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Senator Murray Reintroduces Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives



Act, Continuing Push to Strengthen Nation's Public Health System as New Report Chronicles Perils of Underinvestment

Senator Murray: "It's time for us to invest in prevention—and invest in public health—in a serious way. Because, when we say an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, we are talking about stopping the next global pandemic and the next global economic crisis in its tracks—saving so many lives and livelihoods."

****WATCH (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_JwqV8o7hw): Senator Murray speaks on the Senate floor about why she is reintroducing the Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act****

****WATCH (<https://youtu.be/akwO3kN7XvM>): Senator Murray holds virtual press conference with experts on the need for robust investments to strengthen U.S. public health system****

Washington, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), a senior member and former chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP), reintroduced the Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act (PHISLA), legislation to establish \$4.5 billion in dedicated, annual funding for a grant program to build up and maintain the nation's public health system across the board. Senator Murray spoke about the legislation on the Senate floor, and held a press conference on the need for robust public health investments with Dr. J Nadine Gracia, MD, MSCE, President and CEO of Trust for America's Health (TFAH), and Dennis E. Worsham, Director of the Snohomish County Health Department. Senator Murray's reintroduction of the legislation comes as TFAH releases a new report (<https://www.tfah.org/report-details/funding-2023/>) detailing how chronic underfunding of our nation's public health system jeopardizes our families' health and leaves our country ill-equipped to address critical public health threats.

“Our public health system was sorely underfunded before COVID struck and it has been severely overwhelmed ever since. We have—thank goodness—gotten a much better grasp on COVID, but who in their right mind would look at the last few years and think—funding public health is probably something we can put on the back burner?” said Senator Murray. **“We have to end the cycle of crisis and complacency when it comes to building and maintaining strong public health infrastructure. Because the simple fact of the matter is: public health infrastructure saves lives—and the better funded and prepared our public health system is before a crisis, the more lives it will be able to save during one.”**

“Today, Trust for America’s Health released our annual report showing the impact of chronic underfunding on America’s public health system. We show that decades of inadequate, unpredictable funding have left health departments understaffed and unable to modernize. The Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act would build the foundation every health department needs to promote and protect the health of its residents.” J. Nadine Gracia, M.D., M.S.C.E, President and CEO, Trust for America’s Health.


“Short term funding can be helpful to respond to an emergency or get a new effort off the ground. But it is not the way to create the public health infrastructure we need to best protect the health and safety of our communities. We need long-term, stable, and predictable funding to bolster local health departments and equip our dedicated teams to better meet the challenges of an increasingly complex world. We’ve seen over the last few years that a new virus or disease is just a plane ride away,” said Director Worsham. **“I’m proud of our work and of the diligent and compassionate people I work with. But they are tired. They are burning out. We need the resources to build and sustain a more robust local public health infrastructure. Funding like what is proposed in Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act will do exactly what the name says—it will save lives.”**

PHISLA would create a Core Public Health Infrastructure Program at CDC to help modernize public health at every level to ensure every American is served by a 21st century health department. The bill would establish mandatory funding for the program that would ramp up over five years to \$4.5 billion annually and then remain at that level to build and maintain the nation’s public health infrastructure to better respond to challenges and keep communities healthy.

The bill would:

- Provide mandatory funding for State, Tribal, territorial, and local health departments to strengthen capabilities and capacities of public health departments, establish a core set of activities and measures, and support a trained workforce and systems in place to address existing and emerging health threats.
- The funding would be focused on eight core capabilities:
 1. Public health assessment
 2. Preparedness and response
 3. Policy development and support
 4. Communications
 5. Community partnership development
 6. Organizational competencies
 7. Accountability
 8. Equity
- Ensure that 3 percent of the competitive grants go to Tribal health departments.
- Support grantees through technical assistance from the CDC.
- Provide that mandatory awards would supplement, and not supplant, existing public health department resources.

The Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act is co-sponsored by Senators Merkley (D-OR), Schatz (D-HI), Casey (D-PA), Blumenthal (D-CT), Klobuchar (D-MN), Smith (D-MN), Baldwin (D-WI), Warren (D-MA), Reed (D-RI), Menendez (D-NJ), Van Hollen (D-MD), Duckworth (D-IL), and Brown (D-OH).

The legislation is endorsed by: America Walks, American Academy of Nursing, American Association of Colleges of Nursing, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, American Association on Health and Disability, The American College of Preventive Medicine, American Federation of Teachers, American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), American Heart Association, American Lung Association, American Physical Therapy Association, American Public Health Association, American Sexual Health Association, American Society for Microbiology, American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, American Trauma Society, Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, Association of American Medical Colleges, Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs, Association of Public Health Laboratories, Association of Public Health Nurses, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN), Big Cities Health Coalition, Bipartisan Policy Center, Buffalo Trace District Health Department, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, Caring Ambassadors Program, Center for Advocacy for the Rights and Interests of Elders (CARIE), ChangeLab Solutions,  English Children's Environmental Health Network, Coalition of National Health, Education

