



# American Public Health Association

*Working for a Healthier World*

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February 8, 2007

United States Congress  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, I urge you to make efforts to improve and protect the public's health a top priority during the first session of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. The American Public Health Association is the nation's oldest, largest 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 Congress to support and strengthen the public health system so it is able to respond to everyday health threats in addition to the unexpected public health emergencies, and ensure that all individuals—regardless of their income, health status or race and/or ethnicity—have access to the health care and preventative services they need. In particular, we urge you to:

- **Increase funding for vital public health agencies and programs.** We urge you to provide adequate and sustainable funding for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and other public health service agencies. Past budget cuts have caused these critically important agencies to do more with less, and not have sufficient resources to provide basic public health services, like state-based chronic disease prevention programs, let alone to adequately respond to public health emergencies and natural or man-made disasters. While we applaud efforts to provide additional funding to prepare the country for emergencies, including a possible influenza pandemic, we urge you to resist any attempts to offset funding for these programs at the expense of other important public health programs.
- **Reauthorize and fully fund the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).** During the past decade, SCHIP, together with Medicaid, has been successful in reducing the percentage of low-income children who are uninsured and improving their health status and outcomes. APHA urges Congress to make children's health coverage a priority and provide sufficient funding to not only maintain the coverage of kids already enrolled in the program, but to make real strides in covering children eligible for but not enrolled in SCHIP and Medicaid—75 percent of the nation's uninsured children. During SCHIP reauthorization, priority issues include mandating a defined, Medicaid-like benefits package that includes EPSDT and improving outreach for and streamlining enrollment in the program. Funding for SCHIP reauthorization should not be at the expense of the Medicaid program, which complements SCHIP and covers 28 million children.
- **Close the health care disparities gap.** Despite dramatic achievements in health and healthcare over the past century, there exist evident racial/ethnic and rural/urban health disparities in health outcome exacerbated by lack of insurance coverage, and access to and quality of health care. We encourage Congress to support a comprehensive approach to address the underlying causes of disparities in health status and healthcare access.

- **Strengthen nutrition policies in the Farm Bill.** We urge you to modernize federal policies, including the Food Stamps Program, under the Farm Bill, to allow states and localities more flexibility to provide access to fresh, healthy food and safe, enjoyable physical activity to food stamp recipients. We also encourage you to create and expand food systems programs to help communities develop retail food markets and urban agriculture projects in underserved neighborhoods. In addition, Congress should strengthen school child nutrition programs by increasing the availability of fruits and vegetables in schools, implementing wellness policies and expanding nutrition education.

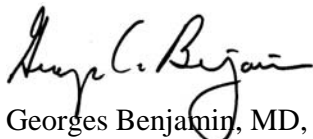
We also invite you to participate APHA's public education and outreach campaigns. This year's National Public Health Week, "Preparedness and Public Health Threats: Addressing the Unique Needs of the Nation's Vulnerable Populations" runs from April 2-8. You will receive materials that you can tailor to fit the needs of your district and state, including fact sheets, press releases, sample speeches that can be used for the Congressional Record or during a town-hall meeting in your state or district. You can visit the National Public Health Week campaign website at: <http://www.nphw.org>. In addition, APHA has launched the "Get Ready" campaign to provide information, resources and tools so that all individuals, families and communities in the United States, are more prepared for a potential influenza pandemic, outbreak of an emerging infectious disease or other hazard or disaster than they are today. The Get Ready campaign will serve as a venue for people who are looking for real advice on how to prepare for flu. Materials are available at [www.getreadyforflu.org](http://www.getreadyforflu.org)

Please know that APHA staff stand 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 and the Farm Bill, can be reached at 202-777-2514 or [donald.hoppert@apha.org](mailto:donald.hoppert@apha.org).
- Courtney Perlino, Health Policy Analyst, handles Medicaid and SCHIP, can be reached at 202-777-2436 or [courtney.perlino@apha.org](mailto:courtney.perlino@apha.org).
- Kate Sweeney, Government Relations Manager, handles HRSA budget advocacy and health disparities, can be reached at 202-777-2513 or [kate.sweeney@apha.org](mailto:kate.sweeney@apha.org).

Enclosed are background materials on National Public Health Week as well as information on select 2007 priority issues. In the coming weeks, we will forward additional information on our other legislative priorities. We look forward to working with you on these and other important issues this year.

Sincerely yours,



Georges Benjamin, MD, FACP  
Executive Director