



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

For science. For action. For health.

January 25, 2019

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals who champion the health of all people and communities, I write to urge you to make improving and protecting the public's health a top priority during the 116th Congress.

APHA urges you to support and strengthen the public health system so it is able to respond to everyday health threats in addition to unexpected public health threats and emergencies. We must ensure that all individuals — regardless of their location, income, health status, sexual orientation, gender identity, race and/or ethnicity or religion — have access to the health care and community-based health and preventive services they need to live safe and productive lives. Additionally, it is imperative that we are prepared to address the unexpected public health threats posed by natural disasters — such as the recent hurricanes which devastated Puerto Rico, Florida and Texas — and disease outbreaks, such as the Zika virus in the United States and U.S. territories and the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the Republic of the Congo.

We strongly encourage you to take into consideration the potential health effects of any major legislation considered by Congress, including decisions on funding for our nation's public health agencies and programs, environmental protection, agriculture, transportation and housing. In particular, we urge you to:

Increase and protect funding for vital public health agencies and programs. We are pleased that for the first time in two decades Congress passed and the president signed the FY 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill before the end of the fiscal year, increasing important funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Health Resources and Services Administration. We are also pleased that the bill fully allocated the Prevention and Public Health Fund, which provides funding to support local, state and federal programs that fight obesity, curb tobacco use, improve access to preventive care services and respond to public health threats and outbreaks. We strongly urge Congress to build upon its FY 19 investments in CDC, HRSA and other important health agencies and programs by working in a bipartisan manner to raise the current budget caps to ensure adequate resources are available to further increase funding for vital public health programs in the FY 2020 appropriations process. APHA is joining with other public health partners to support the 22 by 22 campaign, an effort to increase funding for CDC by at least 22 percent by FY 2022. This would require an investment of \$1.5 billion over the next three years to support critical CDC programs, including those to combat infectious and chronic diseases, prevent substance misuse, protect the public from environmental threats and ensure our state and local health departments have the resources they need to respond to natural disasters and other public health emergencies.

We also urge you to oppose any efforts to block funding for qualified health providers that provide important family planning and related preventive health services. Millions of women, men and young

people access critical health services, including cervical cancer screenings, breast exams, contraceptive services and tests and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, at public health departments, community health centers, and family planning and other private nonprofit agencies, including Planned Parenthood health centers. These services contribute to our nation's efforts to improve access to health care and have been critical in preventing unintended pregnancies, decreasing infant mortality, improving women's health and reducing the spread of sexually transmitted and communicable disease.

Uphold the Affordable Care Act and expand access to health coverage and services. We cannot afford to turn back the clock on progress we have made under the Affordable Care Act. Millions of Americans are reaping the benefits of the law through expanded coverage, coverage of highly rated preventive benefits, a prohibition on discriminating against people with pre-existing conditions, an extension of dependent coverage for adult children up to age 26 and progress in closing the Medicare prescription drug coverage gap. We also strongly support the Prevention and Public Health Fund, a first of its kind mandatory fund for public health and prevention activities created by the ACA. Notably, the fund makes up about 11 percent of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's budget. Through CDC, the fund is providing critical resources to help states keep communities healthy and safe, such as the 317 immunization program, epidemiology and laboratory capacity grants, the entire Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant program, cancer screenings, chronic disease prevention, lead poisoning prevention and other important prevention programs. We continue to oppose any effort to repeal or weaken the ACA or the prevention fund, including by redirecting funds away from their intended use. Additionally, we look forward to working with you on efforts to further expand health insurance to the millions of individuals who still lack coverage and access to critical public 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 negative health impacts associated with climate change. 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. The existing conditions that cause worse health among these populations – unhealthy air, water and living conditions, extreme heat, drought, flooding and mental health stresses – are exacerbated by the adverse effects of 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 adequately funding CDC's Climate and Health Program and supporting other efforts to address the negative public health impacts of climate change. We also strongly urge you to take action to address climate change by cleaning up major sources of carbon pollution and other greenhouse gases and to oppose any efforts to block or weaken existing regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are contributing to climate change.

Uphold critical public health laws and regulations. The Clean Air Act is a critically important and successful public health law. APHA strongly supports efforts to reduce carbon pollution, a major contributor to climate change, and other dangerous pollutants released from power plants. EPA estimates that by 2030, the Clean Power Plan will prevent up to 4,500 premature deaths as well as thousands of heart attacks, asthma attacks and other air pollution-related illness. Unfortunately, the current administration is working to dismantle this critical public health regulation. We also support the strongest possible measures to reduce ozone pollution, particulate matter and other deadly air pollution. Other crucial public health rules and laws have come under attack by the current administration and some in Congress, including laws and regulations that protect our water, ensure worker safety, maintain regulation of tobacco products, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect

access to the full range of family planning services and provide our nation's school children with healthier school meals. We urge you to oppose any efforts in Congress to weaken or roll back important regulations and laws that protect the public's health including legislation that would weaken the process for developing evidence-based public health regulations.

Address the nation's gun violence epidemic. Gun violence is one of the leading preventable causes of death in the nation. In 2017, more than 39,000 individuals died as a result of gun violence, and nearly 90,000 suffered nonfatal gun injuries. It is more than past time for Congress to take immediate action to address this serious public health crisis. First, we call on Congress to provide the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention with funding for vital research that will allow us to identify comprehensive solutions to this devastating problem. We need a sound public health approach to address this public health epidemic, and we know this begins with understanding the science behind the problem. Research is an essential function to achieve this understanding to make data-driven policy and programmatic decisions. We also call for action on legislation to require universal background checks for all firearm purchases in the United States, including those sold at gun shows, on the internet and through classified ads. We must ensure our nation's laws are strengthened to prevent felons, domestic abusers, the seriously mentally ill and others prohibited from owning firearms from purchasing these deadly weapons.

We also invite you to participate in APHA's public education and outreach campaigns. This year's National Public Health Week, *Creating the Healthiest Nation: For science. For action. For health.* will be celebrated during the week of April 1-7. You can visit the National Public Health Week website at: www.nphw.org. Additionally, APHA's Get Ready campaign provides information, resources and tools to better prepare the public for a potential influenza pandemic, outbreak of an emerging infectious disease or other hazard or disaster. The Get Ready campaign serves as a venue for people who are looking for real advice on how to prepare themselves, their families and their communities. Materials are available at www.aphagetready.org.

Please know that APHA staff stands ready to assist you to achieve these and other important goals. Feel free to contact me or my staff:

Susan Polan, Associate Executive Director of Public Affairs & Advocacy, can be reached at 202-777-2510 or susan.polan@apha.org.

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We look forward to working with you on these and other important public health issues this year.

Sincerely,



Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director