



January 21, 2009

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey:

The Friends of NCHS wish to thank you for providing \$40 million for the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. We greatly appreciate your continued leadership in restoring funding for this vital agency and the health data it collects.

As you know, years of underinvestment have forced NCHS to undermine, eliminate, or further postpone the collection of critical health information to the point where key data users now question whether NCHS itself is in good health. The funding you've proposed will help NCHS address critical needs for activities that have been on hold or curtailed because of budget constraints. For example, NCHS will be able to restore and prevent future cuts to the National Health Interview Survey and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey that would've compromised our ability to understand the health status of minority groups and health disparities.

In addition, NCHS will be able to modernize the national vital statistics infrastructure so that all states collect vital statistics data using the enhanced 2003 birth and death certificates, and all states collect these data electronically. Today only about half of the states and territories use the 2003 birth or death certificates to collect enhanced vital statistics; fewer jurisdictions collect both and only about half do so electronically. Modernizing the national vital statistics system with this bolus funding will improve data quality, efficiency, interoperability, and security.

At a time when both the new administration and Members of Congress are considering major health reform, the data NCHS collects are needed now more than ever to track Americans' health and evaluate our progress improving it. 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 \$40 million for NCHS in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Please do not hesitate to contact the Friends' representative, David Helms, President & CEO of the Coalition for Health Services Research (202.292.6700 or david.helms@academyhealth.org) if you have questions.

The Friends of the NCHS is a voluntary coalition of over 150 organizations that want to ensure the agency's continued vital role in monitoring our nation's health. For a complete list of our membership, please visit <http://www.chsr.org/friendsfnchslst.htm>.