

COALITION *for* HEALTH FUNDING

September 7, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The Coalition for Health Funding—an alliance of 81 nonprofit organizations working to promote strong investments in the public health continuum—urges Congress to pass the FY 2022 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill as soon as possible. As the end of the fiscal year draws near, it is frustrating, yet clear, that a continuing resolution (CR) is inevitable. Unfortunately, CRs—especially those that last for months or are renewed several times—harm public health, research and disability programs, as well as other domestic programs. Relying on CRs is irresponsible and should not be the norm as part of the annual appropriations process.

While a CR is preferable to a government shutdown, normalizing them creates dysfunction and disruption across the entire public health continuum. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to expose the serious consequences of chronic underfunding of the public health infrastructure, which requires sustained and predictable increases through regular appropriations. Below are some examples highlighting the challenges that long-term CRs pose to critical health programs:

- Last year, the nation's overdose rate increased by a staggering 30 percent with 90,000 deaths nationwide. This is a rate of increase that has not been seen in three decades. States are slated to receive billions of dollars more to assist them in prevention, treatment, and recovery services in FY 2022.
- CRs force grant-funding agencies like the National Institutes of Health to adopt conservative funding policies, holding back on investments in new areas of life-saving research and damaging existing ongoing research efforts. Unreliable and unpredictable funding streams hurt the nation's scientific enterprise, and damage America's competitiveness globally.
- CRs make it difficult for state and local health departments to plan activities and hire staff as they rely on predictable funding from federal agencies to carry out their work. Funding delays or pauses can ultimately hold up essential programmatic work in communities across the country.

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- Funding challenges that health departments face because of CRs also impact the non-profit organizations they partner with as they impede the ability to move goals and objectives forward. Progress at non-profits will slow, or worse, come to a halt entirely during the CRs while they wait for the release of grant funding.
- For many Coalition for Health Funding members who rely on grant funding, long-term can CRs make it difficult to keep staff motivated on grant deliverables when they are worried about their job security. These staff members are acutely aware that if grant funding is not appropriated their own job security is at risk.

Under the best circumstances, predictable and sustainable funding is required to protect and promote the health of all Americans under the current circumstances it is critical. CRs inject fiscal uncertainty into an already uncertain environment for the agencies that support the nation's health and wellbeing. The reliance on CRs that has become commonplace in recent years allows Congress to neglect its responsibilities to pass annual appropriations bills on time, while at the same time limiting its ability exercise its oversight authority and make necessary adjustments to funding levels to meet new demands. While the Coalition for Health Funding is grateful for the emergency funding that Congress has appropriated for the Department of Health and Human Services and its agencies throughout the pandemic, Congress must provide sustained and predictable increases in order ensure that we are building a public health system that can easily and adequately respond to the next crisis.

The Coalition for Health Funding calls on Congress to pass the FY 2022 appropriations bills to provide robust support for health-related agencies in a timely manner to avoid the damaging trend of long-term CRs. Thank you for your consideration; please feel free to reach out to me at emorton@dc-crd.com.

Sincerely,

Erin Will Morton

Erin Will Morton
Executive Director
Coalition for Health Funding