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**SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES BIG INCREASES
FOR PUBLIC HEALTH DEFENSES**

Senate Urged to Adopt House-Level of Funding for Health Tracking to 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 Senate Appropriations Committee for taking decisive action to fortify the nation's public health defenses, but also urges the full Senate to adopt the House-approved level of funding for 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 \$4.4 billion budget for the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which is above the 2001 budget and the President's request. The measure also allocates \$23.7 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), a \$3.4 billion increase. These levels are particularly gratifying given the competing demands for limited resources.

One of the legislation's most notable highlights is a \$15 million investment in the CDC to lay the groundwork for a nationwide health tracking network. The House of Representatives has already approved \$20 million for the network, which 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."

Hearne noted that the leadership of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies is building a balanced portfolio of health investments. "Senator Harkin (D-IA), Senator Reid (D-NV) and Senator Specter (R-PA) have clearly made a commitment to improving public health and this legislation is proof positive. We hope they will also see the good work of the House of Representatives and agree to higher funding levels for health tracking, so we can get to work that much faster on identifying public health needs," added Hearne.

Hearne called the \$15 million a down payment toward the creation of a fully developed 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 Senate FY '02 Labor-HHS bill include:

- Funding of \$701.7 million for CDC chronic disease prevention programs. While this is not an increase over FY01, many of these initiatives had been slated for cuts in the proposed budget.
- Providing \$1 million for bioterrorism preparedness for CDC. Members of the committee noted that this funding begins to deal with deficiencies in America's public health infrastructure and will be supplemented with significant funding expected in separate legislation.
- Increasing support for Community Health Centers by \$150 million to \$1.3 billion.
- Providing funding for the new 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.

The Senate and House conference committee is expected to consider the spending bill in the upcoming weeks.

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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.