

APHA advocacy priorities for the 117th Congress and the Biden Administration



The mission of the American Public Health Association is to improve the health of the public and achieve equity in health status. To realize this mission, APHA will work with members of the 117th Congress and the Biden administration to promote and adopt policies that protect and strengthen public health systems for all communities and populations. APHA believes Congress and the Biden administration should prioritize the following issues.

Increase and protect funding for vital public health agencies and programs and strengthen the nation's public health infrastructure. Congress and the Biden administration must prioritize funding for the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Health Resources and Services Administration](#). These two agencies are the backbone of our federal public health system and provide valuable resources to our nation's state, local, territorial and tribal health departments as well as the health professionals who work to keep our nation healthy and address the health inequities that exist in the U.S. We strongly urge Congress and the administration to increase investments in these important health agencies and programs by working in a bipartisan manner to further increase funding in the FY 2022 appropriations process. Congress should also ensure that additional urgently needed funding is made available to assist the nation's public health and health care infrastructure in their ongoing efforts to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, including the [distribution of new COVID-19 vaccines](#).

We also urge support for two important proposals to strengthen the nation's public health infrastructure and workforce. First, we strongly support the creation of a \$4.5 billion fund for core public health infrastructure at the CDC and state, local, tribal and territorial public health departments. The [Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act](#) would establish this funding to support essential activities such as: disease surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory capacity, all-hazards preparedness and response; policy development and support; communications; community partnership development; and organizational competencies. A reliable, long-term funding stream for these activities is essential for anticipating and responding to future public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. We also support the creation of a [loan repayment program for public health professionals](#) who agree to serve two years in a local, state or tribal health department. The public health workforce is the backbone of our nation's governmental public health system at the county, city, state and tribal levels. These skilled professionals deliver critical public health programs and services and are on the frontlines of combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Uphold the Affordable Care Act and expand access to health coverage and services. Millions of Americans are reaping the benefits of the ACA through expanded coverage, coverage of preventive benefits, a prohibition on discriminating against people with preexisting conditions, an extension of dependent coverage for adult children up to age 26 and progress in closing the Medicare prescription drug coverage gap. APHA supports efforts to [improve and build upon the ACA](#) by ensuring continued protection for people with preexisting conditions by reversing actions by the Trump administration that fundamentally undermine the individual and small group health insurance markets. We can make health care and services more affordable by expanding access to health insurance premium tax credits. We also support the creation of a public option health insurance plan, operated by the federal government, to provide consumers with choice, giving them a competitive and more affordable alternative to private insurance coverage. Support for the Prevention and Public Health Fund, a first of its kind mandatory fund for public health and prevention activities created by the ACA, is also an important component to improving the nation's health and well-being. Through CDC, the fund is providing critical resources to help states keep communities healthy and safe. We continue to [oppose any effort to repeal or weaken the ACA or the prevention fund](#), including efforts to redirect money from the fund to pay for non-public health legislative proposals. APHA is committed to working with Congress and the Biden administration to further expand health insurance to the millions of individuals who still lack coverage and access to critical health services.

Address the health impacts of climate change. Climate change and extreme weather events are threatening our health today, and, if left unchecked, will lead to increases in disease and death. Immediate action can and must be taken to slow climate change and prepare the public health system to protect our communities from the associated negative health impacts. Vulnerable populations — such as communities of color, the elderly, young children, the sick and the poor — bear the greatest burden of disease and death related to climate change. We urge Congress to ensure our federal, state and local health departments and agencies have the resources and tools they need to address these challenges by [increasing funding CDC’s Climate and Health Program](#) and supporting other efforts to address the negative public health impacts of climate change, including the [Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act](#). This legislation would require the Department of Health and Human Services to develop a national strategic plan to address the health impacts of climate change and would enhance forecasting and modeling, track environmental and disease data and expand the science base to better understand the relationship between climate change and health outcomes. We strongly support action to address climate change by cleaning up major sources of pollution and oppose any efforts to block or weaken existing regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. APHA also supports the U.S. immediately rejoining the [Paris climate agreement](#) to meet its commitments under this important effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the globe.

Advance racial equity. To achieve health equity and create the [healthiest nation in one generation](#), we must address racism as a driving force of social determinants of health (e.g. housing, education and employment) and a root cause of disparate outcomes for communities of color. We must dismantle racism through brutally honest conversations as well as policy and practice changes, and support actions at all levels to ensure all communities have the social and economic resources needed to be as healthy as possible. Two pieces of legislation, the [Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2020](#) and the [Improving Social Determinants of Health Act of 2020](#) seek to eliminate health disparities while correcting the conditions that cause and perpetuate them. There is also a growing focus on addressing the racial disparities in maternal health outcomes, with legislation in Congress to strengthen the perinatal workforce, ensure continuity of insurance coverage during and after pregnancy and to improve data collection. All of these efforts are particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, as communities of color bear a disproportionate burden of COVID-19 morbidity and mortality. We must also continue to work to address the issue of [police violence](#) and the harm it has done to Black communities and other communities of color.

Uphold critical public health laws and regulations and reverse damaging rollbacks. We oppose any efforts to weaken or roll back important regulations and laws such as the Clean Air Act that protect the public’s health, including legislation that would weaken the process for developing evidence-based public health regulations. Unfortunately, the Trump administration undermined or dismantled numerous critical public health regulations including the Clean Power Plan, which would limit carbon and other dangerous air pollution from power plants, and the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, which has successfully limited mercury and other toxic pollution from power plants. We urge the Biden administration to repeal the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s [Affordable Clean Energy rule](#), the much weaker replacement to the Clean Power Plan, to repeal the Trump administration’s finding that the [MATS rule](#) is no longer appropriate and necessary to protect the public’s health, and to reverse EPA’s [Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science proposed rule](#). Other crucial public health rules and laws were weakened or undermined under the Trump administration including laws and regulations that [protect our water](#), ensure worker safety, protect the public from exposure to toxic substances, provide our nation’s children with [healthier school meals](#) and ensure access to the full range of [reproductive health services](#). We urge the Biden administration to repeal these damaging regulatory rollbacks and ensure other important laws and regulations are implemented as intended.

Address the nation's gun violence epidemic. In 2018, more than 39,000 people died as a result of gun violence. We are extremely pleased that in FY 2020, Congress provided \$25 million to CDC and the National Institutes of Health for vital gun violence prevention research. A sound public health approach to address this epidemic begins with understanding the science behind the problem. Research is essential to achieve this understanding to make data-driven policy and programmatic decisions, and we must continue to provide [and increase the level of these critical resources](#). We also call on the Senate to take up House-passed legislation to require [universal background checks](#) for all firearm purchases in the U.S. and for Congress to pass [legislation that allows the removal of firearms](#) from those deemed potentially harmful to themselves or others through the issuance of extreme risk protection orders.

For more information on APHA's advocacy priorities, visit: www.apha.org/advocacy or contact Don Hoppert at Donald.Hoppert@apha.org or Jordan Wolfe at Jordan.Wolfe@apha.org.



The American Public Health Association champions the health of all people and all communities. We strengthen the public health profession. We speak out for public health issues and policies backed by science. We are the only organization that combines a nearly 150-year perspective, a broad-based member community and the ability to influence federal policy to improve the public's health.

Learn more at www.apha.org.

APHA | 800 I Street, NW | Washington, DC 20001 | 202-777-2742