

How the Prevention and Public Health Fund Helps Women and Their Families

As organizations committed to the health and wellbeing of infants, children, adolescents, and pregnant women, we strongly support the Prevention and Public Health Fund and urge you to oppose any effort to reduce, eliminate, or divert funding from this critical investment in public health. Recent proposals to reduce or eliminate the Prevention and Public Health Fund will have a significant impact on community efforts to prevent chronic disease and promote and protect the health and safety of all Americans, including women and their families.

The Prevention and Public Health Fund is critical to bringing effective programs to scale, reversing the erosion of vital public health programs, and instituting new investments in the health of all Americans. Leading public health scientists agree that promoting the health of women before and between pregnancies – in addition to quality prenatal care – offers the best hope of improving America's troubling infant mortality rate and assuring babies a healthy start.

States are already using the Prevention and Public Health funds to help control obesity, reduce tobacco use, and improve nutrition – risk factors known to impact pregnancy outcomes. Combined, these initiatives promise significant improvements in both maternal health and birth outcomes. For example, by reducing the costly and serious trend of elevated preterm birth rates in this country by half, we would save an estimated \$13 billion dollars annually. More importantly, such a reduction in the preterm birth rate would save the lives of thousands of babies while itself covering the costs of the Fund.

Specific Prevention and Public Health Fund investments to improve the health of women and their families include the following proposed activities for FY12:

- **Promoting the Benefits of Breastfeeding (\$7 million):** The National Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality (NICHQ), with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is leading a nationwide effort in close partnership with Baby-Friendly USA to help hospitals improve maternity care and increase the number of Baby-Friendly hospitals in the United States. The U.S. Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative encourages and recognizes hospitals and birthing centers that offer an optimal level of care for infant feeding practices. CDC is funding this initiative with money from the Prevention and Public Health Fund. Breastfeeding is one of the most effective measures to protect the health of infants. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, breastfeeding protects babies from infections and illnesses, including diarrhea, ear infections and pneumonia. In addition, breast-fed babies are less likely to develop asthma and those who are breastfed for six months are less likely to become obese. Research also suggests health benefits for the mother; studies have shown that women who breastfeed have a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers.
- **Reversing the Obesity Epidemic among Children and Women of Reproductive Age (\$236 million):** The increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity among women of childbearing age is a growing public health concern. A higher proportion of women of child bearing age are overweight or obese compared to men and women of younger or older ages. In addition, upwards of 80 percent of African American women are either overweight or obese. A body mass index above the normal range is associated with a number of adverse reproductive health outcomes in areas including infertility, gestational diabetes, pregnancy-induced hypertension and preeclampsia, birth defects and cesarean sections, prolonged labor, and postpartum anemia. The Community Transformation Grant program, which is a centerpiece of the Prevention Fund, is supporting state and local efforts to promote nutrition and physical activity and reduce obesity, which will improve the health of women of childbearing age and promote healthy birth outcomes.
- **Preventing Disease through the 317 Immunization Program (\$190 million):** The Section 317 program provides funding for immunization operations and infrastructure necessary to implement

a comprehensive immunization program at the federal, state, and local levels. Routine childhood immunizations prevent 14 million cases of disease and 33,000 deaths every year, resulting in an annual cost savings of \$9.9 billion in direct medical costs and an additional \$43.3 billion in indirect costs. These investments will help provide moms the peace of mind that their children are protected from preventable disease.

- **Protecting Moms and Babies from Tobacco (\$93 million):** Although smoking rates among women have decreased, in 2006 an estimated 22 percent of women of reproductive age continued to smoke. Tobacco use during pregnancy increases the risk of spontaneous abortion, ectopic pregnancy, low birthweight, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, premature birth, and other fetal and maternal complications. To avoid early pregnancy complications, women who smoke should be counseled to quit before becoming pregnant. Funding from the Prevention and Public Health Fund is being directed toward tobacco prevention programs including media and quit lines reaching women of childbearing age.
- **Reversing the Childhood Obesity Epidemic (\$5 million):** Lack of physical activity is a significant risk factor for childhood obesity. According to a national study, only 42 percent of children meet minimum recommended activity levels. Those at greater risk for being inactive include girls, racial/ethnic minorities, and children residing in neighborhoods with few public recreational facilities. Increasing physical activity is a key component of the First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* campaign, which encourages children to get 60 minutes of play with moderate to vigorous activity every day to maintain a healthy weight. Resources from the Fund are activating community collaborations to address this national epidemic.
- **Building the Evidence Base of Public Health (\$10 million)** The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) is an essential resource for public health professionals. It provides evidence-based findings about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety. State Maternal and Child Health programs can use the guide to promote evidence-based practices to improve preconception health and reduce adult and childhood obesity.
- **Improving Public Health Capacity (\$40.2 million):** The National Public Health Improvement Initiative (NPHII), supports state, tribal, local, and territorial health departments and several schools of public health to enhance the nation's public health enterprise and strengthen public health's capacity to protect the health of the United States and improve the quality of life of all Americans. Public health capacity will be improved and made more efficient through this investment, including in workforce capacity and competency; laboratory systems; health information and systems, as well as health information analysis for decision-making; communications; and other related activities.
- **Understanding the Environmental Causes of Disease (\$35 million):** "Health tracking" refers to tracking the incidents of chronic disease and other health concerns, such as breast cancer, asthma and juvenile diabetes, overlaid with data on social and environmental factors such as race, ethnicity, geographic location and toxic exposures. The funding provided for the National Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) Network allows public health to identify connections between health and the environment.

Supported By: American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs; Association of State and Territorial Health Officials; Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses; March of Dimes