



September 4, 2008

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

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter:

The Friends of NCHS (list attached) wish to thank you for proposing a funding level of \$124.7 million for National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) in the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies fiscal 2009 appropriations mark. We greatly appreciate your leadership in restoring funding for this vital agency and the health data it collects.

As you prepare the fiscal 2009 continuing resolution, we respectfully ask that you consider providing NCHS with the \$124.7 million proposed in your mark. NCHS needs this funding now to preserve its current and future data collection efforts. Without the funding needed to revise, pretest, and plan data collection activities for calendar year 2009 and beyond, NCHS may be forced to make the following cuts:

- Reducing by half its National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) sample, which has monitored trends in illness, disability, and health insurance coverage for over 50 years. Such cuts will jeopardize data on health insurance coverage at a time when policymakers need these data to formulate and evaluate health system changes. These cuts will also have significant adverse effects on our ability to understand the health status of minority groups and health disparities at a time when our society becomes increasingly diverse.
- Postponing until at least fiscal 2011 its Nursing Home Survey, which was last conducted in 2004. Further delays in the collection of these essential data will prolong our understanding of the provision and financing of long-term care at a time when more and more aging and disabled Americans seek care in these sites of service.

- Taking its National Hospital Discharge Survey—which has been conducted annually since 1965—out of the field. Doing so will mean no data in calendar year 2009 on the characteristics of inpatients discharged from U.S. hospitals, e.g., average length of stay and rates of surgical and non-surgical procedures by age, race, and gender. In addition, work will be suspended on the survey redesign to provide a wider range of data to reflect changes in health care delivery.
- Purchasing only “core items” of birth and death data from states (e.g., place of residence, age of mother, race of parents, and gender). Nearly all data items that are routinely used to monitor maternal and infant health, such as use of prenatal care, smoking during pregnancy, medical risk factors, and educational attainment of parents, would be considered “enhanced data items” and would not be collected from all states. As a result, complete national data on key risk factors would be unavailable and will only be collected if sufficient funding is available.

Flat and/or delayed funding in fiscal 2009 and uncertainty about future funding could result in even more drastic cuts in fiscal 2010 and beyond. These could include:

- Deeper cuts to the NHIS sample, or taking the survey out of the field altogether.
- Reducing by half its National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) sample, eliminating the practice of oversampling of minority populations, or taking NHANES out of the field.
- Postponing the Home Health and Hospice Survey, further limiting our understanding of long-term and end-of-life care.

The Friends are very concerned that postponing the proposed \$11 million funding increase until early 2009 will force NCHS to eliminate these data collection efforts in the interim and they will not be restored. By way of background, when NCHS has faced budget shortfalls and cut data collection in the past, the data are only restored years later. Under severe budget constraints, as we see now, the data are never restored (e.g., the elimination of data collection on marriage, divorce, and abortions).

Your leadership demonstrates your commitment to ensuring that NCHS is able to continue uninterrupted collection of vital statistics, restore other important data collection and analysis initiatives, and modernize its systems to increase efficiency, interoperability, and security. Please know that the Friends of NCHS and our grassroots partners stand ready to support you in securing \$124.7 million for NCHS in fiscal 2009.

Please contact Emily Holubowich at 202.292.6743 or emily.holubowich@academyhealth.org with any questions or comments.



AARP

Abt Associates, Inc.

Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

Alliance for Aging Research

Alliance on Nutrition Monitoring

Alpha-1 Association

Alpha-1 Foundation

Altarum Institute

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Academy of Physician Assistants

American Association of Colleges of Nursing

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy

American Association for Clinical Chemistry

American Association for Dental Research

American Association for Health Education

American Association for Respiratory Care

American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association

American Brain Coalition

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

American College of Clinical Pharmacy

American College of Emergency Physicians

American College of Healthcare Executives

American College of Nurse-Midwives

American College of Preventive Medicine

American Dental Education Association

American Dietetic Association

American Geriatrics Society
American Health Information Management Association
American Heart Association
American Medical Informatics Association
American Nurses Association
American Optometric Association
American Osteopathic Association
American Public Health Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
American Society of Nephrology
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
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American Urological Association Foundation
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Aplastic Anemia & MDS International Foundation
The Arc of the United States
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Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Association for Clinical Research Training
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Black Cardiologists, Inc.
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs
Association of Minority Health Professions Schools
Association of Population Centers
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of State & Territorial Health Officials
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric, and Neonatal Nurses

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

Aveta, Inc.

Brown University, Warren Alpert Medical School, Center for Gerontology and Health Care Research

Building Bridges, Inc.

C3: Colorectal Cancer Coalition

Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine

Center for Science in the Public Interest

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Coalition for the Advancement of Health through Behavioral and Social Sciences Research

Coalition for Health Services Research

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Health and Vital Statistics Office

Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc.

Consortium of Social Science Associations

COPD Foundation

Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics

Diabetes Action Research and Education Foundation

District of Columbia State Center for Health Statistics, Vital Records Division

Early Intervention Research Institute, Utah State University

Easter Seals

Emergency Medicine Network

Epilepsy Foundation of America

Fenway Community Health Center

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Hearing Loss Association of America
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Huntington's Disease Society of America
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International Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia Foundation
International & American Associations for Dental Research
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The Jewish Guild for the Blind
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MATRIX Public Health Consultants, Inc.
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National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems
National Committee for Quality Assurance
National Health Council

National Association of the Deaf
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Business Group on Health
National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
National Coalition for LGBT Health
National WIC Association
National Cued Speech Association
National Disability Sports Alliance
National Fragile X Foundation
National Health Law Program
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Organization for Hearing Research Foundation
National Osteoporosis Foundation
National Psoriasis Foundation
National Quality Forum
National Sleep Foundation
Nestle USA
North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition
NTM Info & Research, Inc.
Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy
Parkland Health and Hospital System
Pfeiffer University
Pituitary Network Association
Platelet Disorder Support Association
Post-Polio Health International
The Ohio State University College of Public Health
Partnership for Caring
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Population Association Of America
Prevent Blindness America
Public Health Foundation
Quality Community Health Care, Inc.
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Simmons School for Health Studies, Center for Health Policy Research
Snack Food Association
Society for Investigative Dermatology
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Southeast Emergency Consultants, Inc.
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University of Washington Department of Health Services
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Virginia Department of Health, Division of Health Statistics

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