



July 16, 2009

Dear Representative:

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) join in urging your strong support for the Prevention and Wellness Trust proposed in H.R. 3200, the America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009. The Trust would provide a long-needed stable, reliable source of funding for strengthening the nation's state and local health departments in an accountable fashion through a new program of grants for core public health infrastructure and activities.

The infrastructure of state and local health departments is the neglected backbone of public health protection upon which every American relies. It provides population-wide prevention and health protection with respect to both infectious and chronic disease that is beyond the capacity of the medical care or health insurance systems. Evidence-based public health actions benefit all health care consumers, providers and payors by reducing the human and economic toll of preventable diseases.

The public expects the governmental public health system to protect it from a large and growing host of urgent health threats, from illnesses caused by contaminated food to epidemics of existing and new infectious diseases, such as the novel H1N1 influenza virus. However, state and local health departments are experiencing a severe erosion of resources and capacities at the same time that the demands on them are increasing. By early 2009, 11,000 state and local health department jobs had been lost and that number is increasing rapidly.

State and local health departments also face severe and well-documented shortages of skilled public health professionals. The workforce development provisions of H.R. 3200 include new approaches to increasing and enhancing this workforce, building on models of current successful health care workforce development programs. We vigorously support these provisions, which are a necessary component of public health infrastructure improvement.

NACCHO and ASTHO collectively represent every state, regional and local health department in the United States and its territories. We wish to impress on you our grave sense of urgency to sustain and improve the governmental public health system, without which all of America is vulnerable to health threats that only governmental public health authorities can address. A strong, well-funded governmental public health system focused on keeping America healthy is an essential cornerstone of the high-performing health system that the public expects.

Sincerely,

Paul E. Jarris, MD, MBA  
Executive Director  
ASTHO

Robert Pestronk, MPH  
Executive Director  
NACCHO