

July 6, 2010

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW – Room 120F
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

We are writing to urge you to ensure that future expenditures of the Prevention and Wellness Fund place a high priority on supporting community-based prevention efforts and directing resources to communities most in need.

Investing in community prevention provides a major opportunity to contain medical costs and improve health outcomes. As you know, research has shown that medical care only attends to about 10 percent of the factors that contribute to illness and injury. Seventy percent of premature mortality in the United States is shaped by environmental factors and behaviors.¹ Living near safe places to play and exercise; making commutes shorter and less polluting; steady employment in a job that doesn't put one's health at risk; having access to healthy foods; and living in a neighborhood free of pollutants, lead, and other toxins—all of these can help keep people out of the doctor's office in the first place.

Ultimately, in order for health care reform to be successful, we must reduce the demand on our medical system. Given that many of the leading causes of illness, injury, and death are preventable, every dollar invested in prevention will reduce the burden on our health care system. While the Prevention and Wellness Fund represents only a small portion of the total expenditures in the bill, it provides a landmark opportunity to create a system that truly promotes health. Quality prevention, which focuses on broad-based policy, systems, organizational and environmental changes, is a perfect complement to the improvements in access to quality health care in the other titles of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Therefore, we urge you to maximize the available dollars to support public health and community infrastructure to implement community-focused prevention efforts.

As strong supporters of health equity, we want to ensure that equitable health outcomes are of the highest priority. Research shows that communities of color and low-income communities have some of the worst health outcomes, and that these poor health outcomes can be linked to community socio-economic and environmental conditions. Health reform offers an opportunity to change this. We commend the administration in its prior investments in these types of efforts through the recovery act's Communities Putting Prevention to Work. Moving forward, it is critical that health reform efforts are expanded and aimed at communities in highest need and that community members are engaged and funded to address critical health issues. This impact will be enhanced by establishing guidelines that provide the flexibility for public health and

¹ Lee, P., & Paxman, D. (1997). Reinventing Public Health. *Annu. Rev. Public Health*, 18, 1-13.

community leaders to address health issues of greatest concern, such as chronic diseases, violence and unintentional injury, or HIV.

Thus, the promise of prevention in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act can be realized through:

- Maximizing Prevention and Public Health Fund resources dedicated to community prevention, in particular by using the Community Transformation Grant mechanism.
- Emphasizing and ensuring that communities with high levels of need be prioritized and that community groups be directly involved in the decisions that affect them
- Designing future community prevention funding guidelines to apply an environmental and policy change approach to a broad range of priority community health issues

The prevention community has been galvanized by the President's prioritization of community prevention. We continue to be strong supporters of your efforts to improve health status of all Americans and stand ready to help you in every way.

Sincerely,



Larry Cohen
Executive Director
Prevention Institute



Judith Bell
President
PolicyLink



Jeffrey Levi
Executive Director
Trust for America's Health



Mary Pittman
President and Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Institute