



News from Frank Pallone, Jr.

New Jersey Congressman, Sixth District



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 24, 2009

CONTACT: Tali Israeli
(202) 225-4671

PALLONE STATEMENT AT HEALTH REFORM HEARING ON PUBLIC HEALTH

Washington, D.C. --- U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, gave the following opening statement this morning at the fourth in a series of hearings focused on making health care work for American families. Today's hearing addresses the need to bolster the public health system, which will be a vital component to making health reform sustainable and improving health outcomes.

"Good morning. Today the Subcommittee is meeting for the 4th hearing in the 'Making Health Care Work for American Families' series. To date, we have heard about the failings of our current health care system, the need to increase access to care and improve our primary care workforce, and the mechanisms that can make health care coverage affordable for all. In today's hearing however, we are going to explore a less often discussed, yet extremely vital aspect of health reform; and that is public health.

"Health reform isn't just about improving coverage and access; it's also about making our Nation healthier. We spend more than any other country on health care and still we have higher morbidity and mortality rates than any other industrialized nation. More than half of our population suffers from at least one chronic condition, which not only increases our health care costs but also lowers our productivity. This is simply not sustainable, especially in these difficult economic times.

"What is frustrating is that these diseases, for the most part, are preventable. Too many people are dying of illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory diseases, and diabetes-related illnesses. And if the current obesity epidemic continues on the path it is on now, we will see even further increases in many of these diseases.

"In New Jersey, 14 percent of our children are clinically overweight and this epidemic is obvious nationwide. A report conducted by the Trust for America's Health in 2008 highlighted all potential problems these children will have to face during the course of their lifetime. Childhood obesity can lead to a myriad of health problems including high blood pressure, type two diabetes, joint problems and depression, just to name a few. This epidemic alone has the potential to cripple our health care system if we do not take measures to address it.

"Providing all Americans with health care coverage and improving access to care will address some of these issues. However, bolstering the public health system will be the vital component to making health reform sustainable and improving health outcomes. We must start investing in the prevention of these horrible diseases, rather than just focusing on those who are already sick. This paradigm shift in our resource allocation could potentially save the system billions of dollars per year, not to mention the benefits to patients.

"Public health means improving the quality of life for individual people, communities, and our society as a whole. Many of the federal, state, and local public health initiatives have already had huge impacts on our society's health. Diseases that once were life-threatening are now all but extinct thanks to vaccination efforts. Smoke-free environments have already had an impact on the rates of smoke-related illnesses and the community-based prevention initiatives supported by the Centers for Disease Control have already shown great results in increasing healthy lifestyle awareness and adherence. It is our responsibility in Congress to ensure that they have the resources they need to continue and expand the work they are doing.

"In short, public health ensures that individuals and communities are able to lead healthier lives. We will hear from witnesses today who have dedicated their lives to this noble goal. I would like to welcome and thank you all for coming to testify, and I would especially like to welcome Commissioner Howard. It is wonderful to see you again. I look forward to your testimony and I would like to now recognize Mr. Deal for an opening statement."