



March 4, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
SD-131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
SD-156 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
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. 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

Friends of AHRQ  
March 4, 2008  
Page 2 of 3

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](mailto: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

Friends of AHRO  
March 4, 2008  
Page 3 of 3

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.