

October 12, 2009

Dear Senator:

[sent to Senators from the states listed below, Senate leadership and Democrats on Finance and Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committees]

The undersigned state-based associations, in conjunction with 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, respectfully request that Titles III and IV of the Affordable Health Choices Act are included in the merged health care reform legislation to be considered by the Senate. Moreover, we urge you to strongly advocate that any final national health reform legislation contain – and sufficiently fund – a prevention and public health investment fund to provide sustained support to the nation’s local and state health departments. By ensuring this support, Congress can help reverse the erosion of local public health protections 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 public health department infrastructure, as provided for in the Prevention and Public Health Investment Fund (Sec. 302 of Title III) contained in the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee-passed health reform bill.

A stable, reliable funding stream for local health department prevention efforts, coupled with a highly skilled public health workforce as supported by Title IV of the HELP bill, 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 the public health, prevention, and workforce provisions of the Affordable Health Choices Act represent an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen the public health system that safeguards the public’s health through local health departments across the country.

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 public health department workforce. As always, if we can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Eli Briggs, NACCHO Senior Government Affairs Specialist (202/507-4194, ebiggs@naccho.org).

Sincerely,

National Association of County and City Health Officials
Association of Montana Public Health Officials
Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials
Connecticut Association of Directors of Health
County Health Executives Association of California
Iowa Counties Public Health Association
Maryland Association of County Health Officers
Minnesota Local Public Health Association
Missouri Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials