



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 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 \$10 million** 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 an additional **\$3 million** 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.

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
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
Grocery Manufacturers Association
Hearing Industries Association
Kidney Cancer Association
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

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National Coalition for LGBT Health
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization
National Osteoporosis Foundation
National WIC Association
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 National Center for Health Statistics (1976-1982)
Service Employees International Union
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