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## **HEALTH TRACKING FUNDING APPROVED BY CONGRESS WILL IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH**

### **Tracking World Trade Center and Pentagon Relief Workers' Health First Pilot Project of Nationwide Health Tracking Network**

WASHINGTON, DC—Congress has approved almost \$30 million to establish a nationwide health tracking network to track chronic diseases such as cancer and asthma and any potential links to environmental hazards, giving local, state and federal public health officials and communities more information to respond to these serious health concerns as well as the unforeseen emergencies of tomorrow. The Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a non-profit public health advocacy group calls the funding a "big step toward improving the health of all Americans."

The fiscal year 2002 Labor-HHS appropriations bill approved by both the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives and awaiting the President's signature contains \$17.5 million to begin a nationwide health tracking network. Such a network could allow health officials to monitor disease rates and environmental hazards down to the community level, information that is not currently available. The network could alert officials to an alarming increase in asthma, as well as a sudden uptick in illnesses that could indicate a chemical or biological attack.

Congress approved another \$12 million for the first health tracking pilot project to track and monitor the health of the World Trade Center and Pentagon relief workers. Contained in the fiscal year 2002 Department of Defense appropriations, the tracking project will help identify any related health effects from workers' exposures to harmful substances in the wake of the terrorist attacks.

"By funding the beginning of the nationwide health tracking network, Congress has made a commitment to improving the health of the public," said Shelley Hearne, TFAH's executive director. "This isn't a partisan issue. It's a health issue. And Republicans and Democrats agree that it makes sense to track chronic diseases so communities and public health officials have the information they need to prevent future illnesses."

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Hearne applauded the leadership of the Senate and House appropriations committees, particularly the work of Senator Harkin (D-IA), Senator Specter (R-PA) and Senator Reid (D-NV), as well as the work of Senator Clinton (D-NY). On the House side, Hearne praised the commitment of Rep. Regula (R-OH), Rep. Pelosi (D-CA), Rep. Obey (D-WI) and Rep. Young (R-FL) to improving public health.

“While many members of Congress have long recognized the benefits of health tracking, these Senators and Representatives understand that strengthening our public health system will help us respond to the day-to-day public health problems as well as detect and respond to potential terrorist attacks using chemical or biological agents,” said Hearne.

The funding approved this year is a downpayment on a fully implemented nationwide health tracking network, which would require an estimated \$275 million – or less than \$1 for every American.

The President is expected to sign into law the appropriations bills in the coming weeks.

For more information on health tracking and improving the nation’s public health system to better protect communities from illness, visit [www.healthyamericans.org](http://www.healthyamericans.org).

*Trust for America's Health (TFAH) is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to protect the health and safety of all communities, especially those most at risk of environmental and other public health threats. Its goal is to strengthen the nation's public health system through science-based research, community partnerships, education, and advocacy. TFAH's website is: [www.healthyamericans.org](http://www.healthyamericans.org).*