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Prevention fund needs our support

The Prevention and Public Health Fund, created by passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, is the nation's first mandatory funding stream dedicated to improving the public's health. By law, the Fund must be used "to provide for expanded and sustained national investment in prevention and public health programs to improve health and help restrain the rate of growth in private and public health care costs."

Our state and society face significant health and fiscal challenges that could be mitigated by a better and more reliably funded public health system – the Prevention and Public Health Fund represents a vital part of ongoing efforts to create such a system.

To date, the Fund has invested in a broad range of evidence-based work in Nevada and other states, including community and clinical prevention initiatives; infectious disease surveillance and tracking; a wide-range of state and local immunization and screening activity; and tobacco prevention and control efforts. Over the next 10 years, the Fund will invest a total of \$12.5 billion in cross-cutting, upstream prevention efforts that have the potential to transform our public health system – a pittance compared to the \$3 trillion annually spent by our largely downstream, sick-care system.

Since 2010, Nevada has received more than \$14.2 million from the Fund during tough fiscal times for state and county health agencies. This investment is already at work, providing much needed resources for prevention programs to combat the leading causes of chronic disease, disability and death across the state.

For example, the Clark County School District has utilized \$2.4 million in Fund-supported Community Transformation Grants to increase physical activity, nutrition, and tobacco-prevention efforts to improve outcome measures established by the reform law among CCSD students and staff. The Fund has also underwritten over \$1.2 million to support statewide capacity in Nevada to improve the ability of local health departments, like the Washoe County Health District, to detect and respond to infectious disease outbreaks, including those caused by influenza and food-borne pathogens, and to prevent hospital and other healthcare-associated infections.

This year, for the first time, Congress fully allocated \$1 billion to the Fund, ensuring that the money is used as intended to improve the future of our nation's health. However, over the past couple of years, the Fund has been slashed as a result of sequestration cuts and billions diverted to offset a schedule cut Medicare physician payments and other unintended uses.

As Congress returns to Washington from its summer recess, members of the Nevada delegation have an obligation to ensure the law reaches its full potential and that dedicated investments in public health supported by the Fund are maintained at their intended levels.

Otherwise, Nevada stands lose ground on progress already brought about by the Fund. With so much at stake, we cannot afford to allow Congress and election-year politics to chip away at essential funding for public health.

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