



American Society for Nutrition
Excellence in Nutrition Research and Practice
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April 15, 2011

The Honorable Dennis R. Rehberg
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rehberg and Ranking Member DeLauro:

The American Society for Nutrition (ASN) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony regarding fiscal year (FY) 2012 appropriations for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). ASN is the professional scientific society dedicated to bringing together the world's top researchers, clinical nutritionists and industry to advance our knowledge and application of nutrition to promote human and animal health. Our focus ranges from the most critical details of research to broad societal applications. **ASN respectfully requests \$35 billion for NIH, and we urge you to adopt the President's request of \$162 million for NCHS in FY 2012.**

Basic and applied research on nutrition, nutrient composition, the relationship between nutrition and chronic disease, and nutrition monitoring are critical to the health of all Americans and the U.S. economy. Awareness of the growing epidemic of obesity and the contribution of chronic illness to burgeoning health care costs has highlighted the need for improved information on dietary components, dietary intake, strategies for dietary change and nutritional therapies. The health costs of obesity alone are estimated at \$147 billion each year. This enormous health and economic burden is largely preventable, along with the many other chronic diseases that plague the U.S. It is for this reason that we urge you to consider these recommended funding levels for two agencies under the Department of Health and Human Services that have profound effects on nutrition research, nutrition monitoring, and the health of all Americans—the National Institutes of Health and the National Center for Health Statistics.

National Institutes of Health

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is the nation's premier sponsor of biomedical research and is the agency responsible for conducting and supporting 90 percent (approximately \$1 billion) of federally-funded basic and clinical nutrition research. Nutrition research, which makes up about four percent of the NIH budget, is truly a trans-NIH endeavor, being conducted and funded across multiple Institutes and

Centers. Some of the most promising nutrition-related research discoveries have been made possible by NIH support.

In order to fulfill the full potential of biomedical research, including nutrition research, **ASN recommends an FY 2012 funding level of \$35 billion for the agency**, a modest increase over the current funding level of \$34 billion (including supplemental appropriations).

The modest increase we recommend is necessary to maintain both the existing and future scientific infrastructure. The discovery process—while it produces tremendous value—often takes a lengthy and unpredictable path. Economic stagnation is disruptive to training, careers, long range projects and ultimately to progress. NIH needs sustainable and predictable budget growth to achieve the full promise of medical research to improve the health and longevity of all Americans. It is imperative that we continue our commitment to biomedical research and continue our nation's dominance in this area by making the NIH a national priority.

Over the past 50 years, NIH and its grantees have played a major role in the growth of knowledge that has transformed our understanding of human health, and how to prevent and treat human disease. Because of the unprecedented number of breakthroughs and discoveries made possible by NIH funding, scientists are helping Americans to live longer, healthier and more productive lives. Many of these discoveries are nutrition-related and have impacted the way clinicians prevent and treat heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other chronic diseases. By 2030 the number of Americans age 65 and older is expected to grow to 72 million, and the incidence of chronic disease will also grow. Sustained support for basic and clinical research is required if we are to successfully confront the health care challenges associated with an older, and potentially sicker, population.

CDC National Center for Health Statistics

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), housed within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is the nation's principal health statistics agency. The NCHS provides critical data on all aspects of our health care system, and it is responsible for monitoring the nation's health and nutrition status through surveys such as the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), that serve as a gold standard for data collection around the world. Nutrition and health data, largely collected through NHANES, are essential for tracking the nutrition, health and well being of the American population, and are especially important for observing nutritional and health trends in our nation's children. Through learning both what Americans eat and how their diets directly affect their health, the NCHS is able to monitor the prevalence of obesity and other chronic diseases in the U.S. and track the performance of preventive interventions, as well as assess 'nutrients of concern' such as calcium, which are consumed in inadequate amounts by many subsets of our population. Data such as these are critical to guide policy development in the area of health and nutrition, including food safety, food labeling, food assistance, military rations and dietary guidance. For example, NHANES data are used to determine funding levels for programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clinics, which provide nourishment to low-income women and children.

To continue support for the agency and its important mission, **ASN recommends an FY 2012 funding level of \$162 million for the agency**. Flat and decreased funding levels threaten the collection of this important information, most notably vital statistics and the NHANES. Moreover, nearly 30 percent of the

funding for NHANES comes from other federal agencies such as the NIH and the USDA Agricultural Research Service. When these agencies face flat budgets or worse, budget cuts, they withdraw much-needed support for NHANES, placing this valuable resource in peril. Sustained funding for NCHS can help to ensure uninterrupted collection of vital health and nutrition statistics.

Funds are necessary not only to continue to conduct vital health and nutrition data collection, but also to cover the costs of adoption of electronic systems, and other technology and information security upgrades that are necessary to replace aging survey infrastructure. Funds also are needed to maintain quality control efforts, modernize surveys to reflect changes in demography, geography, and health delivery, and expand survey sample sizes to provide more robust findings.

The obesity epidemic is a case in point that demonstrates the value of the work done by NCHS, as NHANES data first made our nation aware of this public health epidemic. NHANES data allow us to continue to monitor rates of obesity, as well as the rates of heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers. It is only through continued support of NCHS that the public health community will be able to stem the tide against obesity and other chronic diseases. Continuous collection of health and nutrition data will allow us to determine not only if we have made progress against public health threats, but also if public health dollars are being appropriately targeted.

Thank you for your support of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), and thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding fiscal year 2012 appropriations. Please contact Sarah Ohlhorst, MS, RD, Director of Government Relations, if ASN may provide further assistance. She can be reached at 301.634.7281 or sohlhorst@nutrition.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Russell", with a long, sweeping underline.

Robert Russell, MD
President, American Society for Nutrition