

# Data: *Elemental to Health*

CSTE APHL HIMSS NAPHSIS



December 10, 2019

The Honorable Lucy McBath  
1513 Longworth House Office Building  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Buddy Carter  
2432 Rayburn House Office Building  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives McBath and Carter,

On behalf of the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE), the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), and the National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems (NAPHSIS), we applaud your efforts to strengthen the public health core infrastructure through H.R. 5321 Public Health Infrastructure Modernization Act of 2019.

As organizations whose members protect the nation from public health threats, we appreciate that the Public Health Infrastructure Modernization Act recognizes the importance of expanding, enhancing, and improving public health data systems at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and at state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments. As an interconnected ecosystem that relies on collection, transmission, exchange, and analysis of health data to inform effective and efficient public health responses, it is critical that the core public health infrastructure is interoperable and keeps pace with technological advancements. The Public Health Infrastructure Modernization Act would authorize an unprecedented investment in a system-wide, enterprise approach to strengthening the core public health infrastructure at all levels of governmental public health and across the health care sector. This bold initiative will allow the public health community to detect public health threats sooner and ultimately save lives.

An interoperable public health surveillance system is critical to effective and timely public health response, prevention, and policy development. We strongly support the Public Health Infrastructure Modernization Act's provisions to enhance data exchange with interoperable public health data systems and ensure public health professionals are equipped with the training and skills to implement, operate, and maintain these systems, interpret complex data through predictive analytics and informatics, and deploy actionable interventions. These improvements are sorely needed because the nation's public health surveillance ecosystem is falling behind. Currently, data sharing between health care providers, epidemiologists, public health laboratorians, and vital records registrars depends heavily on time-consuming manual and paper-based methods and processes. Phone calls, faxes, and emails create enormous administrative burdens and leave room for data entry errors and incomplete information that compromise data quality and impede timely data exchange. The consequences of inefficient and slow data sharing are significant: delayed detection and response, lost time, lost opportunities, and lost lives.

Modernizing public health data exchange and expanding a highly-skilled workforce will increase data quality and timeliness, decrease administrative burden, improve connectivity and coordination between health care and public health, and ensure sensitive health data is protected from cybersecurity threats. Investments today will update antiquated systems and allow public health to be at the nexus of data, technology, and innovation to maximize progress and resources. The Public Health Infrastructure Modernization Act would support public health taking advantage of technological advances to expand and update vital records systems, enhance nationally notifiable disease surveillance, support electronic laboratory ordering and reporting, expand the number of hospitals conducting syndromic surveillance, automate disease reports directly from electronic health records to support electronic case reporting, develop highly skilled public health informaticians and data scientists, and improve data security. This commitment to transform today's public health surveillance system will make a lasting, positive impact on Americans' health.

For additional information on the current state of our public health data systems and how they can be improved, please read [Driving Public Health in the Fast Lane: The Urgent Need for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Data Superhighway](#).

We thank you for your leadership and vision to improve the public health infrastructure. If you have any questions, please contact Erin Morton at [emorton@dc-crd.com](mailto:emorton@dc-crd.com).

Sincerely,

The Association of Public Health Laboratories

The Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists

The Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society

The National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems