



March 4, 2008

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6024

The Honorable James T. Walsh
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6024

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Walsh:

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. Yet chronic under-funding threatens the agency's ability to achieve this important mission—at a time when health care costs are at an all time high, and Americans' basic health status lags behind that of others around the world. To begin to address this problem, the Friends of AHRQ recommends an FY 2009 funding level of \$360 million, an increase of just \$26 million over the FY 2008 level. This increase will preserve AHRQ's current initiatives and get the agency on track to \$500 million in five years.

AHRQ provides the high quality, unbiased information needed to make educated decisions about our health care. Through this evidence base, AHRQ's research helps improve quality, patient safety, and the overall efficiency of our health care system. 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. With continued investment Americans will receive more of the information they need to make informed decisions—from which medicines to take, to when (and if) to have surgery, ultimately ensuring they get the best care at the best value.

Before the targeted increase Congress provided last year to study comparative effectiveness research and Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), the agency's budget rose just 6.7 percent since FY 2002. Even with last year's increase, the agency has lost \$19 million

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in purchasing power since FY 2005 due to inflation and years of flat funding. And under the President's budget, the agency stands to lose an additional \$9 million.

As a direct result of under-funding AHRQ, for example, there has been a dramatic decline in the number of, and funding for, grants that support researcher innovation and career development. AHRQ needs funding for new and competing grants to rejuvenate the free marketplace of ideas, and greater investment in young researchers to ensure the field's capacity to respond to the growing public and private sector demand for research.

We've made an initial investment in initiatives to expedite the adoption of Health Information Technology, as well as programs to reduce medical errors, improve patient safety, and determine what treatments work best, for whom, and in what circumstances. Without additional resources these and other initiatives will be curtailed, undermining AHRQ's core mission (please see attachment for more details).

The Friends of AHRQ recommends an FY 2009 budget of at least \$360 million for the agency, a \$26 million increase over FY 2008 funding. With this increase—just 0.0013 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; and reignite innovation and discovery.

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 Emily Holubowich with the Coalition for Health Services Research at 202.292.6743 or e-mail at emily.holubowich@academyhealth.org.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
AFL-CIO
Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Clinical Chemistry, Inc.
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American College of Cardiology
American College of Clinical Pharmacy
American College of Physicians
American College of Preventive Medicine
American Dental Association
American Dental Education Association
American Health Planning Association
American Heart Association
American Hospital Association

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American Nurses Association
American Optometric Association
American Osteopathic Association
American Pediatric Society
American Psychological Association
American Society of Nephrology
Arthritis Foundation
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Schools of Public Health
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric & Neonatal Nurses
Association of Professors of Medicine
Association of Program Directors in Internal Medicine
Association of Specialty Professors
Clerkship Directors in Internal Medicine
Coalition for Health Funding
Coalition for Health Services Research
Consortium of Social Science Associations
March of Dimes Foundation
Marshfield Clinic
Medco Health Solutions
Medical Group Management Association
National Business Coalition on Health
National Business Group on Health
National Health Council
RTI International
Society of General Internal Medicine
Society of Hospital Medicine
Society for Pediatric Research
Society for Women's Health Research
Spina Bifida Association
The Joint Commission
UnitedHealth Group
WellPoint, Inc.