

Issue Brief – Birth Defect Network

SUMMARY

The Utah Birth Defect Network (UBDN) is a state-wide surveillance system monitoring the occurrence of major structural birth defects in Utah.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the program is to measure the impacts of birth defects, find and respond to clusters, and help families and providers improve outcomes and the health of pregnancies and affected children.

The objective of this building block request of \$360,000 is to obtain the funding support to maintain the Utah Birth Defect Network and provide the surveillance infrastructure to maintain the federally funded birth defect research in Utah. The funding replaces a federal fund reduction. A supplemental appropriation request for \$173,000 is necessary to keep the program going without interruption. This is a repeat request from the 2006 General Session.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The UBDN uses the information that it collects to determine if prevention efforts are working and to identify whether clusters of birth defects are occurring. Accurate and timely birth defect data collection is essential to public health. Birth defects are the leading cause of infant mortality. Birth defects also contribute to premature births and are the major reason for hospitalizations during the first year of life.

Economic Impact

The economic costs for children born with birth defects are high and extend beyond the medical and surgical care to behavioral and educational service issues. Numerous programs are funded through the Department of Health, Public and Higher Education to address some of these issues. The cause of most birth defects remains unknown. The amount requested by the Department for this activity is less than the cost of taking care of one baby born with spina bifida. One baby born healthy instead of with this birth defect could save more Medicaid and Early Intervention Program expenses each year than the cost of the entire UBDN surveillance program.

Additional Federal Funding Loss

The UBDN was started with Federal Funds in 1995. Funding for this program has been eliminated by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Since the program was started in Utah, the State has become one of nine national research centers. Utah receives about \$900,000 annually for this research center separate

from the surveillance portion of the program. The State must maintain the surveillance capabilities of the UBDN to continue as a research center and to continue receiving federal funding. The UBDN funding is for 5 FTE and the research portion supports another 6.55 FTE.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Recommendation

The Analyst recommends that the Subcommittee consider funding of \$360,000 ongoing General Fund for the Utah Birth Defect Network be added to its priority list. This funding will support 5 FTE and the associated costs and program expenses.

Supplemental Funding

A supplemental funding request of \$173,000 one-time General Fund for FY 2007 will be necessary for the program to continue uninterrupted, due to current funding allocations.