

NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

July 2, 2009

The Honorable Henry Waxman, Chairman
Committee on Energy & Commerce
2125 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy & Commerce
2322A Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Rangel, Chairman
Ways and Means Committee
1102 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dave Camp, Ranking Member
Ways and Means Committee
1139E Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller, Chairman
Education and Labor Committee
2181 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard McKeon, Ranking Member
Education and Labor Committee
2101 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

On behalf of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), I am pleased to offer our strong support and deep gratitude for the robust emphasis on public health, prevention and wellness in the Congressional Tri-Committee health reform bill draft. The provisions of Division C, "Improving the Health of the American People," embody a recognition that health reform addressing only access to health insurance, as important as that is, will be incomplete if it does not also address improvement of health status in the United States, prevention of disease and disability, and the health professionals and systems necessary to achieve health improvement.

NACCHO represents the nation's more than 2800 local health departments, government agencies that work every day in their communities to prevent disease, promote wellness, and protect health. NACCHO is committed to building a 21st century health system for the United States that results in optimal health for all. Such a system will be based upon promoting good health, rather than mitigating sickness, and will address the known determinants of health. In order to do so, it will connect and integrate the resources and knowledge of public health, health care delivery and research, and all private and public sector entities that influence health outcomes. It will assure that every community is served by a robust governmental public health system.

Taken together, the provisions of Division C that address prevention and public health establish a comprehensive, scientific, and accountable approach to nationwide health improvement. In



particular, the Prevention and Wellness Trust is a long-needed innovative mechanism for financing evidence-based public health and prevention. It will provide a stable funding stream for the nation's state and local health departments, part of the core public health infrastructure, the long-neglected backbone of public health protection upon which every American relies and which benefits all health care consumers, providers and payors.

The Trust will also finance the community-based prevention and wellness services that are critical to improving the health of communities but that are not, and cannot be, covered by health insurers. NACCHO endorses the emphases on reduction of health disparities and on coordination between community partnerships and public health departments, because each has distinctive strengths and abilities necessary to achieving measurable results.

NACCHO's leaders look forward to contributing the unique perspective of experienced local public health practitioners to the development of a National Prevention and Wellness Strategy and appreciate the explicit requirement for the Secretary to consult with NACCHO in this work.

The proposal also recognizes the importance of advancing the evidence base for prevention. Enhanced support for the Community and Clinical Preventive Services Task Forces is essential to guide both public health research and practice, as is the proposed additional research in prevention and wellness.

NACCHO strongly and urgently supports Subtitle C of Title II, Division C concerning the public health workforce. It proposes a comprehensive approach to addressing the public health workforce shortages that, if current trends continue, threaten the nation's capacities to protect health. Establishment of a Public Health Workforce Corps, scholarships and loan repayment programs for public health professionals, and grants to state and local health departments to enable mid-career training of public health professionals are all critical to managing this problem.

NACCHO is fully committed to your goals of providing quality, affordable health coverage for all Americans and improving the quality of health care and the health system, the other principal topics addressed by the this proposed legislation. We look forward to working with you to ensure that measures taken to achieve these goals are accompanied by the strongest possible emphasis on public health, prevention and wellness.

Thank you for recognizing that improving health requires more than providing health care, and for assuring that health reform legislation includes the best and most advanced approaches to improving the health of America.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Pestronk, MPH
Executive Director