sec. Bogen mentioned that dry leaf can be used in a vape product and stated that any oversight regarding the public use of medical marijuana would require an amendment to the act. Chairman Martin questioned why the department couldn't modify provisions regarding dry leaf usage, to which Sec. Bogen responded that her department reviews the safety of products, highlighting a recent action to prevent an unsuitable product from entering the market. Rodack explained that a product referred to as a "pre-roll" was denied entry into their program because all products must receive pre-approval, emphasizing the role of dispensaries in educating patients and the challenge of Black market products. Sec. Bogen highlighted the progress in pediatric cancer research, particularly in leukemia, and mentioned the hiring of a specific person to expedite grant processing after receiving feedback. She reported that nearly \$20 million of the \$40 million allocated from the tobacco settlement fund for curing cancer has been distributed or is in the process, with efforts to improve the efficiency of grant processing.

Chairman Martin asked about the distribution of the \$40 million allocated by the General Assembly from the tobacco settlement fund. Sec. Bogen responded that about \$20 million has been distributed or will be by the summer, with the remaining \$20 million currently being processed to increase efficiency and expedite distribution.

Chairman Martin inquired about the performance of donations made through tax refunds and driver's license renewals to the pediatric cancer research fund, and whether these donations are processed similarly. Sec. Bogen mentioned that around \$4 million has been donated, with \$2.5 million distributed in 2022, and plans to distribute the remainder this year. She also discussed efforts to increase a smaller diabetes fund to attract bids on a request for proposal (RFP) to support health care initiatives.

Chairman Martin acknowledged Sec. Bogen's previous role as the head of the Department of Health in Allegheny County during the COVID years. Sec. Bogen confirmed her position in Allegheny County during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chairman Martin discussed the impacts of COVID-19, suggesting the need for a post-mortem to evaluate the response, improve future public health responses and rebuild public trust. Sec. Bogen emphasized the importance of cross-departmental collaboration and communication, highlighted by the pandemic. She shared her experience with the emergency preparedness team and ongoing efforts to improve emergency preparedness and response.

Chairman Martin expressed appreciation for local governments' roles in emergency preparedness and stressed the importance of learning from past mistakes and rebuilding public trust, announcing a recess until the next appropriations hearing.