



October 12, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice-Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairwoman Mikulski, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray:

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 public health and the health care system through data cooperatives and surveys that serve as a gold standard for data collection around the world. As you work to enact final spending legislation for fiscal year (FY) 2017, **the undersigned members of the Friends of NCHS urge you to protect NCHS's budget from further cuts and provide the agency at least \$160.4 million, consistent with the House Appropriations Committee's mark and the FY 2016 level.**

NCHS collects data on chronic disease prevalence, health disparities, emergency room use, teen pregnancy, infant mortality, causes of death, and rates of insurance, to name a few. These data are used by the Census Bureau in informing its population estimates and projections; by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in developing nutrition policies that undergird multibillion dollar federal food assistance programs; by state and local governments and public health officials; by federal policymakers; and by demographers, epidemiologists, health services researchers, and other scientists. The health data collected by NCHS are an essential part of the nation's statistical and public health infrastructure.

We greatly appreciate Congress's longstanding leadership in securing steady and sustained funding increases for NCHS, including your most recent efforts to modernize the National Vital Statistics System—moving from paper-based to electronic filing of birth and death statistics—with a \$5 million increase in FY 2016. Because of your efforts, NCHS has funded states and territories to speed the release of birth and death statistics, including infant mortality and prescription drug overdose deaths. In fact, the percentage of mortality records reported within 10 days has increased from 14 percent in 2012 to 40 percent in 2015.

Nevertheless, NCHS's purchasing power is down considerably; current base funding remains below FY 2010 levels, adjusted for inflation, and the agency is unlikely to recover the roughly \$25 million in supplemental Prevention and Public Health Fund dollars lost in 2013. NCHS also faces increasing costs on the horizon associated with state and vendor contracts and other infrastructure challenges related to survey redesign

and systems improvements that will require additional resources far beyond current levels. Additional cuts—however seemingly minor, as proposed by the Senate Appropriations Committee—have a demonstrably negative effect on the agency’s programs, survey data, and staff.

For example, if NCHS’s budget is reduced below the FY 2016 level, NCHS will need to consider reducing the sample sizes of its two seminal surveys: the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)—the principal data source for studying demographic, socioeconomic, and behavioral differences in health and mortality outcomes since 1957—and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), which has assessed the health and nutritional status of adults and children in the United States since the early 1960s. Reducing the NHIS sample size would adversely affect the agency’s ability to provide state-level estimates, especially for smaller, predominantly rural states, as well as its ability to monitor health disparities and provide timely estimates for smaller population subgroups, including American Indians and Asian Americans. If NHANES’s sample size is reduced, data across multiple years would need to be pooled, reducing the timeliness of estimates of key health indicators such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, among others.

Your leadership has helped NCHS rebuild after many years of underinvestment and stabilized the collection of essential health data. Cuts to NCHS’s budget now will only undermine progress made over the last decade. We urge you to protect NCHS’s budget from further cuts and provide the agency at least \$160 million in FY 2017. We thank you for your ongoing support and look forward to helping you further strengthen the agency. For more information about this request, please contact Lindsey Horan at 202.292.6718 or lindsey.horan@academyhealth.org.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
AcademyHealth
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Dental Research
American Association for Respiratory Care
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American College of Clinical Pharmacy
American College of Preventive Medicine
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Heart Association
American Pediatric Society
American Psychological Association
American Society for Nutrition
American Statistical Association
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Population Centers
Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
Center for Demographic & Social Analysis, University of California, Irvine
Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, University at Albany, SUNY
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc. (COA)
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Cornell Population Center
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics

Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
CUNY Institute for Demographic Research
Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences
ICPSR, the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research
March of Dimes
Maryland Population Research Center, University of Maryland, College Park
Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota
NAPHSIS
National Association of County and City Health Officials
Office of Population Research, Princeton University
Ohio State University
Pediatric Policy Council
Population Association of America
Population Research Institute, The Pennsylvania State University
Population Studies Center of the University of Pennsylvania
Population Studies Center, University of Michigan
Population Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania
RAND Population Research Center
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Society for Pediatric Research
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy
UW Center for Studies in Demography & Ecology