

January 27, 2023

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Shalanda D. Young
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Carole Johnson
Administrator
Health Resources and Services Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Secretary Becerra, Administrator Johnson, and Director Young:

As organizations representing tens of thousands of members on the front lines of public health and infectious disease, we write to **request that you include \$100 million for the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program and an additional \$50 million for the BIO Preparedness Workforce Pilot Program in the President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024.** These programs were authorized in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 as part of the PREVENT Pandemics Act, and they are essential to ensure our country has the public health and infectious diseases health care workforce necessary to mount equitable responses in all communities to outbreaks and epidemics, such as COVID-19, mpox, influenza, HIV, viral hepatitis, the opioid crisis, and antimicrobial resistance.

Funding of \$100 million in FY24 would allow as many as 2,000 public health professionals to receive up to \$50,000 in student loan repayment benefits, and \$50 million for the Pilot would benefit as many as 1,000 infectious diseases (ID) professionals. More importantly, this funding will serve as a significant incentive to enter the fields of public health and ID within the upcoming educational, training and recruitment processes.

The public health workforce – the backbone of our nation's governmental public health system – is facing a crisis that predates COVID-19 but has worsened during the pandemic. Between 2016 and 2019, local health departments lost 21% of their workforce capacity. A 2022 [analysis](#) found that nearly one-third of the public health workforce is considering leaving their agency in the next year, leaving the field with a severe lack of capacity to respond to continuing and emerging public health emergencies, and public health challenges faced at the community level. In addition to the clear need to strengthen recruitment into public health careers, loan repayment can help retain current staff long term, ensuring the resources spent training these individuals are leveraged to build a long-term, robust, and diverse public health workforce.

At the same time, the ID workforce that works in collaboration with public health is also in crisis. Workforce shortages coupled with lower pay and a lack of financial incentives persist among ID health care professionals, including ID physicians, clinical microbiologists, nurses, pharmacists, physician assistants, and infection preventionists: 80% of U.S. counties lack even one ID physician, 25% of health care facilities have reported a vacant infection preventionist position, and a 2019 [survey](#) showed a vacancy rate for clinical microbiologists of over 10%. The Pilot would make this field a more financially

feasible choice for new clinicians and would ensure a more equitable distribution of ID experts across the country, protecting their communities from ID threats and advancing federal initiatives to End the HIV Epidemic and eliminate viral hepatitis.

We are grateful to the Administration for past support of the public health workforce and ID professionals and urge you to include these priorities in the FY24 Budget Request. For additional information, please contact Adriane Casalotti, Chief of Government and Public Affairs, National Association of County and City Health Officials (acasalotti@naccho.org) and Amanda Jezek, Senior Vice President, Public Policy of Government Relations, Infectious Diseases Society of America (ajezek@idsociety.org).

Sincerely,

National Association of County and City Health Officials
Infectious Diseases Society of America
AIDS United
American Academy of HIV Medicine
American Public Health Association
American Society for Microbiology
Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Big Cities Health Coalition
HIV Medicine Association
Trust for America's Health