

COALITION *for* HEALTH FUNDING

Emily J. Holubowich, MPP, Executive Director

November 3, 2014

Dear Member of Congress,

The Coalition for Health Funding—on behalf of its 96 member organizations representing the full breadth of constituent support for discretionary health programs—urges you to **enact final, omnibus spending legislation for fiscal year 2015 before the end of the calendar year**. Such legislation should provide core funding to rebuild the diminished capacity of the nation’s public health infrastructure after years of budget cuts, as well as emergency, supplemental funding to support the nation’s response to Ebola. Now more than ever, the public health and health research enterprise needs the certainty and stability provided by an omnibus to respond to pressing challenges that threaten Americans’ physical and mental health.

When public health works, it is often invisible to the average person. Ebola has demonstrated the government’s important role in building a strong public health and health research infrastructure. In the United States, our public health and health care systems have almost entirely stopped the spread of the disease on U.S. soil. In West Africa, where finding a hospital bed is a challenge, the disease continues to spread after already claiming 4,500 lives. The difference between the “haves” and “have nots” is stark, and the value of a strong public health infrastructure is evident.

Nonetheless, America’s domestic response to Ebola thus far has shown that our public health system is not as strong as it has been in the past, and not as strong it needs to be. As demonstrated in our recent report, [*Faces of Austerity: How Budget Cuts Hurt America’s Health*](#), deep cuts to the federal budget—compounded by state and local budget cuts—have weakened our public health readiness. For example, at the Southwest Utah Department of Health, federal cuts to emergency preparedness have reduced the public health workforce by more than half. Today, only 52 staff remain responsible for protecting the health of the region’s 200,000 residents. Unfortunately, Southwest Utah is not alone. Since 2008, more than 50,000 state and local public health employees have been laid off and many more continue to experience furloughs, leaving communities around the nation vulnerable to emerging health threats.

Given the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the imminent need to invest in our own public health infrastructure, the Coalition for Health Funding urges you to act swiftly in the remaining days of the 113th Congress to address the discretionary funding needs of the Department of Health and Human Services, its principle agencies—AHRQ, CDC, FDA, HRSA, Indian Health Service, NIH, SAMHSA—operating divisions, and offices and programs that support and protect America’s health. Specifically, we call on Congress to:

1. **Pass omnibus legislation to complete appropriations for fiscal year 2015** – No country runs effectively on autopilot. The annual budget and appropriations process is vital to the American government’s ability to respond to the ever changing challenges that Americans face. During the lame duck session, Congress must pass omnibus legislation to make the funding adjustments that reflect changing priorities.

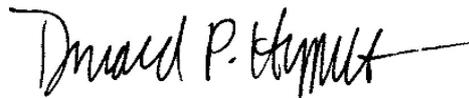
<http://www.publichealthfunding.org>

2. **Reinvest in America's public health infrastructure** – For years, disinvestment in the public health infrastructure has left Americans vulnerable to public health threats. Congress must act now to ensure that the public health continuum—from bench, to bedside, to curbside—has the resources it needs to protect Americans from infectious diseases, as well as other public health threats such as chronic disease, disability, mental illness, and substance abuse—America's leading causes of death.

3. **Provide emergency funding to combat Ebola in West Africa** – The Ebola outbreak in West Africa is a public health emergency that could not have been foreseen. To best protect Americans, we must stop the disease at its source. To ensure that the Public Health Service agencies are able to respond appropriately to Ebola and maintain their ongoing work to combat other health threats, Congress must provide emergency, supplemental funding to support the immediate Ebola response.

Public health is an essential pillar of national security and one that the government alone is equipped to provide. Congress must act now to provide the public health continuum with the resources needed to combat all health threats, both here and abroad.

Sincerely,



Donald Hoppert, President



Emily J. Holubowich, Executive Director