

Harold P. Wimmer
National President and
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March 8, 2017

The Honorable James Lankford
Chairman
Subcommittee on Regulatory
Affairs and Federal
Management
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Heidi Heitkamp
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Regulatory
Affairs and Federal
Management
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Lankford and Ranking Member Heitkamp:

The American Lung Association calls upon you to ensure the use of sound science to guide public policy and protect the health of all Americans.

Sound science saves lives and must be the foundation of decisions to adopt policy throughout the federal government. It is the backbone of lifesaving work at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and many other agencies that safeguard the health of the American people. Peer-reviewed research about health informs the public and forms the foundation of lifesaving policies.

We urge you to embrace the following principles to guide the use of science in federal policy development:

- **Federal Agencies Must Continue to Make Decisions Based on Peer-Reviewed Science.** Science is the bedrock of sound regulatory decision-making. Peer-reviewed research from private organizations, public charities, research universities, corporations, federal agencies, and others is critical to informing standard-setting and health-protective actions. Key information about each study, including funding and affiliations of researchers, ensures that each can be independently evaluated. Federal agencies, including EPA, FDA, CDC, and NIH, must have access to independent scientific information and advice to inform policy.
- **Scientific Data Should Not Be Subject to Political Editing.** For the sake of public health, science must be uncensored. For example, any political or economic-based suppression or editing of health science at EPA would

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directly contradict EPA's current scientific integrity policy, which prohibits "all EPA employees, including scientists, managers and other Agency leadership from suppressing, altering, or otherwise impeding the timely release of scientific findings or conclusions."

- **Public Access to Science-Based Information is Vital.** Access to accurate information enables members of the public to understand threats and take steps to protect themselves. Resources such as air quality data in specific communities and reports on the impacts of climate change can help members of the public protect themselves. The public not only has a right to know about potential risks to their health, but a *need* to know; for example, accurate air quality data allows a person with asthma to plan to spend more time indoors on a day with high levels of outdoor air pollution. The health of children, seniors and other vulnerable neighbors depends on ready access to information about factors that could impact their lungs.
- **Patient Privacy Must Continue to Be Protected.** Physicians and researchers have a clear legal and ethical obligation to maintain patient privacy. Researchers who evaluate the health impacts of air pollution, for example, must collect sensitive data from participants such as family medical history, geographic location, and personal medical history. Researchers who collect information about tobacco use can aggregate the data to determine patterns, but personal information about specific individuals must remain confidential. Scientists and institutions build in systems to protect this information while still maintaining open access to the collective data. The studies themselves are peer-reviewed and published in transparent processes. However, no way exists to protect patient privacy if the raw patient data are released. The federal government must continue to protect patient privacy by ensuring that patients' sensitive information is never made public – but that does not negate the use of such data to inform policy.
- **Public Funding of Science is Essential.** The federal government must continue to fund core scientific efforts to ensure that public health is protected, as the Clean Air Act and Tobacco Control Act require. Those core efforts must include research investigating the health impacts of air pollution and climate change; the public health impact of tobacco products; epidemiological surveillance data regarding the prevalence and severity of diseases such as asthma, lung cancer, influenza, COPD and pneumonia; research into effective measures to reduce pollution and prevent and treat diseases; and data collection and evaluation of air quality and pollution levels in communities across the nation. These funds must include funding to state and local governments and tribes to collect air quality data affecting their residents and to develop plans to clean up the pollution to protect their health, as well as funding for state and local departments of health to monitor and implement public health interventions. The Federal government must also continue to fund research at NIH and CDC that will continue to lead to life-saving breakthroughs for lung health.



Politics must not be allowed to undermine the integrity of, or access to, scientific data needed to protect public health. The American people depend on our leaders to maintain public access to scientific data and enforce the nation's public health laws based on accurate science. Censoring science will have devastating impacts on the health of the communities our organizations serve. We urge you to embrace the above listed principles to protect the health of all Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harold Wimmer". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light gray rectangular background.

Harold P. Wimmer
National President and CEO

