



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **CDC Offers Money to State and Local Governments For Health Tracking**

*Cancer, Asthma, Birth Defects, and Parkinson's Are Among Diseases  
Targeted for Greater Study and Prevention;  
Bioterrorism Preparedness Would Also Benefit*

**Washington, DC** -- Chronic diseases including cancer, asthma, birth defects and Parkinson's, which are collectively responsible for seven out of 10 deaths in America, are targeted for greater study and prevention under a federal initiative announced today.

State and local health departments can now apply for federal funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to begin or expand their state health tracking programs. The CDC grants, announced in today's *Federal Register*, would help enhance or develop chronic disease tracking in their respective local areas, which would be the building blocks of a nationwide health tracking network.

There is currently no nationwide system for monitoring where and when chronic diseases occur and their potential links to environmental hazards. A nationwide health tracking network would give communities the health information they have a right to know and would provide health officials with the tools they need to better prevent diseases from occurring in the first place.

The Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a nonprofit advocacy group, has been the country's leading champion of health tracking. "State and local governments lack the tools and troops they need to protect our communities from the number one killers of Americans today—chronic diseases," said Dr. Shelley Hearne, executive director of TFAH. "A nationwide health tracking network is a key component in understanding why we are getting sick, and most importantly, acting to prevent future illnesses."

A nationwide health tracking network also would serve as an early warning system in the event of a biological or chemical terrorist attack. For example, not only would such a system warn officials of increases in diseases such as asthma; they also could pinpoint a surge in illnesses that would indicate a bioterror attack had occurred.

As directed by Congress, the CDC is offering approximately \$10 million to establish or enhance 15 state pilot programs. The grants may be provided to any of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, or the local health departments of Chicago, Houston, New York City, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles County.

CDC also is offering \$2 million to establish three “Centers of Excellence” at Schools of Public Health to support research and expertise for state health tracking. Applications for both the state health tracking programs and the Centers of Excellence are due August 22, 2002. The grants will be awarded in September. Information on the grants can be found at TFAH’s home page: [www.healthyamericans.org](http://www.healthyamericans.org).

On another front, the U.S. Senate appropriations committee is expected today to approve an additional \$30 million in its Fiscal Year 2003 spending bill for health tracking. The funding in the Labor Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill would allow more states to receive assistance for establishing or further developing their health tracking programs next year as a part of a nationwide health tracking network.

### **An Important Step Toward Protecting the Health of All Americans**

“As we evaluate how best to improve our homeland security, we absolutely must strengthen our public health defenses, which are integral to our nation’s health and safety,” added Hearne. “The CDC grants are an important step toward a safer future,” said Hearne. “We applaud the CDC’s ongoing leadership, and we encourage state and local officials to seize this opportunity.”

“The ultimate goal is a nationwide health tracking network, because every family and every community deserves better health protection. The additional funding the Senate committee is expected to approve today is great news for the development of a nationwide network that will help us better prevent these terrible diseases,” Hearne said.

Hearne was formerly the executive director of the Pew Environmental Health Commission, which the CDC credits with documenting the need for a nationwide health tracking network in its 1999 report, “America’s Environmental Health Gap: Why the Country Needs a Nationwide Health Tracking Network.” A full copy of that report can be found on TFAH’s website at [www.healthyamericans.org](http://www.healthyamericans.org).

### **Enormous Impacts on U.S. Society**

Many chronic conditions with suspected links to environmental hazards are on the rise across the country, for reasons that remain unclear to scientists. Chronic diseases collectively are the #1 killer in the United States, accounting for about 70% of all deaths. About 100 million Americans, more than a third of our population, suffer from some form of chronic illness. The annual cost of chronic disease is estimated at more than \$325 billion.

“The impacts of cancer and other chronic diseases on our society are no less enormous and frightening than the threat of terrorism,” Hearne added. “Investing in disease tracking will help protect our families and communities from the full range of health threats.”

*The Trust for America's Health 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. For more information, visit [www.healthyamericans.org](http://www.healthyamericans.org).*