

Millions in Prevention Funding at Risk as Part of Federal Health Care Reform

By Lorna Schmidt, Executive Director, Local Public Health Association of Minnesota

As debates about repealing or replacing the Affordable Care Act (ACA) continue, much of the conversation is focused on how many individuals may lose health care coverage and the impacts of block granting Medicaid. There is no doubt these are serious issues that demand our attention, but there is another important piece of health care reform with the potential to affect millions that has been largely overlooked: the Prevention and Public Health Fund.

The Prevention Fund, which is currently rolled into the ACA, is a critical component of our nation's efforts to curb rising health care costs. It's an investment dedicated to preventing disease, rather than just treating it after the fact. Therefore, it is deeply concerning that each of the health care reform proposals brought forward by the U.S. House and Senate have threatened to fully eliminate the Prevention Fund.

The Prevention Fund was originally intended to boost public health activities, but the reality of federal budget pressures meant dollars instead went to backfill spending cuts. Today most of the services funded by the Prevention Fund are core public health functions which actually pre-date the ACA.



In Minnesota, \$18.6 million in annual Prevention Fund dollars support immunizations, childhood lead poisoning prevention, heart disease and stroke prevention, foodborne illness prevention, epidemiology and laboratory capacity, tobacco use prevention and more. Many of these dollars contribute to efforts like those involved in investigating and responding to the recent measles outbreak—and to preventing future outbreaks from occurring.

Without a mechanism to sustain or replace the Prevention Fund, Minnesota stands to lose more than \$80 million for these core public health services over five years.

A funding cut of this size would significantly compromise public health's capacity and put at risk the health and safety of Minnesotans throughout the state. The current public health challenges facing our communities—from infectious disease outbreaks to concerns over drinking water safety, opioid abuse and more—have great implications for our economy, our workforce and our health. We should be looking for ways to invest more, not less, in public health and prevention.

Federal public health funding and the Prevention Fund are a critical piece of our nation's and Minnesota's health care system. As Congress continues moves forward with efforts to repeal or replace the ACA, protecting the Prevention Fund must not be overlooked. ■

We put service before status.

Master of Public Administration for aspiring leaders

Join Hamline's online Master of Public Administration (with residencies every eight weeks). Start January 2018.

Upcoming events:

October 27, 2017

Insights and Trends Seminar I
"Addressing Conflict: The Most Effective Techniques for a Growing Problem"

November 3, 2017

Women in Public Service Annual Conference
"Women as Agents of Change"

Scholarships and discounts available.

Take your lead further at hamline.edu/PA.



We
take
the
lead