



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

*For science. For action. For health.*

January 29, 2021

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals who champion the health of all people and communities, I write to urge you to make improving and protecting the public's health a top priority during the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress.

APHA urges you to support and strengthen the public health system so it is able to respond to everyday health threats in addition to unexpected public health threats and emergencies. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic highlights the urgent need to provide critical and sustained funding to bolster the nation's public health infrastructure and workforce to be able to respond to this and future public health emergencies. We must ensure that all individuals — regardless of their location, income, health status, sexual orientation, gender identity, race and/or ethnicity or religion — have access to the health care and community-based health and preventive services they need to live safe and productive lives.

We strongly encourage you to take into consideration the potential health effects of any major legislation considered by Congress, including decisions on funding for our nation's public health agencies and programs, environmental protection, agriculture, transportation and housing. In particular, we urge you to:

**Increase and protect funding for vital public health agencies and programs and strengthen the nation's public health infrastructure.** Congress and the Biden administration must prioritize funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Health Resources and Services Administration. These two agencies are the backbone of our federal public health system and provide valuable resources to our nation's state, local, territorial and tribal health departments as well as the health professionals who work to keep our nation healthy. Congress should also ensure that additional urgently needed funding is made available to assist the nation's public health and health care infrastructure in their ongoing efforts to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, including the distribution of new COVID-19 vaccines.

**Uphold the Affordable Care Act and expand access to health coverage and services.** Millions of Americans are reaping the benefits of the law through expanded coverage, coverage of highly rated preventive benefits, a prohibition on discriminating against people with pre-existing conditions and an extension of dependent coverage for adult children up to age 26. Maintaining these protections and expanding health insurance to the millions who still lack coverage should be a priority for the Biden administration and the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. We also urged your continued support for the Prevention and Public Health Fund, a first of its kind mandatory fund for public health and prevention activities created by the ACA.

**Address the health impacts of climate change.** Climate change and extreme weather events are threatening our health today, and, if left unchecked, will lead to increases in disease and death. Immediate action can and must be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow climate change and prepare the public health system to protect our communities from the associated negative health impacts. Vulnerable populations — such as communities of color, the elderly, young children, the sick and the poor — bear the greatest burden of disease and death related to climate change. We urge Congress to ensure our federal, state and local health departments and agencies have the resources and tools they need to address these challenges by increasing funding CDC’s Climate and Health Program and supporting other efforts to address the negative public health impacts of climate change, including the Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act.

**Advance racial equity.** To achieve health equity and create the healthiest nation in one generation, we must address racism as a driving force of social determinants of health (e.g. housing, education and employment) and a root cause of disparate outcomes for communities of color. We must dismantle racism through brutally honest conversations as well as policy and practice changes, and support actions at all levels to ensure all communities have the social and economic resources needed to be as healthy as possible. We hope to see sustained action on health equity and the social determinants of health as well as other issues affecting communities of color such as maternal mortality and police violence.

**Uphold critical public health laws and regulations and reverse damaging rollbacks.** We oppose any efforts to weaken or roll back important regulations and laws such as the Clean Air Act that protect the public’s health, including legislation that would weaken the process for developing evidence-based public health regulations. Unfortunately, the Trump administration undermined or dismantled numerous critical public health regulations including the Clean Power Plan and the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards. Other crucial public health rules and laws were weakened or undermined including those that protect our water, ensure worker safety and ensure access to the full range of reproductive health services. We are committed to working to reverse these damaging regulatory rollbacks and ensure other important public health laws and regulations are implemented as intended.

**Address the nation’s gun violence epidemic.** In 2018, more than 39,000 people died as a result of gun violence. We are extremely pleased that in FY 2020, Congress provided \$25 million to CDC and the National Institutes of Health for vital gun violence prevention research. A sound public health approach to address this epidemic begins with understanding the science behind the problem. We also call on Congress to pass legislation to require universal background checks for all firearm purchases in the U.S. and to pass legislation that allows the removal of firearms from those deemed potentially harmful to themselves or others through the issuance of extreme risk protection orders.

We also invite you to participate in APHA’s public education and outreach campaigns. This year’s [National Public Health Week](#), *Building Bridges to Better Health* will be celebrated during the week of April 5-11. Additionally, [APHA’s Get Ready campaign](#) provides information, resources and tools to prevent COVID-19 transmission and to better prepare the public for a potential influenza pandemic, outbreak of an emerging infectious disease or other hazard or disaster. The Get Ready campaign serves as a venue for people who are looking for real advice on how to prepare themselves, their families and their communities.

You can view a full outline of [APHA's advocacy priorities on our website](#). Please know that APHA staff stands ready to assist you to achieve these and other important goals. Feel free to contact me or my staff:

**Don Hoppert**, Director of Government Relations, oversees APHA's advocacy on the CDC budget, health reform, climate change, environmental health and violence prevention and can be reached at 202-777-2514 or [donald.hoppert@apha.org](mailto:donald.hoppert@apha.org).

**Jordan Wolfe**, Manager of Government Relations, oversees APHA's advocacy on the HRSA budget, nutrition, health reform, maternal and child health, public health workforce, substance misuse and immigration and can be reached at 202-777-2513 or [jordan.wolfe@apha.org](mailto:jordan.wolfe@apha.org).

**Susan Polan**, Associate Executive Director of Public Affairs & Advocacy, can be reached at 202-777-2510 or [susan.polan@apha.org](mailto:susan.polan@apha.org).

We look forward to working with you on these and other important public health issues this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Georges C. Benjamin, MD  
Executive Director