



Building Advocacy for Policy Change to Improve the Nation's Health

Executive Summary

From 2002 to 2012, the Washington-based nonpartisan advocacy organization, [Trust for America's Health](#) (TFAH), worked with RWJF and a broad coalition of partners in public health, health care, philanthropy, and business to build consensus and support for a modernized public health system that is effective, well-funded, and accountable to its stakeholders.

During that period, TFAH focused attention on key public health issues by convening consensus-building forums, educating federal, state, and local policy-makers, the media, and the general public, and producing strategic reports on topics that include emergency preparedness, the obesity epidemic, injury prevention, and the flu pandemic.

The advocacy efforts of TFAH and its coalition partners helped inform the health care reform debate and included recommendations that were ultimately incorporated into the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. After the passage of the legislation, TFAH focused on implementation and also served as a watchdog, holding government institutions accountable for assuring quality public health programs and policies.

[Read the full report.](#)
[Learn more about the program here.](#)

CONTEXT

The nation's public health infrastructure is in dire need of overhaul, according to the Institute of Medicine. Among the findings of its 2002 report, *The Future of the Public's Health in the 21st Century*,¹ the nation has outdated health information systems and technologies, an insufficient and inadequately trained public health workforce, antiquated laboratory capacity, a lack of real-time surveillance and epidemiological systems, and ineffective and fragmented communications networks.

Modernizing the chronically underfunded and outdated public health system is essential to ensure the well-being of families and communities. By controlling the skyrocketing costs of health care through a focus on prevention, a revitalized public health system can also improve workplace productivity, U.S. competitiveness, and national security.

THE PROGRAM

From 2002 to 2012, RWJF awarded TFAH eight grants, totaling some \$20 million, to support its role as an advocate for a revitalized public health system, and to build its organizational capacity. The eighth grant continues through mid-2014 to support TFAH in advocating for the effective implementation of the Affordable Care Act and protecting some of its key provisions, such as the Public Health and Prevention Fund.²

TFAH aims its core message—that prevention and public health are central to the well-being of families, communities, workplace productivity, U.S. competitiveness, and national security—primarily at federal policy-makers.

Its information and advocacy model has the following components:

- Translating existing health-related data and research for a broader audience
- Building consensus for a stronger public health system through meetings and forums with diverse stakeholders
- Producing strategic reports that lay out policy options and offer recommendations about important public health issues
- Conducting strategic communications and educating policy-makers by disseminating reports, action agendas, polling and other information

¹ Executive Summary available [online](#).

² Grant ID# 70002 was an ad hoc grant made outside of this authorization. It runs until July 14, 2014. A description of the results of work done under this grant will be added to this report when it closes.

KEY RESULTS

- **In 2006 and 2007, TFAH brought together public and private sector leaders to build consensus around an agenda for modernizing the public health system.** Over time, TFAH built a coalition of some 770 organizations, initially to promote public health modernization and then to strengthen support for health reform, the 2010 Affordable Care Act. Milestones included:
 - Convening the Public Health Leadership Initiative, comprised of 17 leaders from health, philanthropy, business, and government, to develop a vision and framework for a revitalized public health system. Representatives included the American Public Health Association, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the American Medical Association.
 - Developing the Action Plan for Healthy People in Healthy Communities, which made recommendations for modernizing the public health system
 - Agreeing on a consensus statement, *Our Vision for a Healthier America*, which was signed in October 2008 by more than 140 leading health organizations, including AARP, the American Red Cross, and the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors
- **With an eye to helping shape the agenda for health care reform, TFAH developed publications and engaged in advocacy efforts that were ultimately reflected in the public health provisions of the Affordable Care Act.** These included:
 - *Blueprint for a Healthier America* in October 2008, which had specific recommendations for improving the public health infrastructure by focusing on prevention and preparedness. Strategies included a stable funding stream for core public health functions and setting realistic short-term and long-term health goals for the country.
 - *Prevention for a Healthier America*, which documented the business case for prevention and communicated that message to policy-makers. The 2008 report presented findings that a \$10 per-person per-year investment in proven community-based programs to increase physical activity, improve nutrition, and prevent smoking and other tobacco use could save the country billions in health care costs over a 20-year period.

- **Following passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), TFAH and its partner coalition advocated for the effective implementation of its prevention provisions.**

An important focus was to protect key provisions, such as the Prevention and Public Health Fund, against the budget-cutting efforts that began shortly after the act's passage. Project staff:

- Convened meetings of experts who highlighted the value of cross-cutting approaches to prevention, public health department accreditation, and investing in best practices
- Disseminated information via the TFAH [website](#), which receives between 600,000 and nearly 2.5 million visitors a month
- Shared news on important activities, materials and events related to prevention and public health, including implementation of the ACA, through a *Wellness and Prevention Health Reform Digest* reaching 8,500 public health leaders as of March 2013
- Updated the business case for prevention with three new reports: *Healthier Americans for a Healthier Economy*; *The New Prevention Fund*; and *Bending the Obesity Cost Curve*
- Played a leadership role on the Advisory Group on Prevention, Health Promotion, and Integrative and Public Health. President Obama appointed TFAH Executive Director Jeffrey Levi, PhD, to serve as a member of the advisory group, and U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin, MD, MBA, appointed him chair.

- **TFAH worked with a series of partners to develop public education reports and analyses and advocacy efforts around the need to bolster public health preparedness and pandemic flu readiness.**

Information and recommendations in these reports were reflected in development of the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza in 2005, \$7.1 billion in supplemental funding for pandemic influenza preparedness to support the plan, including provisions in the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act of 2006 (PAHPA), and more than \$8 billion in emergency appropriations during the H5N1 pandemic flu outbreak in 2008.

- **TFAH reports, meetings, and briefings helped educate policy-makers, the media, and the public about key public health issues and make the case for improving the nation's public health system.**

TFAH delivers every report to all members of Congress and holds follow-up, one-on-one meetings to discuss policy recommendations with officials. Topics included emergency preparedness, obesity, public health investment, food safety, and injury prevention.

- **TFAH launched the Advocates for a Healthier America e-advocacy network in January 2006.**

The user-friendly, online action center allows activists and advocates to help determine public health preparedness and disease prevention national priorities

THE PROGRAM CONTINUES

In July 2012, RWJF awarded TFAH a two-year renewal grant so that it can continue advocating for a stronger federal commitment to prevention and public health, the importance of protecting the Affordable Care Act's Prevention and Public Health Fund, and the importance of core funding for the CDC and prevention-related programs elsewhere in government.

Educating policy-makers, the media, and the public also remains a program priority, and TFAH will continue to produce and disseminate reports and briefs. In 2013, TFAH will prepare a transition report for the Obama administration, members of Congress, and other stakeholders that analyzes changes in the structure and function of the public health system since the 2008 *Blueprint for a Healthier America*.

Program Management

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