

COALITION *for* HEALTH FUNDING

**Statement of
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for
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations
Subcommittee for Fiscal Year 2022
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The Coalition for Health Funding—an alliance of 81 national health organizations representing more than 100 million patients and consumers, health providers, professionals and researchers—appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony for the record about the importance of health funding. Together, our members speak with one voice in support of federally funded health programs with a shared goal of improved health and well-being for all. **While each member organization has its own funding priorities within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), our coalition is united in support of increased and sustained funding for all federal agencies and programs across the public health continuum—from bench to bedside—to ensure that all Americans lead long, healthy, productive lives.**

Today, we have an unprecedented opportunity to shape the future of this country's public health infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic critically strained health, social, and economic systems around the world, and highlighted the importance of sustained and predictable health funding. Supplemental funding to address the urgent needs of the pandemic was, and continues to be, essential, but it alone is not the solution to respond to future pandemics. For too long, Congress neglected critical pieces of our public health infrastructure and health research pipeline, which hindered our ability to respond quickly and effectively when disaster struck. Now is the time to take corrective action and make sustained investment in public health. We learned many lessons during the pandemic, including that biomedical

research and a robust public health workforce are indispensable and require sustained investment. A significant fiscal year (FY) 2022 allocation for public health funding will allow our health systems to emerge stronger and better equipped to improve health outcomes.

The Coalition urges Congress to seize the opportunity FY 2022 presents as the first appropriations cycle in a decade not governed by the spending caps of the Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA). Without the BCA imposed budget caps, Congress should provide funding increases across the HHS accounts commensurate with the need for non-defense discretionary programs that support public health, medical and scientific research, infrastructure, education, public safety, and more. **Congress should follow the increase set forth in President Biden's FY 2022 Discretionary Budget request and increase the HHS budget by at least 23.5 percent or \$25 billion above FY 2021 levels.** Increased funding will not only support future economic growth, but will strengthen the health, safety, and security of all Americans.

HHS agencies play a key role in addressing our nation's public health needs and work in partnership with state and local governments to protect and promote health in our communities. While each agency within HHS has a unique mission to respond to our nation's health demands, they are all interconnected. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that investment in medical research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is important, but on its own will not improve health. You need the Food and Drug Administration to approve new treatments. You need the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Resources and Services Administration, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and Indian Health Service to ensure we have qualified health professionals who can translate research into health care and public health delivery, support Americans while they're awaiting

new cures, and prevent them from getting sick in the first place. You also need the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to provide clinical evidence on what treatments work best, for whom, and in what circumstances. And you need the Administration for Community Living to support those who are aging and those who have disabilities—as well as their caregivers—so that they can live their best life, every day. Without robust funding for all agencies and programs of the interdependent public health continuum, we’re falling short on the promise to protect and improve the health and well-being of all Americans. Shortchanging public health and health research programs—or cutting health programs—leaves Americans vulnerable to health threats and will not prevent public health crises from arising in the first place as we witnessed over the last year.

As COVID-19 cases begin to decline and life starts to look more like it did before the pandemic, it is important to recognize that the pandemic’s effects go far beyond the virus itself and will have long-lasting impacts on Americans. Research is just one of the many areas impacted by the pandemic that requires additional investment to get back on track. Every agency within HHS conducts research that is important to strengthening our public health system. Congress has a responsibility to ensure that all agencies within HHS receive equitable funding for efforts to regain some of the ground that has been lost due to necessary pauses in and increased costs of research as well as ensure the pandemic does not wipe out a whole generation of investigators who were forced to choose other career paths because of the disruption.

Another well-established impact of the pandemic has been the toll it has taken on mental health and substance abuse. Four in ten adults report symptoms of anxiety or a

depressive disorder, up from one in ten adults in June 2019. Substance abuse and misuse, including alcohol, has increased by 12 percent.¹ Gains made in the fight against the opioid epidemic—another dire public health crisis—were diminished as an estimated 87,000 Americans lost their lives due to overdose from September 2019 to September 2020, a 29 percent increase over the previous year.² Adequate funding for preventive, supportive, and rehabilitative services will be critical to address and reduce these concerning trends.

The detection and management of chronic diseases is another area of public health that was set back as a result of the pandemic. An estimated six in ten American adults have a chronic disease, with four in ten having two or more.³ Restrictions on elective procedures and non-urgent health care visits, coupled with concerns about the virus and obstacles to connecting virtually with providers during the pandemic caused many Americans to postpone routine care and skip necessary screenings, which in some cases has negatively impacted patients' ability to manage their disease.⁴ Additionally, the millions of Americans now living with post-acute sequelae of COVID-19—often referred to as “long-haulers” because they experience lingering symptoms that last from weeks to months—could further increase the number of people in the U.S. living with a chronic disease, like diabetes or heart disease, and adds new complexities to our chronic disease management efforts. As a result, there is a

¹ Nirmita Panchal, R. K., & 2021, F. (2021, April 14). *The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use*. KFF. <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, May 12). *Products - Vital Statistics Rapid Release - Provisional Drug Overdose Data*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, January 12). *Chronic Diseases in America*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/infographic/chronic-diseases.htm>.

⁴ Kendzerska, T., Zhu, D. T., Gershon, A. S., Edwards, J. D., Peixoto, C., Robillard, R., & Kendall, C. E. (2021, February 15). *The Effects of the Health System Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic on Chronic Disease Management: A Narrative Review*. Risk management and healthcare policy. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7894869/#:~:text=Obese%20patients%20with%20chronic%20diseases,during%20in%20erson%20medical%20visits>.

significant need for increased funding for public health programs that reduce barriers to care and help patients detect and manage their conditions.

Research, mental health, substance use disorders, and chronic disease are just some of the areas of public health that have been impacted by the pandemic and require increased investments. Despite the funding included in the emergency appropriations packages, we have seen setbacks in most, if not all, areas of public health. The only way to remedy this situation is through robust and sustained funding. As the country continues to work to build back, Congress has a responsibility to make robust, sustained, investments in our public health system. Health security is national security; Congress would not hesitate, rightfully so, to make increased investments in defense or national security after a crisis. Now is our chance to act boldly and make investments in public health that will benefit all Americans. The goal for our nation's public health system should not be to return to normal, but rather to build a paradigm that makes the U.S. a healthier country by addressing health disparities and ensures that when the next public health crisis comes, we are prepared.

The Coalition for Health Funding strongly supports at least a 23.5 percent increase for the Department of Health and Human Services above FY 2021 levels. We look forward to working with Congress to support the health of all Americans and we hope that you will view us and our member organizations as a resource.