

May 18, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As Congress considers next steps to bolster the health of Americans in the face of a devastating pandemic, the 71 undersigned organizations urge you to include The Improving Social Determinants of Health Act of 2020 (H.R. 6561) in any further iterations of legislation to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how a community's resources directly impact the health of its residents. People at a disproportionate risk for serious health impacts from the novel coronavirus are also more likely to suffer secondary consequences, such as loss of income or health care, as a result of the pandemic. Now more than ever it is important to address the social and economic conditions, including housing, employment, food security, and education, that contribute significantly to an individual's health outcomes over their lifetime. These conditions, collectively referred to as the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), have rightfully been receiving increased attention from insurance companies, hospitals, healthcare systems, and governmental agencies interested in improving health outcomes and controlling costs even before the pandemic began.

Yet, while clinicians can identify non-medical social needs and make referrals to other organizations, they cannot ensure that there are adequate resources and policies in place to meet the needs of those referred. Public health departments are uniquely situated to build these collaborations across sectors, identify SDOH priorities in communities, and help address policies that inhibit health. For example, while the healthcare system can offer in-house social services assistance at a clinical site, a public health department can complement those efforts by convening community organizations and partners to promote clinic-to-community linkages, collecting data across health systems regarding SDOH needs, working to meet those needs at the local level so health systems can reduce costs, and developing community resource materials.

However, most local and state health departments lack funding and tools to support these cross-sector efforts and are limited in doing so by disease-specific federal funding. Given appropriate funding and technical assistance, more communities could engage in opportunities to address social determinants of health that contribute to high healthcare costs and preventable inequities in health outcomes. For this reason, we urge you to cosponsor H.R. 6561, which would create a CDC program to:

- Coordinate across CDC to ensure programs consider and incorporate SDOH in grants and activities;
- Award grants to state, local, territorial, and Tribal health agencies and organizations to address SDOHs in target communities;

- Award grants to nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education to conduct research on SDOH best practices; provide technical assistance, training and evaluation assistance to target community grantees; and disseminate best practices;
- Coordinate, support, and align SDOH activities with other agencies, such as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and others; and
- Collect and analyze data related to SDOH activities.

During this devastating crisis we need to ensure that every community has the necessary access to the supports they require. The Improving Social Determinants of Health Act is one step to achieving that goal.

The full bill can be accessed [here](#). If you need additional information, please reach out to Joshua Izaak of Representative Nanette Diaz Barragán’s office at ext. 8220 or Joshua.Izaak@mail.house.gov or Daphne Delgado, TFAH Government Relations Senior Manager, at ddelgado@tfah.org.

Sincerely,

National Organizations:

All Youth Access, LLC
 American Association of Birth Centers
 American Association on Health and Disability
 American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
 American Public Health Association
 Anxiety and Depression Association of America
 Association of Public Health Laboratories
 Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
 Autistic Self Advocacy Network
 The Center for Community Resilience
 Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
 Common Threads
 Epilepsy Alliance America
 Families USA
 Farmworker Justice
 The Gerontological Society of America
 Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
 Health Leadership Legacy Project
 Hispanic Federation
 Justice in Aging
 Lakeshore Foundation
 Lutheran Services in America
 MaryCatherine Jones Consulting, LLC
 MomsRising
 Move United
 NASTAD
 National Association of County and City Health Officials

National Association of Social Workers
National Council of Jewish Women
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Network of Public Health Institutes
National Nurse-Led Care Consortium
National Partnership for Women & Families
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
PFLAG National
The Praxis Project
Prevent Blindness
Prevent Cancer Foundation
Prevention Institute
RESULTS
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Society for Public Health Education
Treatment Action Group
Trust for America's Health

State and Local Organizations:

Autism Family Services of New Jersey
Berean Wellness & Community Support Center
Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus
Caregivers of New Jersey
Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition (WA State)
Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children
Cook County Department of Public Health
Epilepsy Services of New Jersey
Equality California
Equality North Carolina
The Family Resource Network
Flint Rising
Flint Women's Study Community Action Network
Florida Institute for Health Innovation
Health by Design
Impetus - Let's Get Started LLC
Indiana Public Health Association
Lanai Community Health Center
The Los Angeles Trust for Children's Health
Maine Public Health Association
New Jersey Association of County & City Health Officials
New Jersey Public Health Association
Public Health Foundation
RESULTS DC
Silver State Equality-Nevada
SLM Consulting, LLC