

April 6, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
S-230, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
S-221, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Senator Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Representative McCarthy:

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the nearly 3,000 local health departments across the country thank you for providing support to novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak response efforts. As we face the most challenging public health test of a lifetime, local health departments are leading on the front lines of the response.

We greatly appreciate Congress quickly coming together to provide additional funding to help support the response and the governmental public health infrastructure as it works non-stop to protect the American people. However, as this pandemic continues to grow and affect every corner of our nation it is clear that more needs to be done to invest in local health departments so that they can continue to lead over the long-term response and recovery. This need is heightened by the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, which has already started affecting health department budgets reliant on local and state tax revenues. This is unsustainable. Therefore, as Congress negotiates its next COVID-19 response legislation, we urge you to support efforts to strengthen local health department capacity.

Strong, sustainable funding is critical to increase the capacity of local health departments. The 2008 recession hit local health departments hard—and they have yet to recover. Since 2008, these departments have lost nearly a quarter of their workforce and their budgets have been at best stagnant, with many health departments operating with up to 30% fewer dollars, while responding to more and more high-profile emergencies. The coronavirus-related recession is set to be even more damaging to their bottom line, at a time when every employee and activity is more important than ever. Therefore, NACCHO advocates the following two strategies to address the future needs of local health departments and the public health system overall.

- 1. Enact and implement a loan repayment program for public health professionals who agree to serve two years in a local, state, or tribal health department.**

Since 2008, local and state health departments have lost nearly 25% of their workforce, more than 50,000 jobs. Further, nearly half of the local and state health department workforce might



leave in coming years as the workforce ages. In an effort to recruit and retain a new generation of public health workers, NACCHO urges Congress to enact and implement a loan repayment program for public health professionals who agree to serve two years in a local, state, or tribal health department. Such a program, modeled off the success of the National Health Service Corps in bringing health care providers to communities in need, will help health departments across the country recruit appropriate staff who can tackle 21st Century challenges and increase health departments' capacity, now and in the future, to keep the public healthy and safe. We estimate that a program funded at \$200 million per year could support over 6,000 new hires in local and state health departments across the country.


**2. Enact \$4.5 billion in additional annual funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, state, local, tribal and territorial core public health infrastructure to pay for such essential activities as disease surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory capacity, all-hazards preparedness and response; policy development and support; communications; community partnership development; and organizational competencies.**

The importance of strong, predictable federal investment in the public health system is even more vital now as the economic impacts of the pandemic are felt nationwide. State and local governmental budgets, and therefore public health budgets, are likely to be devastated in the wake of COVID-19, possibly for years to come. This will leave our nation even more vulnerable to emerging health risks. By building the core public health infrastructure of states, localities, tribal governments and territories, as well as the CDC, the nation will be better prepared for the next threat.

In addition, it is critical to ensure that other investments take into account the role of local health departments and the entire governmental public health system. For example, when we have a vaccine to COVID-19, local health departments will need key workforce and infrastructure investments to not only alert the public, but also to administer the immunizations in a timely way and track the data through strong Immunization Information Systems.

We must take action now to ensure that local health departments will be there for their communities in the months and years to come. NACCHO and local health departments look forward to working with Congress to address this global outbreak and shore up the public health system so that Americans are protected from all public health threats. For additional information, please contact Adriane Casalotti, NACCHO's Chief of Government and Public Affairs, at [acasalotti@naccho.org](mailto:acasalotti@naccho.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lori Tremmel Freeman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Lori Tremmel Freeman, MBA  
CEO