

October 1, 2024

Chair Vern Buchanan
Ways & Means Health Subcommittee
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Vice Chair Lloyd Doggett
Ways & Means Health Subcommittee
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Chair Buchanan & Vice Chair Doggett,

Thank you for holding the recent hearing entitled, “Investing in a Healthier America: Chronic Disease Prevention and Treatment.” On behalf of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the over 3,300 local health departments across the country, I write to highlight the importance of local public health in chronic disease prevention and treatment. It is critical that federal policy continues to support the work of local public health and their community-level partners. According to NACCHO’s Profile, a census study, over half of local health departments provide population-based chronic disease primary prevention services and nearly 3 out of 4 local health departments provide population-based nutrition services.¹

Local health departments play a critical role in identifying local-level strategies to advance local policy, systems, and environmental changes to reduce the risk factors for chronic disease, as well as reduce health disparities through community and health system interventions. For example, Ross County, Ohio is working to address several health disparities, including heart disease, as a significant portion of their population is in poverty. In fact, the Appalachian Regional Commission noted that the region’s heart disease mortality rate of 204 per 100,000 is 17% higher than the national rate of 175 per 100,000. In response, Ross County Health District partnered with the Chillicothe Farmers Market, Hopewell Health Centers, and Ross County’s Ohio State University Extension Office’s SNAP-Ed Program to implement a heart healthy pilot initiative that incorporated the evidence-based strategies of team-based care, utilizing community health workers, nutrition education, and self-measured BP monitoring. This program is one of the many examples of ways that local health departments use data to identify the specific challenges facing their residents, convene key partners, and develop solutions to address chronic disease challenges in their communities.²

While much conversation around chronic disease focuses on treatment of a patient who is already sick, funding prevention efforts not only saves lives and reduces pain, but it also saves money. Tobacco use has long been the leading preventable cause of death in the United States. Tobacco is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths and approximately \$241 billion in health care costs in the United States each year. Tobacco use causes nearly one in three heart disease deaths, nearly one in three cancer deaths, and nearly eight in 10 chronic obstructive pulmonary disease deaths. Tobacco use almost always begins during adolescence, and most adult smokers want to quit, but overcoming an addiction to nicotine is difficult and often requires multiple quit attempts. To address

¹ [NACCHO 2022 Profile Report.pdf](#)

² [Ross-County-Health-District-Chillicothe-OH-Compendium.pdf \(naccho.org\)](#)

this, 70% of local health departments across the country provide tobacco prevention services, in both urban and rural areas. Efforts like this save lives and money — at the federal level, the Public Health and Prevention Fund’s Tips from Former Smokers Campaign alone saved an estimated \$7.3 billion in smoking-related healthcare costs from 2012 to 2018 and helped more than one million Americans quit smoking for good.³

Congress can support this work by investing in federal public health programs that address chronic disease, their causes, and their contributors and ensuring that sufficient funds reach the local health department level. Strong annual appropriations for chronic disease programs through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are particularly important as they address these issues at the population level. Another important way to support federal chronic disease efforts is to protect the Prevention and Public Health Fund, a mandatory funding stream meant to support prevention and public health activities. When originally crafted, it was an acknowledgement that clinical care is necessary but is not sufficient for the larger goal of getting and keeping Americans healthy. Most chronic diseases are preventable if we prioritize prevention and public health. The Prevention Fund provides financial support critical to addressing pressing health challenges with programs and services most appropriate for community needs. Over the years, the fund has been reduced to pay for other, unrelated programs. NACCHO strongly supports protecting the fund and restoring cuts made previously.

Beyond important disease-specific funds, annual appropriations for public health infrastructure and data modernization are other key investments, as these funds aim to strengthen the overall capabilities, data availability, and workforce of health departments. Together, strong investments in disease-specific and infrastructure funds can ensure public health departments have the core capabilities they need to best support and maintain chronic disease-related activities in their communities.

Finally, it is important that any federal authorizing legislation designed to prevent or address chronic disease include local health departments as both eligible clinical providers as well as supporting their work on upstream population health interventions, in order to expand access to these services in communities across the country. NACCHO stands ready to help support you in these efforts.

NACCHO appreciates the opportunity to submit comments for the hearing record and looks forward to working with Congress to strengthen public health prevention efforts. If you have any questions about these comments, please contact Adriane Casalotti, Chief of Government and Public Affairs, at acasalotti@naccho.org.

Sincerely,



Lori Tremmel Freeman, MBA
Chief Executive Officer

³ [Tips Impact and Results](#) | [About the Campaign](#) | [Tips From Former Smokers](#) | [CDC](#)