

## PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES

# 112th Congress

**T**rust for America's Health (TFAH) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting the health of every community and making disease prevention a national priority. We believe:

- Americans deserve healthy and safe places to live, work, learn, and play.
- It is vital to make healthy choices easier choices in every neighborhood in the country.
- Every community should be prepared to meet the threats of infectious disease, bioterrorism, and natural disasters.
- Americans deserve to know what their government is doing to keep them healthy and safe.



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PREVENTING EPIDEMICS.  
PROTECTING PEOPLE.

## Prioritizing Prevention and Public Health



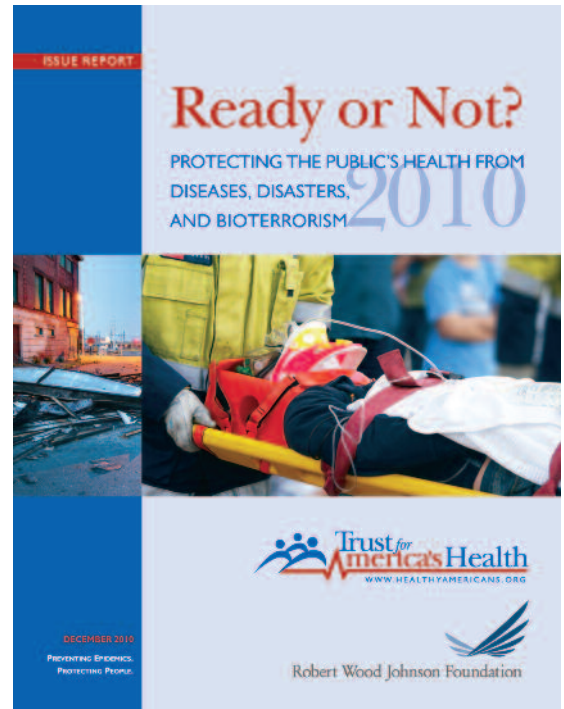
The Affordable Care Act (ACA) included the largest commitment to increasing support for prevention and public health in U.S. history. Instead of just treating people after they are sick, this investment will help the country prevent diseases in the first place and thereby move from a sick care system to a health care system. Effective implementation will require:

- Fully funding the Prevention and Public Health Fund, a mandatory funding stream for prevention;
- Strategically aligning resources to target related conditions and diseases as effectively and efficiently as possible;
- Awarding Community Transformation Grants to invest in proven programs to reduce disease rates;
- Dedicating resources to strengthen core public health capacity — including support for attracting the next generation of public health professionals through the *Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program*; the *Training for Mid-Career Public and Allied Health Professionals Program*; and the *Fellowship Training in Public Health*;
- Promoting insurance coverage to pay for preventive clinical services; and
- Increasing support for public health services and systems research to evaluate community prevention programs or strategies.

## Preparing for Public Health Emergencies

TFAH's eighth annual report, *Ready or Not? Protecting the Public's Health from Diseases, Disasters, and Bioterrorism 2010*, found that significant progress is at risk due to cuts in federal, state, and local public health emergency preparedness budgets. In 2011, Congress may consider reauthorization of the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act, which became law in December 2006, to address ongoing challenges that face public health emergency preparedness. Ensuring every community is prepared for public health emergencies requires:

- Funding key public health preparedness needs, including laboratory capacity, biosurveillance, epidemiology, and workforce training;
- Supporting research, development, and expedited safe approval processes for medical countermeasures, such as vaccines and medicines, through the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) and other federal programs;
- Ensuring communities can cope with and recover from emergencies by engaging a wide range of community members in emergency planning and providing support for health officials to develop standing relationships with communities so they will be trusted and understood when emergencies arise;
- Expanding the ability of medical and health care providers to care for a surge of patients during a mass emergency, including creating alternative care sites, building regional health care coalitions, recruiting additional health care personnel, and clarifying legal issues before a disaster hits; and
- Modernizing disease surveillance systems and information technology to ensure every health department has modern state-of-the-art capabilities that meet national standards.



## Planning for and Responding to Infectious Disease Outbreaks and Pandemics

Worldwide, infectious diseases are the leading killer of children and adolescents and are one of the leading causes of death for adults. These diseases present a major challenge for the public health system, the delivery of medical care, the economy, and national security.

Some priority areas for improving the nation's ability to respond to these threats include:

- Providing sufficient funding to fight ongoing infectious disease threats, such as viral hepatitis and HIV/AIDS;
- Increasing access to childhood and adult vaccinations by investing in vaccination programs, such as the Immunization Grant Program (Section 317), and implementing outreach and education campaigns about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines; and
- Supporting the creation of an Office of Antimicrobial Resistance within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to reduce unneeded antibiotic use in humans and animals and spark development of new antibiotics.



## Preventing Chronic Diseases

Preventing chronic disease is a critical part of improving America's health and reducing health care costs. Some key ways the federal government can help reduce disease rates include:

- Making healthy choices easier choices for more Americans through increased public education campaigns and strengthening the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act;
- Improving nutrition and promoting physical activity in schools by implementing the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, and increasing

the amount of time children spend participating in physical activity by strengthening the Elementary and Secondary Education Act;

- Investing in the research and evaluation of nutrition, physical activity, and disease prevention programs aimed at fighting the obesity epidemic; and
- Increasing preventive services and informing the public about the preventive services covered with no cost-sharing by private health insurance plans under ACA.

## Improving the Health of Low-Income and Minority Communities

Lower-income and minority communities systematically have less access to health care, higher exposure to health threats, and worse health outcomes. In addition, there is limited access to nutritious, affordable foods in low-income areas, as low-income zip codes tend to have fewer and smaller grocery stores, and individuals in these areas often pay more for fresh fruits and vegetables when such foods are actually available. We need to make healthy choices easy choices for all Americans. The federal government can help by:

- Engaging communities in efforts to address both ongoing and emergency health threats;

- Fully funding and expanding proven, effective programs, such as REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health); and
- Creating policies that address the ongoing gaps in services to low-income and underserved minority communities. Inadequate preventive care, such as disease screening and chronic disease management, nutritious foods and physical activity, and vaccine delivery, means problems are often left untreated until they become higher-cost emergency care or serious chronic care conditions.

## Strengthening the Public Health Workforce

Public health professionals are responsible for promoting policies to help ensure a healthier nation. We are experiencing shortages and looming retirements in our aging government public health workforce. We need to revitalize the workforce by:

- Conducting a public health workforce enumeration survey to understand gaps in the

current workforce, including trend lines, wages, benefits, training, and pathways to enter public health; and

- Providing incentives to strengthen partnerships between state and local public health departments and community colleges, vocational and technical education and job corps centers.

## Understanding the Connection between the Environment and Health

There is a direct connection between our environment and our health, but it can take years for the symptoms caused by exposure to environmental hazards to appear. Environmental hazards have been linked to birth defects and diseases, such as asthma and certain forms of cancer. As we consider climate change and transportation legislation and develop funding priorities, we must be mindful of the link between the environment and health outcomes. This requires:

- Expanding environmental public health tracking to all 50 states and the District of Columbia by fully funding the CDC's environmental public health tracking program;

- Preserving the EPA's authority to regulate harmful pollutants, including smog and greenhouse emissions;

- Developing a national strategic plan for addressing the impact of climate change on public health, and authorizing funding for climate change and health research, preparedness planning, and training of the public health workforce; and

- Supporting safer and healthier transportation by including programs like Safe Routes to School and Complete Streets in the reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Authorization Act.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT TRUST FOR AMERICA'S HEALTH AT  
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