

June 27, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
U.S. Senate
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray,

As you develop the Senate's Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations legislation for fiscal year (FY) 2020, the 90 undersigned organizations representing patients and consumers, public health professionals, health information technology (IT) developers, health care providers, and scientists urge you to match the House's FY 2020 appropriation of \$100 million to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for a new, multiyear initiative that will transform the public health surveillance enterprise and save lives. Specifically, this funding would allow CDC, state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments to move from sluggish, manual, paper-based data collection to seamless, automated IT systems and to recruit and retain skilled data scientists to use them. More, better, faster data yielded by secure, interoperable, integrated systems will allow public health professionals and policymakers to make better decisions and get ahead of chronic, emerging, and urgent threats.

"Public health surveillance" is the interactive system of government public health agencies at the federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial levels working with health care providers and the public at-large to detect, report, respond to, and prevent illness and death. Every day—often unbeknownst to most Americans—public health surveillance is saving lives by detecting and facilitating the response to health threats including *E. coli* contaminated lettuce, measles, antibiotic resistance, lead poisoning, influenza, health care associated infections, opioid overdoses, Zika, and many more.

Unfortunately, the nation's public health data systems are antiquated, rely on obsolete surveillance methods, and are in dire need of security upgrades. Sluggish, manual processes—paper records, spreadsheets, faxes, and phone calls— are still in widespread use. Lack of interoperability, reporting consistency, and data standards leads to errors in quality, timeliness, and communication.

In addition, public health professionals are faced with rapid advances in data science and evolving cybersecurity threats, and many do not yet have the necessary 21st century skills to understand and securely integrate health data. The public health workforce of today and tomorrow must acquire new skills to understand and securely integrate health data and bolster and maintain cybersecurity. Developing a new generation of skilled public health data scientists will require new curricula, professional development, post-graduate fellowships, and on-the-job training.

The development of 21st century data systems and the public health workforce needed to operate and maintain these systems have been woefully underfunded to date. A robust, sustained commitment to transform today's public health surveillance will ultimately improve Americans' health. We understand that without a bipartisan budget agreement to avoid a scheduled \$55 billion cut to nondefense discretionary programs, including those at CDC, this funding request will be difficult if not impossible to

achieve. We remain committed to supporting lawmakers as they negotiate a deal to raise the caps, prevent devastating cuts, and reinvest much needed funding in our nation's public health infrastructure, including data systems and workforce. If you have questions, please contact Emily Holubowich at eholubowich@dc-crd.com.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
AcademyHealth
Advocates for Better Children's Diets
American Association on Health and Disability
American Brain Coalition
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA)
American Medical Women's Association
American Mosquito Control Association
American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL)
American Public Health Association
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
American Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene
America's Blood Centers
APIC – Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
Association for Prevention Teaching and Research
Association of Clinicians for the Underserved
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of Public Data Users
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Big Cities Health Coalition
Caring Ambassadors Program, Inc.
Children's Dental Health Project
Center for Science in the Public Interest
College of Healthcare Information Management Executives
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc. (COA)
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Edifecs, Inc.
EHR Association
Epilepsy Foundation
Florida Environmental Health Association
Friends of NCBDDD
Friends of the National Center for Health Statistics
Green & Healthy Homes Initiative
Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS)

Hep B United
Hepatitis B Foundation
Hepatitis Education Project
HLN Consulting, LLC
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Intermountain Healthcare
International Society for Disease Surveillance
Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research
ISF, Inc.
Lakeshore Foundation
Leidos
Liver Health Connection
March of Dimes
MQ Foundation
NASTAD
NAPHSIS - National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Officials
National Birth Defects Prevention Network
National Blood Clot Alliance
National Coalition of STD Directors
National Environmental Health Association
National Healthy Start Association
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Network of Public Health Institutes
National Safety Council
National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable
Northwest Mosquito and Vector Control Association
NTT DATA Services Federal
Philadelphia Department of Public Health
Peggy Lillis Foundation
Prevent Blindness
Public Health Institute
Research!America
Ruvos
Safe States Alliance
SAP
SAP Public Services
SAS Institute
Spina Bifida Association
Teratology Society
Testability, Inc.
The Academy for Radiology & Biomedical Imaging Research
The Immunization Partnership

The Joint Commission
The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research
The Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America
Trisomy 18 Foundation
Trust for America's Health
United Spinal Association
Washington State Department of Health