

To ensure that our nation has a public health system that can rapidly and reliably detect, respond to, and prevent adverse outcomes to all populations in the event of public health emergencies, the immediate availability of funding is crucial. Even when Congress acts to provide emergency funding, that money can take months to actually reach state and local public health agencies. When dealing with a public health emergency, the need to address the problem is immediate, and states may not have the ability to bridge their own funding until that money is released. In 1978, Congress recognized the need to assist state and local governmental response to natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and hurricanes by establishing FEMA – the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The time has come to expanding this approach to providing timely federal assistance to distinct public health activities to further protect the well-being of all Americans by maintaining a stable public health emergency fund.

Over the past few years the number of high profile public health emergencies has vastly increased. In the last year, public health agencies effectively responded to major events, including severe weather, a serious HIV outbreak in Indiana, highly pathogenic avian influenza, wildfires, active shooter events, unsafe water supplies, vaccine preventable disease outbreaks, and preparations for national security actions. Public health preparedness plays a major role in all these events, and state public health agencies respond to health threats every day. Due to federal investments in public health preparedness, states were able to protect lives during these events and minimize health risks to these communities.

There comes a time, however, for an unprecedented response to public health emergencies. We experienced these responses during Ebola's threat to our homeland, a few years earlier with the massive H1N1 response, and also with preparing for and reacting to the devastation of superstorm Sandy. All these events were aided by Congressional response with emergency funding. But with all of these responses, highlighted by the current response to Zika, supplemental appropriations are often delayed by months, and precious time and effort that can lessen the impact of these events is lost. This is why a public health emergency fund is needed for rapid, bridge funding to immediately respond to any public health threat.

Based on the 1983 law, we believe that the Public Health Emergency Fund would greatly assist states in dealing with immediate emergencies. Having such a fund would significantly take the burden off of states in keeping their residents safe. Key issues around such a fund should include:

- Allowing the Secretary of Health and Human Services to designate a public health emergency after consultation with state and local health officials and relevant federal officials.

- Coordination between the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Homeland Security when applicable to enable both agencies to engage in a unified response.
- Once a public health emergency is designated, money would be immediately released to states to coordinate the necessary response in the affected jurisdictions.
- Funding will remain until expended, or until the emergency is deemed terminated, and not tied to a particular fiscal year.
- Funding should not be limited for one particular emergency response, but be available for a wide-range of emergencies including, but not limited to, severe weather and its overall impact, outbreaks of disease, and intentional harm.
- Providing states the flexibility to use the funds as they see fit as they are dealing with their particular response to the emergency.
- Along with flexibility, there should be a system of financial reporting to Congress to ensure accountability, transparency, and the integrity of the fund.

These and other factors should be reasonably considered to protect our nation from natural or man-made disasters. Enabling states to rapidly respond to public health emergencies will undoubtedly save lives, and the ability for states to quickly react will protect populations from needless harm in the otherwise absence of federal assistance.