



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 National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is the nation's principal health statistics agency. Housed within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it provides critical data on all aspects of our health care system. Yet current funding levels continue to threaten the collection of vital information. To address this problem, the Friends of NCHS recommends a FY 2009 funding level of at least \$125 million for the agency. This \$11 million increase over FY 2008 will put the agency on the path to \$175 million by 2013.

Many federal agencies claim that their programs yield savings. The NCHS actually does save money by collecting and analyzing data for other agencies, including the National Institutes of Health. Using NCHS's existing resources and expertise to create efficiencies saves the government millions of dollars in start up costs, government contracts, and duplicative data collection.

Nevertheless, current funding levels for NCHS are precarious. Before the increase Congress provided last year, NCHS had lost \$13 million in purchasing power since FY 2005 due to years of flat funding and inflation. These shortfalls forced the elimination of some 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.

Even amid deep cuts to CDC and health programs broadly, the President recognized the value of NCHS and its data to the health infrastructure, providing the agency nearly \$125 million in his FY 2009 budget request, but this is still not enough for NCHS to achieve its core mission. Without this down payment and future increases, key NCHS programs will continue to be in jeopardy (see attached for details). For example,

- NHANES—which studies major nutrition, infection, environmental, and chronic health conditions—needs this increase to sustain its current operations. Without an increase, NCHS may be forced to eliminate oversampling of minority

populations—which will compromise our understanding of health disparities at a time when our society becomes increasingly diverse.

- Despite the \$4.6 million increase for vital statistics Congress provided last year, the program remains in jeopardy. Last year's stopgap increase provided enough funding to sustain data collection for FY 2008, but NCHS still needs this increase to collect vital statistics from states for the remainder of the calendar year. Without this funding, we remain at risk of becoming the first industrialized nation unable to continuously collect birth, death, and other vital health information.

To address these and other challenges, the Friends of the NCHS recommends an FY 2009 budget allocation of at least \$125 million for the agency, an \$11 million increase over the FY 2008 level and consistent with the President's request. This increase would help NCHS ensure over sampling of vulnerable populations in NHANES and sustain uninterrupted collection of vital statistics. Moving toward \$175 million by 2013 will help NCHS continue these activities, restore and implement new data collection and analysis initiatives, and modernize its systems to increase efficiency, interoperability, and security.

The Friends of the NCHS is a coalition of organizations that want to ensure the agency's continued vital role in monitoring our nation's health. For more information, contact Emily Holubowich at 202.292.6743 or [emily.holubowich@academyhealth.org](mailto:emily.holubowich@academyhealth.org).

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association for Clinical Chemistry, Inc.  
American Association of Colleges of Nursing  
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy  
American Association for Health Education  
American Association for Respiratory Care  
American College of Clinical Pharmacy  
American College of Emergency Physicians  
American Dietetic Association  
American Heart Association  
American Osteopathic Association  
American Public Health Association  
American Society for Nutrition  
American Society for Reproductive Medicine  
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum  
Association of American Medical Colleges  
Association of Population Centers  
Center for Science in the Public Interest  
Coalition for Health Services Research  
Congressional Black Caucus Foundation

Friends of NCHS  
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Consortium of Social Science Associations  
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics  
District of Columbia State Center for Health Statistics, Vital Records Division  
Emergency Medicine Network  
General Mills  
Grocery Manufacturers Association  
Hearing Industries Association  
Kidney Cancer Association  
Kraft  
March of Dimes Foundation  
Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems  
National Business Group on Health  
National Coalition for LGBT Health  
National Hispanic Medical Association  
National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization  
National Osteoporosis Foundation  
National WIC Association  
Nestlé USA  
New Jersey Bureau of Vital Statistics and Registration  
Pennsylvania Department of Health  
Population Association of America  
Public Health Foundation  
Dorothy Rice, Sc.D. (Hon), former Director of NCHS (1976-1982)  
Service Employees International Union  
Snack Food Association  
Society for Women's Health Research  
Southeast Emergency Consultants, Inc.  
State and Territorial Injury Prevention Directors Association  
The Association of Women's Health, Obstetric, and Neonatal Nurses  
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy  
Trust for America's Health  
WellPoint, Inc.  
Well Spouse Association