February 10, 2017

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 first session of the 115th Congress.

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 threats and emergencies, such as the Zika virus in the United States and U.S. territories, the recent Ebola outbreak in West Africa and natural disasters such as last year’s Louisiana floods. We must ensure that all individuals—regardless of their location, income, health status or race and/or ethnicity—have access to the health care and community-based health and preventive services they need to stay healthy. We strongly encourage you to take into consideration the potential health effects of any major legislative decision considered by Congress, including decisions on funding for our nation’s public health agencies and programs, transportation, environmental protection, agriculture and housing. In particular, we urge you to:

**Uphold the Affordable Care Act.** With the implementation of the most comprehensive health reform law in decades now well underway, we cannot afford to turn back the clock on this important achievement in public health and medical care. We are extremely disappointed that Congress recently passed an FY 2017 budget resolution that contained instructions to use the budget reconciliation process to repeal the Affordable Care Act and urge you to oppose any efforts to repeal this historic public health law. 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, an extension of dependent coverage for adult children up to age 26 and progress in closing the Medicare prescription drug coverage gap. We also strongly support the Prevention and Public Health Fund, a first of its kind mandatory fund for public health and prevention activities created by the ACA. Notably, the Prevention and Public Health Fund makes up about 12 percent of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s budget. Through CDC, the fund is providing critical resources to help states keep communities healthy and safe, such as the 317 immunization program, epidemiology and laboratory capacity grants, the entire Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant program, cancer screenings, chronic disease prevention, lead poisoning prevention and other important prevention programs. We urge you to oppose any effort to cut, divert or repeal any of this funding.

**Increase and protect funding for vital public health agencies and programs.** With the passage of the FY 2017 continuing resolution, Congress once again punted final year spending decisions into the next Congress. We are pleased that the bill allocated the full amount provided
through the Prevention and Public Health Fund which provides funding to support local, state and federal programs that fight obesity, curb tobacco use, improve access to preventive care services and respond to public health threats and outbreaks. We strongly urge Congress to quickly finalize the FY 2017 appropriations process by maintaining critical funding at our nation’s public health agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Health Resources and Services Administration and other public health agencies and programs.

We are hopeful Congress will return to regular order during this year’s appropriations process and provide increased funding for CDC, HRSA and other public health agencies and programs. We also urge Congress to develop a long-term agreement that entirely replaces the cuts under sequestration and the Budget Control Act. We stand ready to work with you to develop a proposal that best protects the health of the people of our nation. Past budget cuts, coupled with new challenges and responsibilities, have caused these critically important agencies to struggle to provide basic public health services and effectively respond to public health emergencies.

We also urge you to oppose any efforts that would block funding for qualified health care providers that provide important family planning and related preventive health services. Millions of women, men and young people access critical health services every year including cervical cancer screenings, breast exams, contraceptive services and tests and treatment for sexually transmitted infections from public health departments and community health, family planning and other private nonprofit agencies, including Planned Parenthood health centers. These services contribute to our nation’s efforts to improve access to health care and have been critical in preventing unintended pregnancies, decreasing infant mortality and improving women’s health.

**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 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. The existing conditions that cause worse health among these populations – unhealthy air, water and living conditions, heat, drought, flooding and mental health stresses – are exacerbated by the adverse effects of climate change. We urge Congress to ensure our state and local health departments have the resources and tools they need to address these challenges. We also urge you to oppose any efforts to block or weaken the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s efforts to reduce greenhouse gases that are contributing to climate change, including the Clean Power Plan.

**Uphold the Clean Air Act.** The Clean Air Act is a critically important and successful public health law. APHA strongly supports current efforts to reduce carbon pollution, a major contributor to climate change, and other dangerous pollutants released from power plants. EPA estimates that by 2030, the Clean Power Plan will prevent up to 3,600 premature deaths as well as thousands of heart attacks, asthma attacks and other air pollution-related illness. We also support the strongest possible measures to reduce ozone pollution. EPA recently lowered the ozone standard to 70 parts per billion, and we urge you to oppose any efforts to roll back this important standard that will improve public health across the country by reducing premature
deaths and asthma attacks in children. We urge you to oppose any efforts to prevent EPA from issuing and updating air quality standards under the Clean Air Act to protect the public health.

**Maintain the integrity of the federal regulatory process to protect public health.** We are deeply concerned with efforts to roll-back important public health regulations and to weaken the process by which federal rules that impact public health are developed. Several bills have already passed the House of Representatives this year that would weaken the current regulatory process including legislation that would give Congress final approval authority over all major rules. The House also passed legislation that would allow Congress to use the Congressional Review Act to disapprove multiple rules finalized near the end of a presidential term at once, even rules that have been through years of public input and scientific review and are critical to improving public health. Federal rules play an important role in protecting the public from serious health threats, including lead poisoning, deadly air pollution, toxic chemicals, food contamination and workplace injuries. Congress should be working to pass legislation that will improve public health protections, not derailing protective federal rules.

We also invite you to participate in APHA’s public education and outreach campaigns. This year’s National Public Health Week, “Healthiest Nation 2030,” runs from April 3-9. You can visit the National Public Health Week campaign website at: [www.nphw.org](http://www.nphw.org). Additionally, APHA’s 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.aphagetready.org](http://www.aphagetready.org).

Please know that APHA staff stands ready to assist you in any way possible to achieve these and other important 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.

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**Nicole Burda,** Deputy Director of Government Relations, handles advocacy for the HRSA budget, child nutrition, health reform, workforce and infrastructure, global health, disabilities and immigration, can be reached at 202-777-2513 or nicole.burda@apha.org.

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

Sincerely,

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director