

# Iowa View: Ebola shows why public health needs support from feds

By Jeneane Moody 11:05 p.m. CDT October 5, 2014



(Photo: Special to The Register)

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The deadly Ebola outbreak in West Africa has claimed the lives of several thousand people already — and the longer it lasts and farther it spreads, the greater the risk to our health worldwide.

Fortunately, we know that effective public health interventions have stopped Ebola in the past, and a properly funded and trained public health workforce can do it again.

This global emergency is one of countless examples of the importance of ensuring that we have a strong and adequately funded public health system.

Make no mistake: Public health does much more than just thwart global disease outbreaks. In Iowa, public health programs make our communities healthier every day, whether it's protecting us against the harms of tobacco or creating environments to help us eat healthier and become more physically active.

That just scratches the surface.

Yet the United States continues to undervalue the collective health of our communities — perhaps irrevocably — with inadequate funding for proven community-based health programs across the nation and in Iowa.

Nationally, since 2008, we've seen more than 50,000 jobs eliminated from our state and local public health workforce, with many more having been furloughed.

Without a proper budget to address the many public health challenges we face, the net effect will be more premature deaths and disabilities and higher long-term economic and social costs.

That's why it's imperative that Congress prioritize funding for bedrock public health agencies and programs such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Resources and Services Administration, and the Prevention and Public Health Fund.

Unfortunately, Congress continues to put our health in jeopardy when it fails to work together to develop and pass fully thought out annual appropriations bills.

Additionally, annual spending caps — which are further reduced by budget cuts enacted by a law known as sequestration — continue to challenge the ability of public health professionals to prevent and respond to a health emergency, or provide basic public health and preventive services.

And until the spending caps are lifted, sequestration ends, and Congress gets back to the business of passing adequately funded appropriations bills under regular order, vital public health services will remain on the chopping block.

For Iowa's congressional delegation and candidates for public office, the message is clear: The long-term health consequences from budget shortages will far outweigh the short-term savings.

Public health is the shield that protects Iowa from Ebola and many more threats to our individual and collective health and well-being.

Congress should recognize the significant cuts already made to public health and pass a true fiscal year 2015 spending bill that prioritizes these important programs.

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