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California Department of Public Health

It Could Do More to Ensure Federal Funds for Expanding the State's COVID-19 Testing and Contact Tracing Programs Are Used Effectively

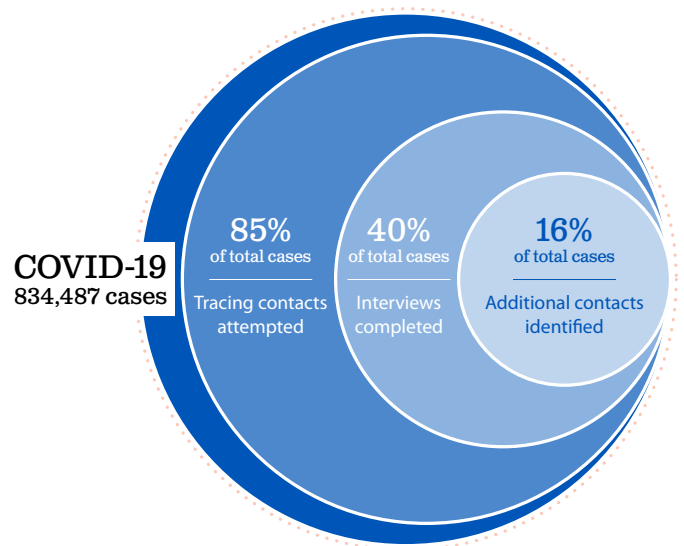
Background

To address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and improve the State's long-term ability to fight infectious diseases, California received \$555 million in 2020 from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as part of the ongoing Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) Cooperative Agreement. The California Department of Public Health (Public Health) is responsible for using \$467 million of that funding (ELC COVID-19 funds) to expand the State's ability to test individuals for COVID-19, to conduct contact tracing to track individuals' exposure to the disease and to develop technology to track such testing and contact tracing throughout the State. To achieve these objectives, Public Health allocated \$286 million in ELC COVID-19 funds to 58 local health jurisdictions and required them to submit work plans, spending plans, and quarterly updates on their progress.

Key Findings

- The State has met, and even exceeded, Public Health's targets for testing individuals for COVID-19.
- Contact tracing efforts throughout California have lagged behind case surges that far exceeded Public Health's initial planning.
- By January 2021, only about 12,100 tracing staff were employed statewide rather than the 31,400 that Public Health estimated would be needed.
- Public Health has been slow to collect and review work plans, spending plans, and quarterly updates for local entities that received ELC COVID-19 funds.
- Public Health delayed required information technology project oversight for a new COVID-19 test results system, which could create complications in the functionality of the system.

In December 2020, Contact Tracing Successfully Identified Additional People to Contact in Only a Small Fraction of Cases



Key Recommendations

To ensure that Public Health is using ELC COVID-19 funds effectively, it should do the following:

- Reevaluate its contact tracing plans and collaborate with local health jurisdictions to overcome barriers to contact tracing.
- Collect and approve, as necessary, all initial work plans and quarterly updates from local health jurisdictions to which it allocated ELC COVID-19 funds.
- Direct the provision of system performance, data validation, and regular reporting to mitigate further risks to the State's new COVID-19 test results system.