



Threats to Public Health Under the American Health Care Act (AHCA)

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Evidence shows that funding public health initiatives not only improves health outcomes,¹ it also reduces health care costs.² The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) contains several mechanisms to fund public health initiatives. The largest of these is the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF).³ The PPHF was created by the ACA to support programming to reduce the burden of preventable chronic disease and promote public health goals.⁴ To date, the PPHF has provided over \$6.5 billion to public health prevention efforts in several areas.⁵

The PPHF is under threat and continued funding is uncertain. The ACA is on the legislative chopping block. The recently passed Cures Act reduces PPHF funding by one-third.⁶ The House version of the American Health Care Act (AHCA) eliminates the rest of the fund entirely.⁷ Elimination of this key fund would have a significant negative impact on public health at the federal, state, and local level. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one of the primary federal funders of public health programs, gets 12% of its budget from the PPHF.⁸ Removal of the PPHF would leave many state and local public health programs in a precarious position as the funds have become an integral part of state budgets.⁹

Despite the importance of the PPHF, most Americans are not aware of its existence and what is at stake if it is eliminated. This fact sheet highlights five crucial areas of public health that will be negatively impacted by the AHCA's elimination of the PPHF.

1. Tobacco cessation

Tobacco use has the potential to affect every single organ in the body.¹⁰ The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that smoking-related diseases cost the U.S. more than \$300 billion each year. Elimination of PPHF would leave a critical funding gap in tobacco-related prevention efforts.¹¹ The PPHF funds many tobacco cessation-related programs at the federal, state and local level. Funded programs include media campaigns,

support groups, and classes.¹² One particularly successful PPHF funded-program is the “Tips from Former Smokers” media campaign.¹³ This program was found to be both cost efficient and effective and preventing tobacco use and tobacco-related deaths.¹⁴ The program also resulted in a 12% increase in attempts to quit tobacco-use.¹⁵

2. Immunizations

The largest allocation of PPHF funds for FY 2016 is going to bolster vaccine coverage among children and adults. PPHF funds make up 40% of the total funding for the CDC’s immunization program.¹⁶ Elimination of this critical funding source would have disastrous effects in the case of a public health emergency. While many individuals obtain vaccinations through public or private insurance, the CDC immunization program helps fill funding gaps for vaccines for adults and children who are uninsured or underinsured.¹⁷ Additionally, the program helps respond to outbreaks of vaccine-preventable illness, including the flu.¹⁸

3. Obesity Prevention

Obesity is associated with the most preventable chronic diseases and the highest health care costs in the United States.¹⁹ Approximately 36% of adults are obese, but if rates continue to increase as projected, then that number may increase to close to 50% by 2030.^{20,21} The elimination of PPHF-funded obesity prevention programs would not only leave states more vulnerable to disease, it would increase health care spending. PPHF funds are being used to promote programming to reduce obesity rates among children and adults. Trust for America’s Health estimates that a 5% reduction in average body mass index (BMI) for state residents could result in averting thousands of cases of chronic disease and billions in health care costs.²²

4. Lead poisoning prevention

Child lead poisoning negatively affects neurological and behavioral development.²³ While there is no lead blood level that is considered safe, the CDC estimates that there are over 500,000 children with blood lead levels high enough to have negative health effects.²⁴ The CDC currently uses PPHF funds to support 29 states’ efforts to reduce child lead exposure and increase lead poisoning prevention efforts.²⁵ In 2015, states that were awarded CDC funds tested over 2 million children, and program successfully reduced harmful blood level rates by over 70% in children age 5 and younger.²⁶ Without these funds, states may be without the ability to detect and remedy dangerous lead blood levels in children.

5. Youth suicide prevention

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth and young adults between ages 10 and 24 in the United States, and has been for over 20 years.²⁷ Youth suicide prevention programs have been shown to have a positive impact on rates, but funding for these programs is often

inadequate.²⁸ To date, the PPHF has funded 372 projects for youth and young adult suicide prevention programs across the nation.²⁹ Elimination of the PPHF would be a tremendous setback for any progress that is being made towards reducing youth and young adult suicide rates. To learn more about the dangers of eliminating funding for youth suicide prevention programs, go to NHeLP's [blog post on the topic](#).

ENDNOTES

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⁷ American Health Care Act of 2017, H.R. 1628. 115th Cong. § 101 (2017).

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¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Ctrs. for Disease Control and Prevention, *Accomplishing CDC's Mission with Investments from the Prevention & Public Health Fund, FY 2010-FY 2016*, <https://www.cdc.gov/funding/documents/cdc-pphf-funding-impact.pdf>.

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²⁶ *Id.*

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