



*Protect, Prevent, Live Well*

January 16, 2009

United States Congress  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association (APHA), I urge you to make efforts to improve and protect the public's health a top priority during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress. APHA is the nation's oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals in the world, dedicated to protecting all Americans, their families and their communities from preventable, serious health threats and assuring community-based health promotion and disease prevention activities and preventive health services are universally accessible in the United States. APHA urges you to support and strengthen the public health system so that it is able to respond to everyday health threats in addition to unexpected public health emergencies, and ensure that all individuals—regardless of their location, income, health status or race and/or ethnicity—have access to the health care, community-based health and preventative services they need. We also strongly encourage you to take into consideration the potential health effects of any major policy decision considered by Congress, including decisions on transportation, climate change, energy, agriculture and housing. In particular, we urge you to:

**Strengthen the nation's health system.** With health system reform a top priority for Congress and the incoming administration, we urge you to think broadly when addressing the many health challenges facing our nation. While expanding health care access is a top priority for APHA, including the reauthorization of the SCHIP program, providing health insurance to all Americans will not guarantee a healthier nation. We must invest in strengthening the nation's public health system including community-based programs and interventions, expanding our primary care and public health workforce and working to eliminate racial and ethnic, socioeconomic and geographical disparities in health care and health status. In order to ensure a healthier America, we must invest in a long-term and comprehensive approach to prevention both in the clinical setting and at the community level. By recommitting ourselves to support our nation's public health system, we can build on the successes of the past and establish the solid foundation needed for a healthy nation.

**Increase funding for vital public health agencies and programs.** We urge you to provide dramatic increases in funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and other public health service agencies. These increases need to be started immediately and sustained over time. Past budget cuts,

coupled with new challenges and responsibilities, have caused these critically important agencies to do more with less and to struggle to provide basic public health services, like state-based chronic disease prevention programs, as well as to effectively respond to public health emergencies and natural or man-made disasters. We urge you to provide our public health agencies with the necessary resources to restore their effectiveness and adequately protect the health of the American public.

**Address the public health implications of transportation policy.** Our communities would benefit from a transportation system that enables all residents to access affordable and secure housing, nutritious food, clean air and water, mass transportation, safe sidewalks, streets, and playgrounds, health services and opportunities for social networking. The federal transportation law, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), a nearly \$300 billion federal investment in our nation's transportation infrastructure, is due to be reauthorized in 2009. Its reauthorization presents an opportunity to promote health as a critical consideration in transportation policies, enforce and expand on existing provisions that promote health, equity and safety, and reform the U.S. transportation system to meet today's demands. We look forward to working with you, the Obama administration and the rest of the health community to ensure that the transportation bill supports the public's health.

**Give FDA the authority to regulate tobacco products.** For decades, the tobacco companies have marketed their deadly products to our children, deceived consumers about the harm their products cause and failed to take any meaningful action to make their products less harmful or less addictive. Legislation introduced in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, which overwhelmingly passed the House of Representatives, would finally end the special protections enjoyed by the tobacco industry and instead, protect our children and the nation's health. This legislation would give the U.S. Food and Drug Administration the authority to effectively regulate the manufacturing, marketing, labeling, distribution, and sale of tobacco products. We strongly urge Congress to make passage of this critical public health legislation a top priority this year.

**Address the public health impacts of climate change.** Climate change is a public health issue. From changes in vector borne diseases to impacts on the drinking water supply to extreme weather events, we are already seeing the effects of climate change on the health of people across the globe. We urge you to ensure that strong provisions to address the public health consequences of climate change are included in any climate change legislation considered next year. We also request your support for new funding for CDC and the National Institutes of Health to help state and local health agencies and the public prepare for and adapt to the health consequences of global climate change.

We also invite you to participate in APHA's public education and outreach campaigns. This year's **National Public Health Week**, "Building a Foundation for a Healthy America," runs from April 6-12, 2009. You can visit the National Public Health Week campaign website at: <http://www.nphw.org>. The "Get Ready" campaign provides information, resources and tools 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. Materials are available at [www.getreadyforflu.org](http://www.getreadyforflu.org)

Please know that APHA staff stands ready to assist you in any way possible to achieve these and other important legislative goals. Feel free to contact my staff:

**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).

**Don Hoppert**, Director of Government Relations, handles advocacy for the CDC budget, health reform, FDA regulation of tobacco, climate change and transportation reauthorization legislation, can be reached at 202-777-2514 or [donald.hoppert@apha.org](mailto:donald.hoppert@apha.org).

**Nicky Bassford**, Government Relations Manager, handles HRSA budget advocacy, health reform and health disparities, can be reached at 202-777-2513 or [nicky.bassford@apha.org](mailto:nicky.bassford@apha.org).

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

Sincerely,

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

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, FACEP (Emeritus)  
Executive Director