Organizations, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces, Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation, Dorchester County Health Department, Entomological Society of America , Epilepsy Foundation, The Gerontological Society of America, GW Cancer Center, The Foundation for Sustainable Communities, Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society, Healthy Teen Network, HIV + Hepatitis Policy Institute, HIV Medicine Association, Illinois Public Health Association, Indiana Public Health Association, Infectious Diseases Society of America, Institute for Public Health Innovation, Kids and Car Safety, Lakeshore Foundation, Liver Health Initiative, Louisiana Public Health Organization, Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc., Maine Public Health Association, March of Dimes, Maryland Public Health Association , Maternal and Child Health Access, Mel Leaman Free Clinic, Missouri Center for Public Health Excellence, Montgomery County Department of Health, National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors, National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, National Association of County and City Health Officials, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Officials, National Environmental Health Association, National Hispanic Medical Association , National League for Nursing, National Network of Public Health Institutes, National Nurse-Led Care Consortium, National Safety Council, National WIC Association, Network for Public Health Law, Nevada Public Health Association, New Progressive Alliance, New York State Public Health Association, Peggy Lillis Foundation, Prevent Blindness, Prevention Institute, Public Health Foundation, Resolve to Save Lives, Safe States Alliance, Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange Healthcare Foundation, Society for Advancement of Injury and Violence Research, Society for Public Health Education, Southern Nevada Health District, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Stop TB USA, Tennessee Public Health Association, Trust for America's Health, Urban Baby Beginnings, Vaccinate Your Family, Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials, Washington State Public Health Association, and Washoe County Health District.

[PDF of the full bill text HERE](https://www.murray.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/PHISLA-2023.pdf) (<https://www.murray.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/PHISLA-2023.pdf>).

[Full report from TFAH on our nation's preparedness for public health emergencies HERE](https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/TFAH-2023-PublicHealthFundingFINALc.pdf) (<https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/TFAH-2023-PublicHealthFundingFINALc.pdf>).

[Senator Murray's full remarks on the Senate floor about the Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act are below:](#)

“Thank you, M. President. They say an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and the COVID pandemic showed us just how painfully true that is when it comes to public health.

“Our public health system is our frontline defense, not only against deadly diseases and pandemics, it also aids in addressing the opioid and fentanyl crisis, preventing chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease, protecting the food and water supply, and a lot more.

“But despite our public health system’s central role in protecting our communities, keeping our families safe and healthy, and preventing major disruptions in our lives. our public health system was sorely underfunded before COVID struck, and it has been severely overwhelmed ever since.

“We have—thank goodness—gotten a much better grasp on COVID .But who in their right mind would look at the last few years and think—funding public health is probably something we can put on the back burner?

“We have to do better Mr. President. We have to apply the lessons we've learned and start thinking ahead now so we're never caught unprepared again. We have to end the cycle of crisis and complacency when it comes to building and maintaining strong public health infrastructure.

“Because the simple fact of the matter is: public health infrastructure saves lives—and the better funded and prepared our public health system is before a crisis, the more lives it will be able to save during one.

“And make no mistake, the question is not whether there will be a new threat... It is when will the next crisis strike? Will we be ready next time?

“We cannot afford to treat public health like a one-and-done issue.

“Which is why I am reintroducing my bill to provide \$4.5 billion in dedicated, annual funding to support core public health capabilities at every level, so we can protect our public health system from complacency, and hostage taking, and dangerous cuts.

“The Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act would make much-needed investments at the CDC, and, crucially, it would establish a grant program to support health departments all across our country.

“This funding would meet a wide variety of needs in communities across America.

“Health departments could use it to make sure they do robust contact tracing and stop outbreaks in their tracks, have adequate lab capacity to address public health threats, and have a surge workforce available in an emergency to save lives.

“This funding would empower public health departments to make sure lifesaving information reaches everyone: people who don’t speak English, people who have disabilities, or people who don’t have access to the internet.

“It would help officials conduct public awareness campaigns, and fight misinformation, and get really basic, but essential, information out—like when and where to find a vaccine clinic.

“Public health departments could also use this funding as they update IT and data systems to help them more quickly identify threats before they become full-blown outbreaks. And it would help us collect more consistent, comprehensive demographic data so we can see and address gaps in our responses, and get resources where they are most needed.


“It would also help departments hire, and train, and retain the people they need.

“That is really important. A recent survey actually showed nearly half of all state and local public health workers left their jobs between 2017 and 2021 citing harassment or retirement. Post-COVID, public health workers are more burnt out than ever—and in dire need of reinforcements.

“This funding will help provide that—and so much more. And, critically, this would be dedicated, annual funding. That would do so much to help take the possibility of cuts and chaos off the table, and put us on track to build the kind of world-class public health system our communities deserve—the kind our families need to keep them safe.

“And here’s the thing: every dollar we invest now saves us many more in the long run. When we tackle public health threats now—staving off major outbreaks, major disruption—we save in a really big way down the line. We should all know by now that we can’t take public health for granted.

“We’ve seen real momentum and support for this from communities who understand all too well we need a strong public health system at every level. It’s time for Congress to show we get it too. It’s time for us to invest in prevention—and invest in public health—in a serious way.

“Because when we say an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, we are talking about stopping the next global pandemic and the next global economic crisis in its tracks—saving so many lives and livelihoods.  English

“Please let's not make public health funding partisan—I urge my Republican colleagues to support this legislation, and if you're skeptical: talk to me.

“A nominal investment in public health, is a major payoff in terms of economic security and keeping our families safe and healthy. Seems like a pretty good deal to me!

“So let's work together and let's pass the Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act. Thank you.”

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← (<https://www.murray.senate.gov/murray>)

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