

NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

October 14, 2009

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the 2,800 local health departments across the nation that work every day to prevent disease, promote wellness, and protect health, I am writing to respectfully urge that you actively seek the inclusion of the Prevention and Public Health Investment Fund in any final national health care reform legislation. With your leadership, the nation can take steps to help reverse the erosion of local public health protections, provide sustained support to local and state health departments, and achieve the promise of health reform to help Americans be healthier.

In the first half of 2009, approximately 8,000 local health department personnel had their jobs eliminated and an additional 12,000 staff had their hours cut or faced mandatory furloughs. This year's severe job losses and resulting program cuts follow a loss of 7,000 local health department jobs in 2008. These cumulative reductions are diminishing local health departments' capacities to keep people healthy, respond to public health emergencies, and address the escalating burden of chronic diseases. These significant funding, staffing, and program cuts underscore the growing need for sustained support for local health department infrastructure, as provided for in the health reform bills passed by the House Energy and Commerce and Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committees.

A stable, reliable funding stream for local health department prevention efforts, coupled with a highly skilled public health workforce as supported by both the Energy and Commerce and HELP Committee bills, are essential to sustain the work of local and state health departments and population-based prevention activities that are beyond the reach of the medical care system. Together these public health, prevention, and workforce provisions represent an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen the public health system that safeguards the public's health through local health departments across the country. The inclusion of a public health and prevention investment fund that encompasses these provisions in final health reform legislation is NACCHO's top priority.

Thank you in advance for ensuring that national health reform expands access to affordable care, makes sufficient investments in population-based prevention activities, and bolsters the nation's local health department workforce. NACCHO is available as a resource for you and your staff at any time. If we can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Pestronk, MPH
Executive Director