



211 West Wacker Drive  
Suite 1700  
Chicago, Illinois 60606

toll free 800.331.2020  
local 312.363.6001  
fax 312.363.6052

PreventBlindness.org

October 3, 2017

The Honorable Greg Walden  
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Franke Pallone, Jr.  
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Walden and Ranking Member Pallone:

Prevent Blindness is the nation's leading nonprofit, voluntary organization committed to preventing blindness and preserving sight. Representing millions of people of all ages across the country who live with low vision and vision-related eye diseases as well as individuals working to keep vision healthy for a lifetime, we are committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America and improving the nation's vision and eye health by enhancing state and community capacities through early detection, patient support, care coordination, public policy, advocacy, research, public awareness, and health education.

As the Committee is preparing to consider legislation that would reauthorize numerous public health programs, including the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) that expired on September 30<sup>th</sup>, **we write to convey both our support for the reauthorization of CHIP, as well as our strong opposition to using any portion of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Prevention and Public Health Fund to offset the costs of its reauthorization.** We are very concerned that diminishing the Prevention Fund at a time when nondefense discretionary programs are already facing dramatic cuts in the regular appropriations process will devastate the CDC's capacity to safeguard Americans from dangerous and costly health threats in the present and future.

The Prevention Fund was specifically established to equip states and local governments and nonprofit organizations with the resources that will allow them to confront the public health needs of their own communities. The Prevention Fund, which represents 12% (\$890 million) of the CDC's budget, helps to lower the cost burden of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, across the age continuum through clinical and community-based interventions, provides needed health literacy, and builds local capacity for a strong surveillance infrastructure vital for detecting emerging diseases and health conditions.

The Prevention Fund is a necessary resource for combatting the serious consequence of crippling eye diseases with cost-effective, preventive interventions. In adults, eye health problems are strongly correlated to costly health conditions like diabetes, smoking dependence, depression, and falls. Vision and eye health problems already cost our nation \$145 billion annually, with eye disorders ranking 5th of the top 8 chronic conditions in a Robert Wood Johnson study. Currently, federal investments in preventing vision problems are at a ratio of \$1 for every \$37,720 that vision impairment and eye disease costs our country. Without significant intervention and planning, like the programs and services funded through the Prevention Fund and the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, these costs are expected to increase to \$717 billion by 2050.

Eye diseases in children are common, and directly impact a child's healthy development and ability to learn. 12.1 million children (or about 1 in every 20) have some form of vision problem that impacts early childhood development processes, including motor skills, social and emotional development, and cognition. Vision impairments in children, including amblyopia, strabismus, and/or astigmatism have a direct impact on a child's ability to learn; yet, these common conditions are highly treatable if detected early through the vision screenings and eye examinations provided under CHIP. **Reducing the Prevention Fund to pay for CHIP and public health program reauthorizations is short-sighted and counterproductive to the future of our nation's collective eye health.** We ask you to protect our nation's only dedicated public health investment fund, and pass a CHIP reauthorization apart from offsets to the Prevention Fund and the CDC.

Thank you for consideration of our position. If you should have any questions, please reach out to Sara D. Brown, Director of Government Affairs at (312) 363-6031 or [sbrown@preventblindness.org](mailto:sbrown@preventblindness.org).

Sincerely,

Hugh R. Parry  
President and Chief Executive Officer

cc: House Energy and Commerce Committee