



February 8, 2021

Dear Senator/Representative:

As you begin the 117th Congress – in the midst of a respiratory pandemic that has taken the lives of almost 500,000 people in the United States, the prioritization of lung health is more critical than ever before. The American Lung Association calls on you to usher the country onto a path of healing by expanding access to quality and affordable healthcare, strengthening clean air protections, addressing climate change, bolstering public health infrastructure, reducing tobacco use and working to put an end to lung disease, including COVID-19.

The urgency of bold action cannot be overstated. The nation's lungs are facing multiple threats all at once – from COVID-19, worsening air pollution, the youth tobacco epidemic, millions of Americans losing their healthcare, and more. Lung disease remains the fourth leading cause of death in the United States, one in four high school students uses tobacco products, and lung cancer continues to be the leading cancer killer among men and women. Nearly half of the U.S. population lives in counties receiving failing grades for air pollution, leading to illness and premature death. Finally, as hundreds of thousands of individuals cope with the lingering effects of a COVID-19 diagnosis, affordable, accessible and adequate healthcare has never been more important.

Below is an overview of lung health priorities for which we ask for your support:

Prioritize responding to the COVID-19 crisis, including supporting state and local governments, tribes, and territories.

More than 400,000 Americans have lost their lives to COVID-19, leaving family members, friends, colleagues and communities with immeasurable loss. The pandemic that has ravaged the country for nearly a year now has highlighted the perennial lack of funds and resources for the nation's public health infrastructure.

- While we deeply appreciated the emergency funds appropriated to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) over the course of the last year, the country needs to see robust and sustained investments in its public health infrastructure in order to ensure that we can conquer the current pandemic, respond to future public health emergencies, and prevent and manage disease. In doing so, Congress can save millions of lives.
- State and local governments, tribes, and territories need support and investment from the federal government to respond to the COVID-19 crisis for their residents, from vaccine education and distribution to enforcement of safety protocols.
- Prior to the pandemic, just barely over half of the population in the United States benefited from a comprehensive public health system. Every community needs a public health system that addresses maternal and child health, infectious and chronic disease prevention, emergency preparedness and other key activities. At a time when we need it most, the backbone of the public health system, composed of nurses, behavioral health staff, community health workers, environmental health workers, epidemiologists, health educators, nutritionists, lab workers and others, is collapsing. Congress must incentivize and enable sustained growth of a public health workforce across this nation.
- All individuals, including those who are underinsured or uninsured, should have access to coverage of COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccines at no cost. Congress must work to close coverage gaps and ensure that cost is not a barrier to COVID-19 care for anyone in the United States.

Restore and strengthen access to quality and affordable healthcare.

The ongoing pandemic has strongly emphasized what we have already known: that access to affordable and adequate healthcare is essential for all. Individuals at risk of or dealing with lung disease rely on health insurance to provide necessary care and services, particularly during a pandemic in which these individuals face greater risk of serious illness. While the country has made great strides toward expanding access to quality and affordable healthcare, more work is needed.

- Medicaid must be restored and strengthened. Congress must increase support to state Medicaid programs during public health and economic crises to protect access to comprehensive coverage. Congress must also renew incentives for Medicaid expansion for the remaining states that have yet to do so.
- The Affordable Care Act (ACA) must be expanded and improved. Congress must restore funding for outreach and enrollment, improve affordability by expanding the availability and generosity of advanced premium tax credits and fixing the family glitch and ensure that critical patient protections are maintained and enforced.
- “Skimpy” plans do not meet the standards of the ACA and do not provide the quality, affordable coverage that patients need. Congress must take action to limit the sale and purchase of inadequate health insurance, such as short-term, limited-duration and association health plans as well as healthcare sharing ministries.
- To strengthen the Medicare program, Congress must enact policies to improve patient access to clinically appropriate supplemental oxygen and protect patients against inappropriate barriers to care. Congress must also improve affordability, such as by restructuring Part D cost-sharing to lower patients’ out-of-pocket costs and providing a smoothing mechanism to allow patients to pay over time.
- Health equity must be achieved. Congress must take steps to eliminate disparities in healthcare coverage, address social determinants of health and work to eliminating health disparities across the nation.

Through these actions we can work to ensure that all lungs receive the care they need.

Respond to the climate crisis with policies that maximize benefits to health and prioritize equity.

Climate change is a health emergency, and air pollution contributes to immediate lung health risks. As the country continues to experience hotter temperatures, more extreme storms and flooding, worsened wildfires and more harmful air pollution from smoke and smog, the time is now to act on climate.

- Burning fossil fuels – including in power plants and vehicles – drives climate change and produces other dangerous air pollutants at the same time, causing immediate health harms. Congress must invest in and prioritize clean, non-combustion, renewable energy and energy efficiency, as well as speed the transition to zero-emission, electric vehicles.
- Congress must prioritize the most polluted communities for cleanup. The benefits of clean air programs have for too long left behind communities near the dirtiest power plants and busiest highways and ports, particularly for communities of color and low-income communities.
- Keeping the Clean Air Act fully in place is critical for equitably reducing air pollution and addressing climate change. The nation needs both congressional action and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) action to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect public health. Congress must not block or weaken EPA’s authority.

Prevent Youth and Young Adults from Starting to Use Tobacco and Help People End their Tobacco Addiction

Tobacco kills approximately 480,000 Americans each year and costs the nation upwards of \$332 billion annually in lost productivity and healthcare costs. One in four high school students uses at least one tobacco product, and cigar use by high school boys is also at dangerous levels and in some states, is higher than cigarette use. Flavored tobacco products fuel youth initiation.

- Congress and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) must act to remove all flavored tobacco products from the marketplace, including menthol cigarettes, flavored cigars and e-cigarettes. In 2020, the House passed the “Protecting American Lungs and Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic” which would prohibit the sale of all flavored products and provide resources for public education campaigns.
- Congress must pass the “Quit for COVID-19” Act, which extend comprehensive tobacco cessation benefits to all adult Medicaid recipients.
- Congress must increase federal funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)’s Office on Smoking and Health to help states combat youth e-cigarette epidemic, and to further strengthen its “Tips from Former Smokers” Campaign.

Provide Forgivable Loans or Grants to Charities, Including Mid-Sized Nonprofits

Nonprofits with more than 500 employees have not been eligible for PPP or other grants or forgivable loans. Restrictions based on number of employees and gross-receipt declines in the Paycheck Protection Program and the Employee Retention Tax Credit do not make sense in the nonprofit context. Nonprofits, including the American Lung Association, are frequently asked to provide additional services without corresponding increases in resources.

- We urge Congress to expand the Paycheck Protection Program and make it more applicable to nonprofits in order to provide forgivable loans to nonprofits of all sizes and without regard to gross receipts.

Thank you in advance for your commitment to protect the lungs of this country. As the national trusted champion on lung health, the American Lung Association welcomes the opportunity to work together to reduce the enormous burden of lung disease and to prevent future public health emergencies.

Sincerely,



Harold P. Wimmer
National President and CEO