

TRANSFORMING

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MQ Foundation
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MQmentalhealth.org

May 22, 2019

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr. Chairman

Committee on Energy and Commerce U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden

Ranking Member

Committee on Energy and Commerce U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member Walden,

On behalf of the MQ Foundation and members of our community of mental health researchers, we applaud efforts to strengthen the public health core infrastructure through the Leading Infrastructure for Tomorrow's (LIFT) America Act.

We appreciate that the LIFT America Act recognizes the importance of enhancing and modernizing the public health infrastructure at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and at state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments and strongly urge you to approve the funding requested to update and strengthen the data science capabilities of these institutions. It is critical that the core public health infrastructure is interoperable and keeps pace with technological advancements. **This bold initiative will allow the public health community to detect public health threats including substance abuse and suicide sooner and will help us save lives.**

An interoperable public health surveillance system is critical to effective and timely public health response, prevention, and policy development. We strongly support the LIFT America Act's provisions to support the modernization of data exchange with interoperable IT systems and ensure public health professionals are equipped with the training and skills to implement, operate, and maintain these systems, interpret complex data through predictive analytics and informatics, and deploy actionable interventions. These improvements are sorely needed because the nation's public health surveillance ecosystem is falling behind. Currently, data sharing between health care providers, epidemiologists, public health laboratorians, and vital records registrars depends heavily on time-consuming manual and paper-based methods and processes. Phone calls, faxes, and emails create enormous administrative burdens and leave room for data entry errors and incomplete information that compromise data quality and impede timely data exchange. The consequences of inefficient and slow data sharing are significant: delayed detection and response, lost time, lost opportunities, and lost lives.

Modernizing public health data exchange and expanding a highly-skilled workforce will increase data quality and timeliness, decrease administrative burden, improve connectivity and coordination between health care and public health, and ensure sensitive health data is protected from cybersecurity threats. Investments today will update antiquated systems and allow public health to be at the nexus of data, technology, and innovation to maximize progress and resources. The LIFT America Act would support public health taking advantage of technological advances to expand and update vital records systems, enhance nationally notifiable disease surveillance, support electronic laboratory ordering and reporting, expand the number of hospitals conducting syndromic surveillance, automate disease reports directly from electronic health records to support electronic case reporting, develop highly skilled public health informaticians and data scientists, and improve data security. This commitment to transform today's public health surveillance system will make a lasting, positive impact on Americans' health.

Thank you for your leadership and vision to improve the public health infrastructure. The mental health community appreciates all you do to help us improve systems.

If you have any questions, please contact our representative, Emily Holubowich at eholubowich@dc-crd.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cynthia Joyce", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cynthia Joyce
Executive Director
MQ Foundation

CC: John Herrmann
Chairman and President
MQ Foundation