

August 3, 2009

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

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor,
Health and Human Services,
Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Cochran:

On behalf of the Coalition for Health Services Research, please accept our thanks for the Subcommittee's support of health services research and health data. The Coalition is the advocacy arm of AcademyHealth—the professional society for health services research and health policy representing 3,800 individual members and 160 organizational affiliates.

Health care in the United States has the potential to improve people's health dramatically, but often falls short and costs too much. Health services research is used to understand how to better finance the costs of care, measure and improve the quality of care, and improve coverage and access to affordable services. At a time when you, your congressional colleagues, and members of the new administration are considering major health reform, health services research and health data are needed more than ever to build the evidence base needed to help policymakers improve health and health care.

The Coalition, as the leader of the Friends of AHRQ, recommended increasing the budget of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) to \$405 million. Nevertheless, we are very pleased that within the \$372 million provided to AHRQ in FY 2010, the Subcommittee gives AHRQ clear direction to invest funding in ways that will maximize the capacity for more and better research needed to improve health and health care.

- Urging AHRQ to invest nearly \$24 million in investigator initiated research grants will rejuvenate the free marketplace of innovative ideas in a broader array of research topics that will yield important contributions to health care reform.

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- Directing AHRQ to invest in training grants and fellowships will develop the next generation of researchers in response to the growing public and private sector demand for health services research.
- The Subcommittee's guidance for AHRQ to broaden the evidence base through a more balanced research portfolio will generate more research on improving the quality and efficiency of the health care system as a whole and will increase our understanding of how services are organized, delivered, and financed.

The Coalition, as the leader of the Friends of NCHS, also commends the Subcommittee for the serious and sustained investment it has made in the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). As you know, NCHS continues to feel the effects of long-term underinvestment, where years of flat funding and budget shortfalls forced the elimination of data collection and quality control efforts, threatened the collection of vital statistics, stymied the adoption of electronic systems, and limited the agency's ability to modernize surveys to reflect changes in demography, geography, and health delivery. With the nearly \$139 million the Subcommittee provides in FY 2010, as well as clear direction to NCHS to protect seminal surveys and submit a plan on developing an optimal national vital statistics system that integrates with electronic health records, NCHS will continue to rebuild and evolve into a 21st Century statistical agency.

Once again, we thank the Subcommittee for its continued efforts to bolster health services research and health data. The accomplishments of our field would not be possible without its leadership and support. If you have questions, please contact our Washington representative, Emily Holubowich, at 202.484.1100 or eholubowich@dc-crd.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. David Helms", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

W. David Helms
President & CEO