



July 29, 2022

The Honorable Lauren Underwood
U.S. House of Representatives
1130 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ami Bera
U.S. House of Representatives
172 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kathy Castor
U.S. House of Representatives
2052 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
U.S. House of Representatives
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Underwood, Bera, Castor and DeLauro:

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) and the 127,600 family physicians and medical students across the country we represent, I write to offer our support for the *Improving Data Accessibility Through Advancements (DATA) in Public Health Act* (H.R. 8481).

Your legislation would establish data standards to improve the exchange and reporting of electronic health information, including demographic data, and strengthen data sharing processes and coordination between federal agencies to ensure data is collected appropriately and is accessible while maintaining confidentiality and protection. Your bill would also establish an advisory committee, along with a grant program for entities developing best practices in collecting electronic health information and using designated data standards to improve the quality and completeness of data, address health disparities, and improve health outcomes. We appreciate the bill would enable health care providers and academic medical centers to be central to this effort by making them eligible for the grant program.

As outlined in the AAFP's [position paper](#), family physicians play an integral role in achieving public health goals and primary care must be integrated with public health to ensure meaningful improvements in population health. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the vital role primary care plays in an effective public health response. It is essential to continue to improve our nation's public health infrastructure to support strong and efficient data collection and exchange between primary care physician offices and local, state, and national partners.

The AAFP has long [supported](#) efforts to advance data sharing standards and interoperability to improve effective information sharing and coordination for public health purposes. We also appreciate the bill's focus on balancing effective data sharing while limiting burden on physicians, clinicians, and other public health officials.

Improved demographic data collection health for public health purposes would be helpful to understand the various needs across our health care system and better target resources to address disparities in access to health care. If appropriately shared with the patient's care team,

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this information would enable primary care physicians to gain a full view of their patient's health and environment and develop more individualized and comprehensive treatment plans.

Uniform data standards can improve the efficiency of the exchange of electronic health information, case reporting, surveillance, and sharing of test orders and results. For example, immunization information systems (IIS) are an essential tool to facilitate the exchange of health data between physicians and other health care clinicians, but they vary across states in terms of what data are collected and the level of the information reported by various providers. Standardization in the collection and storing of IIS data across states would make IIS more useful, strengthen data sharing, allow for bidirectional exchange between IIS and community immunization providers, including family physicians, and improve interoperability between practice and clinical technologies and public health tools.

We look forward to working with you to modernize and strengthen data sharing processes to meaningfully improve clinical and public health outcomes. If you have any questions, please contact Erica Cischke, Director of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs, at ecischke@aafp.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ada D. Stewart, MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ada D. Stewart, MD, FAAFP
Board Chair, American Academy of Family Physicians