



Multnomah County, Oregon's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

Financing Source: Portland Water Bureau

Financing Amount: \$300,000 - \$400,000 annually

Focus: Lead

The [Multnomah County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program](#) is jointly funded by the Portland Water Bureau (PWB), State of Oregon Health Authority, and Multnomah County. The program works in partnership with other community groups and government agencies in the greater Portland metropolitan area to eliminate lead poisoning and make Multnomah County housing "lead safe." Services provided include the Leadline, a telephone information and referral line for questions about lead, lead testing, and lead in drinking water; community outreach and education, including participation in community health fairs and community presentations; home investigations for families who have children with high blood lead levels to assist with identification and reduction of exposure to lead; lead screening for children and those at greatest risk for lead poisoning; and coordination of services with other agencies to create an efficient program designed to prevent lead poisoning from all sources.

Financing Mechanism

The Portland Water Bureau (PWB), State of Oregon Health Authority, and Multnomah County jointly fund Multnomah County Health Department's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, also known as the Leadline. "Leadline" refers both to the program and the hotline service.

Two decades ago, PWB proposed a comprehensive [Lead Hazard Reduction Program](#) (LHRP) as an alternative to optimized corrosion control treatment requirements of the [Lead and Copper Rule](#) (LCR). This program is based on local risk assessment data from state and county health departments and recognizes that children are exposed to lead mainly from lead-based paint and dust. Since 1998, the Portland Water Bureau has allocated \$300,000 - \$400,000 annually to fund efforts to reduce lead exposure from all sources. Whether current actions to adjust city water pH and alkalinity will affect available funding for lead poisoning prevention programs remains to be determined.¹

Every year, the Portland Water Bureau issues a request for proposal (RFP) to agencies and organizations interested in providing lead poisoning prevention activities as part of the LHRP. Presently, eight agencies, including the Multnomah County Health Department Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, are beneficiaries of Portland Water Bureau funding.²

Program Overview

The Multnomah County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program works in partnership with other community groups and government agencies to eliminate lead poisoning in the greater Portland metropolitan area. The program seeks to eliminate lead poisoning in Multnomah County. Services provided include:

- The Leadline, a telephone information and referral line for questions about lead, lead testing, and lead in drinking water;
- Community outreach and education, including participation in community health fairs and presentations;
- Home investigations for families who have children with high blood lead levels to assist with identification and reduction of exposure to lead;
- Lead screening for children and those at greatest risk for lead poisoning; and
- Coordination of services with other agencies to create an efficient program designed to prevent lead poisoning from all sources.

The program provides lead prevention information and referrals in Spanish, Russian, and Vietnamese as needed.³

<https://nchh.org/tools-and-data/financing-and-funding/alternative-financing-mechanisms/>

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Environmental investigations are triggered with a confirmed blood lead level (BLL) of 5 µg/dL or higher. In rare cases, investigations are conducted for levels under 5 µg/dL. The program typically responds with phone education for confirmed levels of 3 µg/dL or higher.

Program Operations

The Multnomah County Health Department manages the Leadline program. Each agency funded by the program has applied for the grant dollars individually, and each agency provides a unique set of lead prevention activities based on their agency focus (e.g., tenant protections, landlord education, urban gardens, community education, et cetera). In this way, the lead prevention activities cover an array of services and actions and provide more widespread benefits in the community.

Eligible Population Served

The program provides general lead poisoning prevention services to all of Multnomah County (population 775,000) and helps coordinate free lead-in-water testing for residents who receive their water from Portland Water Bureau, including those in surrounding cities like Gresham. Lead poisoning home investigations and case management activities are provided for residents 18 years and younger and pregnant women.

Staffing

The service is provided by health department employees, including community health workers (CHWs) and AmeriCorps members.

Billing for Services

This service is billed under grants and offered to participants at no cost.

Outcomes and Evaluation

No formal evaluation of the Leadline's impact on health outcomes or return on investment has been conducted; however, the majority of 135 respondents to a 2016-2017 survey of Leadline callers reported satisfaction with the service on its prompt responses and ability to answer their questions. The majority also reported receiving "a lot" or a "medium" amount of new information on community resources to help with lead reduction in the home and potential lead hazards. An overwhelming majority (82%) reported speaking to friends and neighbors about Leadline or making recommendations to contact the service. Many indicated anecdotally that they had requested the free lead test kits or reviewed water sampling procedures as a result of their Leadline contact; however, fewer than 25% of the respondents reported speaking to their doctor about lead screening or took other actions to reduce lead exposure.

Multnomah County Health Department has received funding for 10 years. Anecdotal reports describe the program as having tremendous positive benefits for the city and county. Funding allows for services to be provided in many areas such as education for homeowners and renters, investigative services, and work within communities of color, which would not have been possible if PWB had an exclusive focus on and funding for optimized corrosion control.

Return on Investment

No cost-benefit analysis studies have been reported.

Lessons Learned

A program's success requires strong collaborative partnerships between community-based organizations (CBOs) and government agencies and between local and state government. Tracking program activities and demonstrating impacts require strong and centralized data collection. It is important for activities to be carefully tracked and services analyzed to determine what qualifies as success. This is important with media scrutiny focusing on corrosion control efforts by the government but having no interest in identifying all the accompanying positive interventions that have occurred.

For More Information

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¹ Portland Water Bureau. (n.d.). Treatment & monitoring. Retrieved from <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/article/123083>

² Portland Water Bureau. (n.d.). Lead Hazard Reduction Program partners. Retrieved from <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/article/123084>

³ Multnomah County. (n.d.). Lead poisoning prevention. Retrieved from <https://multco.us/health/lead-poisoning-prevention>