

Public Health Support Letter

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As the fight against COVID-19 continues across the globe we must continue an active conversation about strengthening the public health infrastructure in Nebraska and across the United States. The COVID-19 Pandemic has shined a spotlight on our nation's public health system. We are witnessing a public health infrastructure that has been weakened over time. The COVID-19 Pandemic has motivated us to envision a system that works for all, one that is connected, responsive, nimble, and includes the values of equity and inclusion. This is necessary, desirable and within reach.

The United States has made enormous strides in improving population health and longevity, but significant challenges remain. More than a third of adults, and nearly one in five children, have obesity. Tobacco use is still the leading cause of preventable death. Risks from infectious disease, drug-resistant superbugs, and foodborne illness continue to pose a challenge. A rapid rise in deaths from drugs, alcohol, and suicide represent an urgent crisis. Weather-related emergencies are becoming more frequent and intense, as the world begins to feel the effects of climate change. Across most health outcomes, socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic disparities persist. These issues are the work of local and state health departments, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and accredited colleges of public health. Tackling these issues requires a strong, well-resourced public health system focused on prevention, preparedness and wellness.

It is time to come together and build a much more robust public health system, creating a strong foundation, to assure we are able to respond to these challenges. This will require our local, state and federal officials to come together with our public health practitioners to develop a plan for sustained funding support and infrastructure.

Action is needed to create a valued, sustainable and strong public health system. This requires support at all levels. The U.S spends approximately \$9,500 per person on health care, \$2,100 on defense, and \$250 per person on public health. Nebraska public health spending per person is \$98. Over the past decade the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has seen a 10% decrease in funding which directly impacts the ability of state and local health departments to do their work well. Nebraska local health departments have seen minimal increases over the past 20 years.

Nebraskans support public health - from indoor smoking policies, an increased living wage, and Medicaid expansion. Additionally, a September 2018 poll of U.S. voters found that 89 percent of respondents believe that public health plays an important role in the health of their community and a majority of voters (57 percent) are willing to pay higher taxes to ensure that everyone has access to basic public health protections.

Today, the work of our state and local public health agencies demonstrates value, importance, commitment and passion. A justly supported infrastructure at all levels enables leaders to tackle the largest public health issues of our time.

It is time for our local, state, and federal elected officials to prioritize and insist on increased funding of CDC, Health Resources and Services Administration, colleges of public health, and local public health agencies.

Now is the time to choose to get this right. Every policy and funding decision must lead us to the future we want: a society where all Nebraskans can be healthy and thrive. As we rebuild, let's redesign an innovative public health infrastructure so that it works for all. This is necessary and within reach.

Resources:

Trust for America's Health (2019). The Impact of Chronic Underfunding on America's Public Health System: Trends, Risks, and Recommendations. De Beaumont Foundation. National Survey Reveals Strong Bipartisan Support for Public Health, 2018. <https://www.debeaumont.org/national-survey-reveals-strong-bipartisan-support-for-public-health>