

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 27, 2020

Contact: Erin Morton

Voice: 202.484.1100

E-mail: emorton@dc-crd.com

Washington, D.C. – Together, the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE), Healthcare Information & Management Systems Society (HIMSS), National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), and National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems (NAPHSIS) issued the following statement in response to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act:

We applaud members of Congress for providing \$500 million for the Data Modernization Initiative at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that will transform public health data systems and save lives.

The nation faces an unprecedented challenge to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, more than ever, it is critical to have a strong public health surveillance system that detects and facilitates immediate responses and containment of emerging health threats. The CDC— together with state, local, territorial, and tribal health departments—have taken important steps to improve the nation’s public health data infrastructure, but due to funding shortages, this has often been in a piecemeal approach.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed gaps in our nation’s outdated public health data systems and a workforce struggling to keep up. The United States currently relies on error-prone, sluggish and burdensome manual and paper-based data exchange methods such as faxing and phone calls to share critical public health data, especially with the health care sector. Simply put, the virus is moving faster than the data and when data move more slowly than diseases, the American people suffer. We are watching as our leaders struggle to make critical decisions without complete data.

An integrated, high-speed, networked health system—from laboratories to health care facilities to public health authorities—with fast and reliable data is necessary in order to protect Americans from COVID-19 and future health threats. Modernization is not just network upgrades; it is a commitment to building and sustaining a world-class data workforce and data systems that are ready for the next public health emergency. The funding provided in the CARES Act is an enterprise-level commitment to build a public health data superhighway of the 21st Century to speed the transmission of accurate, complete data.

We look forward to working with Congress to ensure sustained annual funding for CDC’s Data Modernization Initiative and with CDC in formulating its multi-year implementation plan.

####