

APHA 2022 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES FOR THE 117TH CONGRESS AND THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION



The mission of the American Public Health Association is to improve the health of the public and achieve equity in health status. To realize this mission, APHA will work with members of the 117th Congress and the Biden administration to promote and adopt policies that protect and strengthen public health systems for all communities and populations.

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 and local health departments as well as the health professionals who work to keep our nation healthy and address the health inequities that exist in the U.S. We strongly urge Congress and the administration to increase investments in these important health agencies and programs by working in a bipartisan manner to finish the FY 2022 appropriations process. Congress must avoid using lengthy continuing resolutions that bring uncertainty and make it more difficult for the agency and its grantees to protect the public's health. APHA will also be advocating for increased funding for CDC and HRSA when Congress moves forward with the FY 2023 appropriations process. Congress should also ensure that any additional needed funding is made available to assist the nation's public health and health care infrastructure in their efforts to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

We also urge support for two important proposals to strengthen the nation's public health infrastructure and workforce. First, we strongly support the creation of a \$4.5 billion mandatory fund for core public health infrastructure activities at the CDC and state, local, tribal and territorial public health departments. The [Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act](#) would establish this funding to support essential activities such as: disease surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory capacity, all-hazards preparedness and response; policy development and support; communications; community partnership development; and organizational competencies. A reliable, long-term funding stream for these activities is essential for anticipating and responding to future public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. We also support the creation of a [loan repayment program for public health professionals](#) who agree to serve two years in a local, state or tribal health department. The public health workforce is the backbone of our nation's governmental public health system at the county, city, state and tribal levels. These skilled professionals deliver critical public health programs and services and are on the front lines of combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

UPHOLD THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT AND EXPAND ACCESS TO HEALTH COVERAGE AND SERVICES. Millions of Americans are reaping the benefits of the ACA through expanded coverage, coverage of preventive care, a prohibition on discriminating against people with pre-existing conditions, an extension of dependent coverage for adult children up to age 26 and progress in closing the Medicare prescription drug coverage gap. APHA strongly supported the America Rescue Plan Act which made health coverage more affordable by expanding access to health insurance premium tax credits to millions of individuals. APHA urges the Senate to take up and pass the Build Back Better Act that would further extend these benefits through 2025, provide additional cost-sharing benefits to qualified individuals and would also temporarily close the Medicaid coverage gap for individuals living in states that are not participating in the ACA's Medicaid expansion. We also support the creation of a public option health insurance plan, operated by the federal government, that would provide consumers with choice, giving them a competitive and more affordable alternative to private insurance coverage. 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, is also an important component to improving the nation's health and well-being. Through CDC, the fund is providing critical resources to help states keep communities healthy and safe. We continue to [oppose any effort to repeal or weaken the ACA or the prevention fund](#), including efforts to redirect funds away from their intended use. APHA is committed to working with Congress and the Biden administration to further expand health insurance to the millions of individuals who still lack coverage and access to critical health services.

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 slow climate change and prepare the public health system to protect our communities from the negative health impacts associated with climate change. 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. The Build Back Better Act, passed by the House of Representatives, includes \$555 billion in investments to expand clean energy tax credits, address climate change and address environmental justice, and we strongly urge Congress to work to finalize this critical legislation and send it to the president without further delay. We also 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](#). This legislation would require the Department of Health and Human Services to develop a national strategic plan to address the health impacts of climate change and would enhance forecasting and modeling, track environmental and disease data and expand the science base to better understand the relationship between climate change and health outcomes. We strongly support both Congressional and agency action to address climate change by cleaning up major sources of pollution in the power, transportation and other sectors.

ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY. To achieve health equity and create the [healthiest nation in one generation](#), we must address racism as a driving force of the 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. Two pieces of legislation, the Health Equity and Accountability Act and the [Improving Social Determinants of Health Act of 2020](#), would seek to eliminate health disparities while correcting the conditions that cause and perpetuate them. There is also a growing focus on addressing the racial disparities in maternal health outcomes, with legislation in Congress to strengthen the perinatal workforce, ensure continuity of insurance coverage during and after pregnancy and to improve data collection. The Build Back Better Act contains all of the maternal health provisions included in the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act, including a mandatory, permanent extension of postpartum Medicaid coverage, from 60 days to 12 months after delivery, and we urge Congress to enact these important policies. We must also continue to work to address the issue of [police violence](#) and the harm it has done to Black communities and other communities of color. Voting access is also a key racial equity issue, as multiple states have histories of voting suppression against communities of color, and voting protections continue to be eroded by recent Supreme Court decisions. The [John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021](#) would restore essential voting protections to prevent voting suppression and discrimination, and we urge the Senate to pass this important legislation. All of these efforts are particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, as communities of color bear a disproportionate burden of COVID-19 morbidity and mortality.

UPHOLD AND STRENGTHEN CRITICAL PUBLIC HEALTH LAWS AND REGULATIONS AND REVERSE DAMAGING ROLL BACKS. 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, which would limit carbon and other dangerous air pollution from power plants, and the Mercury and Air Toxics Standard, which has successfully limited mercury and other toxic pollution from power plants. We urge the Biden administration to replace the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s [Affordable Clean Energy rule](#), the much weaker replacement to the Clean Power Plan that was vacated by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, with a strong rule to reduce carbon emissions from power plants. We strongly encourage the administration to quickly finalize a new MATS rule [reaffirming the appropriate and necessary finding for these important public health standards](#). We also urge the agency to further strengthen the rule as it reviews the latest scientific evidence to protect the health of all of our communities, particularly our children.

ADDRESS THE NATION'S GUN VIOLENCE EPIDEMIC. In 2020, more than 45,000 people died as a result of gun violence. We are extremely pleased that in FY 2021, Congress provided \$25 million to CDC and the National Institutes of Health for vital gun violence prevention research and we urge Congress to include [\\$50 million for this research in FY 2022](#). A sound public health approach to address this epidemic begins with understanding the science behind the problem. Research is an essential function to achieve this understanding to make data-backed policy and programmatic decisions, and we must continue to provide [and increase the level of these critical resources](#). We also call on the Senate to take up House-passed legislation to require [universal background checks](#) for all firearm purchases in the U.S. and for Congress 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.

For more information on APHA's advocacy priorities, visit: <https://www.apha.org/advocacy> or contact Don Hoppert at Donald.Hoppert@apha.org or Jordan Wolfe at Jordan.Wolfe@apha.org.