



ASSOCIATION OF STATE AND TERRITORIAL HEALTH OFFICIALS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS IN THE 2009 ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

The current economic environment continues to seriously impair the ability of state and local health agencies to protect the public's health. The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) surveyed its members between November and December 2008 to gauge the extent of the problem. Forty-five members responded:

- Nearly 30% state health departments are currently operating with budgets below FY07 levels.
- Almost all state health departments expect further cuts in FY09; nearly a quarter expect cuts of 10% or more.
- Federal dollars make up about half of the average state's public health budget.

The result - 60% of states have been forced to reduce services and nearly 30% have eliminated entire programs. Cuts include immunizations, laboratory tests, tobacco control and prevention activities, cancer screenings, dental clinics, and other essential public health programs.

The economic downturn will continue to hurt the ability of health departments to maintain adequate staffing. During the coming year 33% of states will lay off workers. At least one state will have lost 30% of its workforce by the end of FY09.

IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY/INFRASTRUCTURE

Provide \$50 million to strengthen state and local childhood immunization registries, ensure compliance with National Health Information Network Standards, and protect children from vaccine preventable diseases. When a disaster such as Katrina strikes, registries ensure that immunization records are accessible and unnecessary immunizations are kept to a minimum. We need to ensure that all jurisdictions have registries and that there are standards for communication among the registries. This information is critical in preventing disease outbreaks and protecting children from vaccine preventable diseases.

Provide \$50 million for state infrastructure for electronic registration of vital statistics. For improved national security and efficiency, states need to implement secure web-based vital statistics reporting systems that can electronically transfer birth and death registration information in real-time between states and to the federal government.

Provide \$400 million to Integrate Health Information Exchanges (HIE) with public health entities for reporting, surveillance, and prevention. This will improve cross-jurisdictional case detection and disease surveillance and reporting systems by providing automated links to electronic health records that can be appropriately accessed by clinicians and the public, including population health quality, performance, and consumer safety improvements.

Provide \$500 million for state and local health agencies to improve the physical infrastructure of state laboratories. The nation's state labs must be equipped to deal with everything from newborn screening to bioterrorism. At least eight states have planned to build new public health laboratories in the next two years to replace facilities that are up to 50 years old. Given the economic downturn, these labs may not be built unless federal funding is available to support this



critical upgrade in infrastructure. Other infrastructure and capital improvements could include communications and command centers and the purchase of emergency medical services vehicles.

SUSTAIN AND STRENGTHEN THE PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE

Include \$500 million (for 5,000 state jobs) for state and local health agencies to prevent further elimination of essential public health professional jobs. Women comprise about 75% of the public health workforce and are equally in need of the benefits of an economic stimulus plan. The existing framework of the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant and other existing and high impact broad-based grants and cooperative agreements such as Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity and the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Programs can help to rapidly disseminate funds to states to prevent additional layoffs. Also, an additional one-time, no-year appropriation would help state health agencies maintain public health programs in danger of deep cuts or elimination.

Provide \$50 million to implement the public health workforce loan repayment program contained in the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act (PAHPA). This program will encourage public health professionals to enter employment in federal, state, or local public health agencies.

Provide \$50 million for the public health information technology (HIT) workforce. State and local health agencies need public health informatics workforce training and development. This funding will establish both workplace and distance-learning programs for public health informatics skills and states will benefit from enhanced support for state-based informatics scientists, such as epidemiologic informatics service fellows and field-based federal public health informatics fellows. This program would also support ongoing development of certification programs for the informatics workforce.

Provide \$75 million to upgrade state public health laboratories with NHIN and PHIN compatible laboratory information management systems. State public health laboratories and healthcare providers must be able to share lab results quickly without having to duplicate tests. Funding would be used to purchase and implement new National Health Information Network (NHIN) and Public Health Information Network (PHIN) compatible systems. This funding would improve laboratory testing data management, ensure interoperability among clinics, and stimulate the software development sector.

STATE RELIEF FROM MATCHES AND MAINTENANCE FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

PAHPA mandates the implementation of match and maintenance funding requirements for the federal preparedness cooperative agreements beginning in FY09. Implementation of these requirements is problematic for states, especially in an economic downturn. ASTHO urges the Obama Administration to work with Congress and, as part of the Stimulus Package, suspend these requirements for a defined period of time.