

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 23, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol, S-230  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol, S-221  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leaders Mitch McConnell and Chuck Schumer,

We write today regarding the urgent need for investment in public health and prevention in the United States. As the COVID-19 pandemic has taken hold across the country and the globe, the United States' inability to adequately and effectively respond to public health threats has been made clear. Furthermore, our country's high rates of chronic disease, particularly within the minority community, has put the health of Americans uniquely in jeopardy. We must take steps to respond to the threat of COVID-19 and prepare for the next global pandemic by investing in public health and prevention measures that will address health inequities, chronic disease, and access to care. As such, we ask that you invest \$2 billion in the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF) in the next COVID-19 response package.

The Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF) was passed into law as a part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010. The fund, designed to support innovative public health and prevention programs around the country, was set to increase each year, gradually reaching an appropriated level of \$2 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2015. Unfortunately, the PPHF was used as an offset for other health priorities over the last 10 years; despite an authorization of \$2 billion, the PPHF has yet to be funded above \$1 billion. While the programs the PPHF have been used to support are critical components of our nation's health infrastructure, our public health system has suffered—and it shows. Less than three percent of the nation's health spending is focused on public health and prevention.

At the same time, we have now far surpassed 100,000 COVID-19 deaths in the United States and are dealing with the worst outbreak in the world; the United States is a COVID-19 epicenter. It did not have to be this way. Those with chronic diseases, such as obesity, heart disease, and high blood pressure are at a greater risk of developing severe COVID-19 symptoms and of dying of COVID-19. Unfortunately, chronic disease is prevalent across the U.S. The prevalence of obesity in the United States was 42.7% in 2017/2018; furthermore, certain groups, including non-Hispanic Black Americans suffer higher rates of obesity than non-Hispanic white Americans. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. — one person dies every 37 seconds from cardiovascular disease.

Disparities between ethnicities are no coincidence either—systematic disinvestment in African American neighborhoods, limiting access to medical care, healthy food, safe places to

recreate, and health education have all played a role in driving up chronic disease prevalence in minority populations. All Americans deserve access to tools that will help them live a healthy life, especially during a pandemic that preys on those with chronic diseases. It is time investment in prevention and public health is taken seriously, and done equitably and sustainably.

Investments in the PPHF make a difference. PPHF dollars support the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Office on Smoking and Health's (OSH) *Tips From Former Smokers Campaign*, a media campaign that has helped over 500,000 Americans quit smoking. Tobacco-use is a leading cause of cardiovascular disease, and in a time of great stress, it is critical that investments are increased to ensure that smokers continue to quit and that former smokers do not relapse. In addition, the PPHF funds the CDC's Million Hearts initiative which provides education and support for patients and physicians, as well as the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, which funds state health departments and their efforts to address local health issues in innovative ways. The fund also supports bipartisan public health programs, like the CDC Immunization program and Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity program—both of which will be critical in our fight against COVID-19 in the days to come.

Investment in public health and prevention has never been timelier. We are in the middle of a pandemic, and an epidemic of racism, that will continue to plague our country if we continue to refuse to acknowledge the chronic disinvestment in public health policy. In investing in the PPHF, we can take a step that will both address the urgent need to respond to COVID-19 and address the health inequities within our nation. As such, we ask that you include the *Public Health Funding Restoration Act* within the next COVID-19 package, which would provide \$2 billion for the PPHF immediately and in the fiscal years to come. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

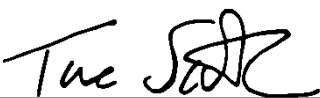
Thank you,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate



RICHARD J. DURBIN  
United States Senate



TINA SMITH  
United States Senate



CORY A. BOOKER  
United States Senate



JACKY ROSEN  
United States Senate



AMY KLOBUCHAR  
United States Senate

*Mazie K. Hirono*

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MAZIE K. HIRONO  
United States Senate

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

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ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.  
United States Senate