



March 19, 2009

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

The Honorable Todd Tiahrt
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Tiahrt:

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.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association

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 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 Preventive Medicine
American College of Rheumatology
American Gastroenterological Association
American Heart Association
American Medical Association
American Osteopathic Association
American Pediatric Society
American Public Health Association
American Statistical Association
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric & Neonatal Nurses
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
Coalition for Health Services Research
Consortium of Social Science Associations
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 Health Council
National Hispanic Medical Association
Palo Alto Medical Foundation Research Institute
Research!America
RTI
Society for Medical Decision Making
Society for Pediatric Research
Society of General Internal Medicine
Society of Hospital 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