

Chairman H. Morgan Griffith Opening Statement
Subcommittee on Health
Healthier America: Legislative Proposals to Improve Public Health
Wednesday, April 15, 2026 – 10:15 AM

As prepared for delivery.

Today we will examine policy proposals to improve public health.

Public health initiatives are essential to improving health outcomes, lowering long-term costs, and moving toward a healthier nation.

Investments in initiatives such as disease surveillance, community-based programs, and health education enable more effective responses to both everyday health challenges and emerging threats.

Early detection saves lives. By prioritizing prevention, we can help individuals make informed choices and empower them to act sooner.

Over time, these efforts also help reduce strain on our health care system by decreasing avoidable hospitalizations and emergency care.

Today we will be discussing ten bills that address the public health and wellness of our country.

One of these bills is H.R. 4348, led by Representative Chris Smith from New Jersey and Representative Doggett of Texas. This bill would reauthorize the Kay Hagan Tick Act, which developed a national strategy to address vector-borne diseases like Lyme disease, improve surveillance, and coordinate federal programs.

Representative Smith has been a Lyme champion for decades, as New Jersey is one of the states most impacted by the disease.

The bill is named after Senator Kay Hagan, who passed away from complications of a tick-borne virus.

Tick-borne illnesses are spreading quickly in our country.

There are many tick-borne illnesses, and we have only scratched the surface in understanding these diseases that continue to have devastating impacts on our communities.

Virginia consistently reports some of the highest annual rates of Lyme disease in the United States, with my district of Southwest Virginia having some of the highest rates of Lyme and other tick-borne illnesses.

Virginia Tech in my district is doing research on of Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses in our communities.

We will also be discussing H.R. 8205, the Accelerating Access to Critical Therapies (ACT) for ALS Act led by Representative Ken Calvert from California and Representative Quigley from Illinois, which would reauthorize the ACT for ALS program that supports initiatives to accelerate research and expand access to investigational treatments for people living with ALS and other neurodegenerative diseases.

Although progress has been made, there is still no cure for ALS.

A swimming friend of mine in Roanoke Valley, Rob Lawson, died from his battle with ALS in 2022.

Former Virginia House of Delegates Republican Raymond R. Robrecht, who was one of my mentors, died from ALS in 1994.

Eric Dane, best known as Dr. Sloan, also known as “McSteamy,” in the show Grey’s Anatomy, came to many of our offices last year to advocate for ALS and share his experience. Unfortunately, he lost his battle with the disease earlier this year.

We hear these heartbreaking stories too often in our communities, as this is regrettably the reality for many who are diagnosed with rare diseases and neurodegenerative diseases.

I trust reauthorizing this bill can help bring hope to those families afflicted by it.

Another bill is H.R. 3747, the Accelerating Access to Dementia and Alzheimer's Provider Training (AADAPT) Act led by Representative Balderson from Ohio and Representative Barragan from California.

This legislation would reauthorize a program that helps increase access to specialty care services in rural and underserved areas by training clinicians through Project ECHO models, of which there are multiple in Virginia.

Even though the language of some of the community health center bills are still being negotiated, I would be remiss not to mention their critical role that community health centers play in supporting our nation's health.

Many of the other bills we will examine place a strong emphasis on prevention, physical activity and nutrition education, research and innovation, workforce development, and other initiatives to uplift our nation's public health.

I am eager to hear from our witnesses about how we can work to improve health outcomes across the country.