



March 19, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter:

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) supports research to improve health care quality, reduce costs, advance patient safety, decrease medical errors, and broaden access to essential services. While targeted funding increases in recent years have moved AHRQ in the right direction, more core funding is needed to help AHRQ fulfill its mission. To begin to address this problem, the Friends of AHRQ recommends an FY 2010 base funding level of \$405 million, an increase of \$32 million over the FY 2009 level. This increase will preserve AHRQ's current initiatives and get the agency on track to a base budget of \$500 million by 2013.

AHRQ provides the high quality, unbiased information needed to make educated decisions about our health care. For example,

- AHRQ's *National Healthcare Disparities Report* tracks disparities in both quality of and access to health care in the United States and monitors the nation's annual progress toward eliminating these disparities.
- AHRQ's Effective Health Care Program—which evaluates the comparative effectiveness of medical treatments—has already demonstrated its potential to help inform patient and provider decisions—from which medicines to take, to when (and if) to have surgery—ultimately ensuring they get the best care at the best value.

Steady, incremental increases for AHRQ's Effective Health Care Program in recent years, as well as the \$300 million provided to AHRQ in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act as a down payment on health reform will help AHRQ generate more comparative effectiveness research and expand the infrastructure needed to increase capacity to produce this evidence. However, funding for AHRQ's broader research portfolio on health disparities, health care

financing and organization, and access and coverage has languished as funding for AHRQ's base has remained relatively flat. The Friends propose that increases provided to AHRQ in FY 2010 be dedicated to bolstering these other important research topics to balance the recent investments in comparative effectiveness research. Comparative effectiveness research alone will not solve our health system challenges; the full spectrum of health services research on health care costs, quality, and access should be supported as part of broader health reform efforts.

In FY 2009, Congress provided AHRQ \$13 million to reverse a decline in the number of, and funding for, grants that support researcher innovation and career development. The Friends are pleased to report that AHRQ is using this funding for investigator initiated research grants to rejuvenate the free marketplace of ideas through the agency's new Innovations Research Portfolio. The Friends propose that Congress provide additional funding to sustain and expand investigator initiated grants in FY 2010.

The Friends remain deeply concerned about AHRQ's limited investment in training grants for young researchers. Based on data collected by the Coalition for Health Services Research, AHRQ's training grants hit new lows in FY 2009—just 40 awards totaling \$5 million—down from nearly double that amount just two years ago. As the lead agency for health services research, AHRQ should be the leader in developing the next generation of health services researchers. The Friends hope Congress will provide AHRQ more funding in FY 2010 for training grants to ensure the field's capacity to respond to the growing public and private sector demand for health services research.

The Friends of AHRQ recommends an FY 2010 core budget of at least \$405 million for the agency, a \$32 million increase over FY 2009 funding. With this increase—a mere 0.0016 percent of the \$2 trillion Americans spend annually on health care—AHRQ can continue and restore its critical health care safety, quality, and efficiency initiatives; strengthen the infrastructure of the research field; reignite innovation and discovery; and develop the next generation of scientific pioneers. At a time when you, your congressional colleagues, and members of the new administration are considering major health reform, AHRQ's research is needed more than ever to build the evidence-base needed to help policymakers improve health and health care. The Friends thank you for your ongoing support of AHRQ and look forward to helping you further strengthen the agency.

The Friends of AHRQ is a coalition of health professional, research, consumer, and employer organizations dedicated to ensuring the agency's continued vital role in improving our nation's health. For more information on the Friends of AHRQ, contact David Helms with the Coalition for Health Services Research at 202.292.6700 or e-mail at [david.helms@academyhealth.org](mailto:david.helms@academyhealth.org).

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association

Advocates for Better Children's Diets  
Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine  
Alliance for Aging Research  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Academy of Physician Assistants  
American Association for Clinical Chemistry  
American Association for Dental Research  
American Association for Respiratory Care  
American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases  
American Association of Colleges of Nursing  
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy  
American College of Cardiology  
American College of Clinical Pharmacy  
American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine  
American College of Physicians  
American College of Preventive Medicine  
American College of Rheumatology  
American Dental Education Association  
American Heart Association  
American Gastroenterological Association  
American Medical Association  
American Osteopathic Association  
American Pediatric Society  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Public Health Association  
American Statistical Association  
American Thoracic Society  
Aplastic Anemia & MDS International Foundation  
Association of American Medical Colleges  
Association of Departments of Family Medicine  
Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors  
Association of Pediatric Department Chairs  
Association of Public Health Laboratories  
Association of Schools of Public Health  
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric & Neonatal Nurses  
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia  
Coalition for Health Services Research  
Consortium of Social Science Associations  
Cystic Fibrosis Foundation  
Emergency Medicine Network  
Federation of American Hospitals

Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research  
March of Dimes  
Marshfield Clinic  
Medical Group Management Association  
National Association of Local Boards of Health  
National Business Coalition on Health  
National Coalition for LGBT Health  
National Consumers League  
National Health Council  
National Hispanic Medical Association  
National Osteoporosis Foundation  
North American Primary Care Research Group  
Palo Alto Medical Foundation Research Institute  
Research!America  
RTI  
Service Employees International Union  
Society for Medical Decision Making  
Society for Pediatric Research  
Society of General Internal Medicine  
Society of Hospital Medicine  
Society of Teachers of Family Medicine  
Spina Bifida Association  
The Joint Commission  
University of Florida College of Public Health and Health Professions  
University of North Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health  
Well Spouse Association