

**For Immediate Release:  
October 9, 2001**

**Contact: Susan Polan  
202-589-0940**

**HOUSE PANEL APPROVES BIG INCREASES  
FOR PUBLIC HEALTH DEFENSES**

**\$20M for Health Tracking Would Improve Capability to Detect and Respond  
to Conventional and Terrorist Threats to Public Health**

**WASHINGTON DC--** The Trust for America's Health (TFAH) applauds the House Appropriations Committee for taking decisive action today to fortify the nation's public health defenses, including programs that would improve our ability to respond to both chronic disease problems *and* biological or chemical attacks.

The committee's FY '02 Labor-HHS appropriations bill would provide a \$4.1 billion budget for the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which is \$200 million above the 2001 budget and \$380 million more than the President requested. The measure also allocates \$23 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), a \$2.5 billion increase. These levels are particularly gratifying given the competing demands for limited resources.

One of the legislation's most notable highlights is a \$20 million investment in the CDC to lay the groundwork for a nationwide health tracking network. The network would involve local, state and federal public health agencies working in concert to continuously monitor disease rates and environmental hazards down to the community level. Such a network could alert officials to everything from an alarming increase in asthma cases in a particular locale to a sudden uptick in ailments that indicate a possible chemical or biological attack.

"Many members of Congress, Republican and Democrat, long have recognized the multiple benefits of investing in health tracking, but today's heightened concerns about terrorism have made those benefits even clearer," said Shelley Hearne, TFAH's executive director. "The same systems that are needed to cope with day-to-day public health problems also can help us detect and respond to potential terrorist attacks using biological or chemical agents. But in community after community across the country, we have failed to give our public health workers the basic tools they need to prevent health crises."

This appears to be changing, Hearne notes, thanks in no small part to the leadership of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies. The subcommittee's new chairman, Rep. Ralph Regula, R-OH, has taken a keen interest in America's public health infrastructure, working closely with Democratic members, including Reps. Nancy Pelosi, D-CA, and David Obey, D-WI, to build a balanced portfolio of health investments.

However, Hearne noted that the \$20 million should be viewed as a down payment toward the creation of a full-blown nationwide health-tracking network, which would require an estimated \$275 million – less than \$1 for every American.

In addition to the funds for health tracking, public health achievements in the FY '02 Labor-HHS bill include:

- Providing steady funding of \$ 722 million for CDC chronic disease prevention programs. While this is not an increase, many of these initiatives had been slated for cuts in the budget proposed by the Bush administration.
- Boosting bioterrorism preparedness funds for CDC, NIH and HHS by \$100 million to \$393 million, with a significant portion of those funds designed to deal with deficiencies in America's public health infrastructure.
- Increasing support for Community Health Centers by \$150 million to 1.3 billion.
- Providing \$20 million in funding for the Frist-Kennedy Public Health Threats and Emergencies Act, which would allow local, state and federal agencies to assess their capacity to respond to health threats and emergencies.

TFAH urges the full House to approve the legislation, and it urges the Senate to follow suit.

###

More information on health tracking and TFAH's public health initiatives can be found at:  
<http://healthyamericans.org>

*The Trust for America's Health (TFAH) is a non-profit public health advocacy organization taking action to prevent disease and protect the health and safety of our communities. TFAH's objectives are to advocate for health policies that protect our communities' health, develop tools to effectively tackle today's health problems and give everyone the information they need to fight disease.*