



Borrowing from the Public Health 3.0 report, *"Public health is what we do together as a society to ensure the conditions in which everyone can be healthy. Though there are many important sectors and institutions with a key role to play, the governmental public health infrastructure is an essential part of a strong public health system."* As a corollary – ACPM adds that a strong public health system is an essential part of a strong, resilient nation.

**Preparedness** – building a robust public health infrastructure as a preventive measure for what's coming next – is timely in the current crisis and critical for avoiding future ones.

There is an enormous cost to neglecting public health in both human and financial terms. The next public health disasters are already here, eclipsed by the COVID-19 pandemic: health manifestations of climate change on infectious disease patterns and the ongoing opioid crisis. And future pandemics are looming somewhere over the horizon.

Ensuring prevention and public health are a cornerstone element for every medical student and that preventive medicine residency programs are fully funded are vital steps in supporting a well-trained and fully operational health care workforce.

## The Role of Public Health

**Public health, when working well, is invisible.** However, when a public health system is chronically underfunded, understaffed, under-trained, and under supported, the consequences are immense and visible. The COVID-19 pandemic has made our nation more aware than ever the important role public health plays in surveillance and screening to contain outbreaks, and the distribution of vaccines and other essential resources to control them. The health care community also has become more attuned to the role of social determinants of health as communities of color and underserved urban and rural areas have faced far more severe consequences of the outbreak than the population as a whole. Public health has an important role to play in health equity, integrating it into every facet of healthcare delivery.



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Health includes complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Prevention is a key element of this and a critical component to the future of life in America. Public health is more than just pandemic response. A prevention-focused public health infrastructure can also help us better prepare to stop chronic disease, improve mental health and wellbeing, reduce and reverse the consequences of climate change and more.



## Preparing for the Future

Governmental public health has been underfunded for decades, with the loss of tens of thousands of the public health workforce. Reversing this trend in terms of agency (CDC, NIH, HRSA, state and local health departments, etc.) funding will be essential to establishing a prepared and resilient healthcare system.



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One of the most obvious paths forward can be found by looking back. As part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) the federal government had an approach toward prevention that was a strong foundation – the National Prevention Council, the National Prevention Strategy (NPS) and the Prevention Fund. The potential of these elements went unrealized in implementation. However, within the framework of the NPS there is great documentation of an approach that incorporated the partnerships necessary to utilize the power in prevention. The NPS also looked at not only the partners in prevention but also the necessary actions needed to realize prevent-focused society – beginning at the individual level, incorporating the family, spreading to the community, to the nation, and to the globe.

Another important action is ensuring the support for a well-trained and fully operational public health workforce. Prevention and public health need to be introduced early in training as a cornerstone for every medical student, and preventive medicine residency programs need to be sufficiently funded to train incoming public health specialists and prepare physicians with a well-rounded skillset to address population health needs. Making the most of the experience and learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic will require supporting these critical training programs to accept and educate an incoming groundswell of new students and future physicians that fully understand the deep ties between public health and the preparedness and resilience of society.



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Find out how you can invest in prevention today, visit [acpm.org/initiatives/power-of-prevention](https://acpm.org/initiatives/power-of-prevention)