



Press Room

Health Official Discusses Building Back Public Health Infrastructure

ARLINGTON, VA (Feb. 24, 2021)—Today, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) member and public health leader Umair Shah, MD, MPH, secretary of the Washington State Department of Health, testified before the House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services Subcommittee. Shah answered questions from members of Congress members in the hearing, “Ready or Not: U.S. Public Health Infrastructure.”

Shah reflected on the impact that underfunding public health has on our COVID-19 response, and how we can build a true 21st-century public health workforce capable of meeting the day-to-day needs of a health department, but also nimble enough to adequately respond to public health emergencies.

“We can only imagine what would happen if spending were doubled on governmental public health activities to 1% of GDP (currently less than 0.5%) not just to address core public health infrastructure, but to implement proven community-based strategies that would equitably improve the health of all Americans,” Shah says. “For now, sustainable, longitudinal federal investment in public health infrastructure is necessary to: 1) ensure foundational public health services for all communities; 2) build a 21st century public health workforce; and 3) modernize public health data systems.”

“A significant effort to rebuild the public health workforce is needed, but that workforce should not just replace lost positions,” Shah says. “Rather, if we are to ‘build back better,’ the public health workforce must be thoughtfully expanded not only to meet the immediate needs to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, but also deal with future and critical prevention efforts whether for communicable disease or beyond.”

For more information and to read the state health official’s testimony, [visit the committee’s website](#).

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ASTHO is the national nonprofit organization representing the public health agencies of the United States, the U.S. territories and Freely Associated States, and the District of Columbia, as well as the more than 100,000 public health professionals these agencies employ. ASTHO members, the chief health officials of these jurisdictions, are dedicated to formulating and influencing sound public health policy and to ensuring excellence in public health practice.

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