

Data: *Elemental to Health*



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May 22, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Speaker McCarthy, and Leader Jeffries:

As you continue critical negotiations on the nation's debt ceiling and overall federal budget, the undersigned organizations representing the Data: Elemental to Health campaign respectfully request that you preserve funding appropriated to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Data Modernization Initiative (DMI) and Center for Forecasting and Outbreak Analytics (CFA) through the American Rescue Plan Act. Recission of unspent funds earmarked for DMI and CFA would catastrophically damage our public health infrastructure and directly impede our ability to respond to future public health crises.

Public health data are essential for effective daily public health actions and response and during public health emergencies. Despite this, many state, territorial, local, and tribal (STLT) health departments lack modern data systems and the connectivity to fully receive and process data electronically, and thus still receive data from health care providers by fax or phone or manually process reports in order to make information available for analysis and response. Core data streams are not connected to each other. All of these critical issues inhibit our ability to address public health threats in real time in every community and at a national level. STLT health departments rely on federal funding and do not have the resources to modernize their data systems without sustained annual investment. DMI is the single most important investment to ensure continued progress in modernizing our public health data infrastructure.

While we are tremendously grateful for Congress' investment to date in upgrading our public health data infrastructure, it is a small fraction of the overall need especially at STLT health departments where daily response to disease threats occurs (even in the absence of a pandemic). Emergency funding provided to DMI and CFA through the American Rescue Plan was never intended to address the acute COVID-19 crisis, rather to support the long-term transformation of public health data systems that are essential for response to every current and potential threat to our nation's health. We must make use of the full amount appropriated by Congress to advance this effort. Further, we need increased regular investments

to complete connectivity and ensure state and local public health systems keep pace with evolving technology.

There is much more work to be done to create a modern public health data system that is equipped to respond to emerging threats and more resources are needed, especially at the STLT levels. The loss of funding for DMI would represent an incredible setback for these efforts. As we know well from other national IT investments, as technology evolves, our public health data systems will need updates and staff will need to be continuously trained and skilled. We need to make use of the prudent investments Congress has already made through supplemental funding to launch DMI in every state, ensure optimal use of dollars already invested in incomplete projects, and provide sustained annual resources to support and improve our public health infrastructure and data systems.

Again, we ask that you preserve American Rescue Plan funding allocated to CDC's DMI and CFA in any negotiated budget agreement. The future of our nation's public health depends on it. Thank you for your consideration. If you have questions or wish to discuss, please reach out to Meghan Riley at mriley@dc-crd.com.

Sincerely,

Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Big Cities Health Coalition
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society
NAPHSIS
National Association of County and City Health Officials