



Trust for America's Health Applauds Congress for Bipartisan Introduction of Nationwide Health Tracking Bill

Proposed Legislation before House and Senate would Help Link Diseases and Potential Causes; Strengthen Gaps in Public Health Infrastructure

Media Contacts: Laura Segal, (202) 223-9870 x 278 or lsegal@tfah.org or Michael Earls, (202) 223-9870 x 273 or mearls@tfah.org.

Washington, DC, October 8, 2004 – Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a non-profit, non-partisan public health organization and a leading proponent of nationwide health tracking, commends Congress on the bipartisan introduction of a nationwide health tracking and public health improvement bill. The legislation, introduced by Senators Chafee (R-RI), Clinton (D-NY), and Reid (D-NV), and Representatives Pelosi (D-CA), Slaughter (D-NY), and Tubbs Jones (D-OH), would expand the current pilot initiative and increase the public health system's ability to prevent illnesses.

"The Coordinated Health Tracking Act of 2004 would be a giant step towards a 21st century public health system" said Shelley Hearne, TFAH's Executive Director. "A network of information linking health and environmental data would help identify disease causes, inform health strategies, cut medical costs, and save lives."

The proposed legislation before both Houses of Congress would:

- Fully fund the Environmental Public Health Tracking Program at CDC, which currently has limited funding to support selected demonstration projects,
- Establish five regional biomonitoring laboratories throughout the nation to test for human exposures to toxins, and
- Address public health workforce shortages by developing centers of excellence at selected Schools of Public Health, establishing a scholarship program for public health students, and creating an applied epidemiology fellowship program.

Chronic diseases, including cancer, asthma, birth defects, and Parkinson's, are the number one killer of Americans, responsible for seven in ten deaths in the United States. It is estimated that chronic diseases cost our nation more than \$750 billion each year. A nationwide health tracking system would allow for better tracking of rates of chronic diseases and potential linkages to environmental exposures, including chemicals, toxins, and other agents.

"A health tracking network is crucial for the range of health threats we face" said Hearne. "Such a network would not only help fight chronic diseases like cancer and asthma, but could also pinpoint a surge in illnesses that might indicate the occurrence of a biological or chemical attack."

TFAH also released today an updated version of a national map featuring known and suspected disease clusters and hotspots, available at: <http://healthyamericans.org/state/clusters/>. Health tracking is essential to finding answers to disease cluster concerns.

“A Nationwide Health Tracking Network would help answer questions about what causes cancer and the multitude of questions that communities have about rates and patterns of disease, and how our environment is impacting these rates,” said Terry Nordbrock, co-founder of Families Against Cancer & Toxics (FACT), an organization of parents of children with cancer in Southeast Arizona. “It would provide valuable information that would help health officials investigating concerns in communities, like the one here in Sierra Vista, struggling with unusually high rates of diseases like cancer.”

More information about health tracking is available at TFAH’s Web site, www.healthyamericans.org.

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Trust for America’s Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority.