

December 30, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid:

The undersigned organizations thank you for your tireless efforts on health reform and respectfully urge that the core public health infrastructure language included in the House passed Affordable Health Care for America Act (H.R. 3962) be included in any final version of health reform legislation. With your leadership, Congress can help to reverse the erosion of local public health protections and achieve the promise of health reform to help Americans be healthier.

The 2,800 local health departments across the nation work every day to prevent disease, promote wellness, and protect health. In the first half of 2009, approximately 8,000 local health department personnel had their jobs eliminated and an additional 12,000 staff had their hours cut or faced mandatory furloughs. This year's severe job losses and resulting program cuts follow a loss of 7,000 local health department jobs in 2008. These cumulative reductions are diminishing local health departments' capacities to keep people healthy, respond to public health emergencies, and address the escalating burden of chronic diseases. These significant funding, staffing, and program cuts underscore the growing need for sustained support for local health department infrastructure. The Core Public Health Infrastructure for State, Local, and Tribal Health Departments section of the House passed health reform bill (Section 3161 of H.R. 3962) would help to address this critical lack of funding with the establishment of a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention grant program for state, local, and tribal health departments.

A stable, reliable funding stream for local health department prevention efforts, coupled with the prevention trust fund and workforce provisions included in both the House passed and Senate merged bill, will help to sustain the work of local and state health departments and population-based prevention activities that are beyond the reach of the medical care system. Together these provisions represent an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen the public health system through local health departments across the country.

Thank you in advance for ensuring that national health reform expands access to affordable care, makes sufficient investments in population-based prevention activities, and bolsters the nation's local health departments. As always, if we can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Donna Brown, NACCHO Government Affairs Counsel (202-507-4197; dbrown@naccho.org).

Sincerely,

Southern Nevada Health District
Washoe County, Nevada Health District
National Association of County and City Health Officials