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Bridging Science, Policy and Public Health

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January 30, 2012

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Boehner and Majority Leader Reid:

On behalf of the National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD), whose members administer state HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis prevention and care programs nationwide, we are writing to express our strong support for the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF), as created by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA).

Since its inception, the future of the PPHF has come into question, especially during negotiations for the extension of the payroll tax cut and Medicare physician reimbursement (“doc fix”). As the two month extension comes to an end on February 29, 2012, we urge you to protect the PPHF and oppose any efforts to reduce or eliminate the fund as it provides vital funding for the preservation and promotion of our nation’s public health.

As you know, the PPHF established in the ACA is a \$15 billion investment over ten years for public health programs. The fund is urgently needed to address the many emerging health threats our country faces through a coordinated, comprehensive, sustainable and accountable approach to improving health outcomes and curbing costs. The investment supports disease prevention by promoting access to vaccines, strengthening the public health workforce, and investing in evidence-based prevention programs at the community level.

PPHF will also be used to tackle critical epidemics, such as HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis. The fund is a unique opportunity to decrease health care spending related to HIV/AIDS treatment and care, and invest in viral hepatitis prevention and screening efforts. The cost of HIV treatment and lost productivity is largely borne by the public sector and can reach \$1 million per infection. With over 50,000 new infections each year, the costs multiply quickly. Individuals who are aware of their HIV infection are far less likely to transmit the virus; in fact they have an estimated transmission rate of 1.7 percent to 2.4 percent in contrast to estimated transmission rates of 8.8 percent to 10.8 percent for those who are unaware that they are infected with the virus.

In FY2010, the \$500 million for the Prevention and Public Health Fund was distributed with \$250 million directed to HRSA for programs to expand the primary care workforce and \$250 million directed to CDC for activities to support prevention activities and public health infrastructure. Of this, \$30 million was directed to HIV prevention to address disparities, expand testing and assist health departments to better focus their programs on effective interventions.

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For viral hepatitis, in 2009 alone CDC estimated that 38,000 Americans were newly infected with hepatitis B (HBV) and 16,000 with hepatitis C (HCV). Unfortunately, due to the lack of an adequate surveillance system, these estimates are likely only the tip of the iceberg. An overwhelming majority of individuals living with viral hepatitis (65-75 percent) remains unaware of their infection and is not receiving the necessary treatment and care. Further, the baby boomer population (ages 46-64) currently accounts for two out of every three cases of chronic HCV. As these Americans continue to age, they are likely to develop complications from HCV and require costly medical interventions that can be avoided if tested earlier and provided with proper treatment.

According to the CDC Professional Judgment budget for viral hepatitis, the top priority is to identify persons with viral hepatitis early and refer them to care by strategically increasing access to testing nationwide. The *HHS Viral Hepatitis Action Plan* establishes a goal of increasing the proportion of persons who are aware of their HBV infection from 33 percent to 66 percent and from 45 percent to 66 percent for HCV. For the first time ever, the Division of Viral Hepatitis (DVH) is poised to receive an additional \$10 million dollars in FY2012 for a screening initiative through the PPHF, per a recommendation by congressional appropriators. In order to reduce the public health and economic consequences of viral hepatitis, it is necessary that the PPHF be maintained in FY2012 and future fiscal years for the creation and continuation of the first-ever DVH national viral hepatitis testing initiative.

It is essential to the health of Americans that we capitalize on the opportunity to invest in prevention programs and transform our public health system. In order to accomplish this, we must maintain the Prevention and Public Health Fund. We look forward to working with Members of Congress to maintain and strengthen the public health of our nation.

Sincerely,



Julie M. Scofield
Executive Director

CC:

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Dave Camp
The Honorable Fred Upton
The Honorable Kevin Brady
The Honorable Renee Ellmers
The Honorable Nan Hayworth
The Honorable Tom Reed
The Honorable Tom Price
The Honorable Greg Walden
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
The Honorable Sander Levin
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The Honorable Allyson Schwartz
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Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell
The Honorable Max Baucus
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