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Health Experts Urge Return of Prevention and Wellness Funding to Stimulus

Statement of IDSA President Anne Gershon, MD

IDSA and HIVMA are surprised and disappointed that the Senate removed one of the most cost-effective provisions—the Prevention and Wellness Fund—from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, to be voted on today. This \$5.8 billion provision—less than one-tenth of one percent of the total stimulus package—would have invested in immunizations, health promotion, HIV/AIDS prevention, and other programs now that would have averted much larger health expenditures later. IDSA applauds the House of Representatives for including \$3 billion in public health funding in its version of the bill, and the Society urges Congress to incorporate this important provision in the final stimulus bill.

No member of Congress needs to be reminded about the precarious state of the nation's health care system. The problems are only getting worse as more Americans lose their jobs and struggle through the recession. The investments contained in the Senate's Prevention and Wellness Fund would have generated cost savings, both for the individuals who benefit from these prevention programs and for the federal government, which pays the health care bills for the nation's neediest—a population that is growing as the economy worsens. A [study by the Trust for America's Health](#) shows every dollar spent on prevention saves \$5.60 over five years.

In addition, the Senate provision would have put badly needed resources into the hands of state and local health departments. These vital agencies are the backbone of the nation's public health infrastructure. Much like our roads and bridges, public health departments also are suffering from years of wear and neglect. Tragically, the economic downturn has accelerated the erosion at these critical agencies, even as the nation confronts new dangers like salmonella-contaminated food outbreaks and ongoing battles such as the 56,000 new HIV infections occurring annually in the U.S. A [survey by the National Association of County and City Health Officials](#) found that more than half of local health departments lost employees last year, and a third expect to lose employees this year. The Senate could have staunched the bleeding and retained or added as many as 40,000 jobs

in this important sector, according to the [Association of State and Territorial Health Officials](#).

The Senate did the right thing by supporting funding for the National Institutes of Health, health information technology, and research into the comparative effectiveness of health therapies. There is still an opportunity for the Senate and House to make a vital reinvestment in public health infrastructure and workforce. The final version of the stimulus package should include the House of Representative's funding for wellness and prevention—a sound investment in our nation's public health infrastructure.

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The Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) is an organization of physicians, scientists, and other health care professionals dedicated to promoting health through excellence in infectious diseases research, education, prevention, and patient care. The Society, which has more than 8,600 members, was founded in 1963 and is based in Arlington, VA. HIVMA is the professional home for more than 3,600 physicians, scientists and other health care professionals dedicated to the field of HIV/AIDS. Nested within IDSA, HIVMA promotes quality in HIV care and advocates policies that ensure a comprehensive and humane response to the AIDS pandemic informed by science and social justice. For more information, visit our websites: www.hivma.org and www.idsociety.org.