

COALITION *for* HEALTH FUNDING

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Rearranging the Life Boats on the Titanic Is Not Enough

Emergency Funds Needed to Combat Zika

August 12, 2016 - Yesterday, Secretary of Health and Human Services Sylvia Matthews Burwell made the difficult but necessary decision under her authority to redirect another \$81 million of already scarce resources to sustain the government's response to the Zika virus. The funding will support the National Institutes of Health) and Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority in the development of a Zika vaccine. The Coalition for Health Funding applauds the Secretary for using every tool available to fight this public health emergency. However, shifting limited resources to combat the spread of Zika only weakens the underlying public health infrastructure that prevents and treats all diseases. Congress must put politics aside and appropriate new, emergency supplemental funding to protect the nation from Zika, consistent with the President's February request.

Already, public health programs at the federal, state, and local levels have seen dramatic cuts under the austere spending caps of the Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA) and sequestration. Transferring funds away from existing public health and health research capacity may provide a much-needed bridge for Zika vaccine development, but it will not improve the health of the nation overall nor is it sufficient for confronting this public health crisis.

Recognizing that emergencies are predictable in their unpredictability, the bipartisan, BCA allows for supplemental funding above the spending caps so the federal government may respond to unanticipated events which require new appropriations "for the prevention or mitigation of, or response to, loss of life or property, or a threat to national security." As the World Health Organization has declared, Zika clearly meets the BCA definition of an emergency and it should be funded as such—without offsets and without politically motivated riders. Emily Holubowich, Executive Director of the Coalition for Health Funding said:

"Patching Zika funding with existing public health resources is like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Congress must treat Zika and other public health crises as exactly what they are – emergencies that require emergency funding and lawmakers' immediate attention."

The Coalition for Health Funding urges Congress to pass clean, adequate, emergency supplemental legislation as soon as possible to give public health professionals, health care providers, and scientists the resources they need to protect American families from this dangerous disease.

The Coalition for Health Funding is the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit alliance working to preserve federal investments in public health and health research. The Coalition's member health organizations together represent the interests of more than 100 million patients, health care providers, public health professionals, and scientists.

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<http://www.publichealthfunding.org>