

**Statement of the American Society for Nutrition (ASN)
Submitted to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies on Fiscal Year 2011 Funding
for the National Institutes of Health and the National Center for Health Statistics**

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The American Society for Nutrition (ASN) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony regarding fiscal year (FY) 2011 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 very broad societal applications. **ASN respectfully requests \$37 billion for NIH, and we request \$162 million for NCHS in fiscal year (FY) 2011.**

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. Preventable chronic diseases related to diet and physical activity cost the economy over \$117 billion annually, and this cost is predicted to rise to \$1.7 trillion in the next ten years. 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 (over \$1.4 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 extraordinary promise of biomedical research, including nutrition research, **ASN recommends an FY 2011 funding level of \$37 billion for the agency.**

Over the past 50 years, NIH and its grantees have played a major role in the explosion 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 age-related macular degeneration.

During the next 25 years, the number of Americans with chronic disease is expected to reach 46 million, and the number of Americans over age 65 is expected to be the largest in our nation's history. Sustained support for basic and clinical research is required if we are to confront successfully the health care challenges associated with an older, and potentially sicker, population.

For several years in a row the NIH budget failed to keep up with inflation and subsequently, the percentage of dollars funding nutrition-focused projects declined. Thanks to Congress' inclusion of nearly \$10 billion for NIH in H.R. 1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the scientific enterprise has been revitalized and additional biomedical research projects have been supported. ASN was pleased to see that ARRA provided over \$300 million for nutrition research projects over two years. These projects also are, in addition to generating new findings to improve human health and nutrition, providing jobs and generating commercial activity throughout the broader community. It is imperative that we continue our commitment to biomedical research and to fulfill the hope of the American people by making the NIH a national priority. Otherwise, we risk losing our nation's dominance in biomedical research.

The research engine needs predictable, sustained investment in science to maximize our return on investment. Recent experience has demonstrated how cyclical periods of rapid funding growth followed by periods of stagnation is disruptive to the discovery process, can lead to fewer students choosing careers in research, impedes long range projects and ultimately slows 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.

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. Nutrition and health data, largely collected through the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), is essential for tracking the health and well being of the American population, and it is especially important for observing health trends in our nation's children. Knowing both what Americans eat and how their diets directly affect their health provides valuable information to guide policies on food safety, food labeling, food assistance, military rations and dietary guidance. Not surprisingly, NHANES serves as a gold standard for nutrition and health data collection around the world.

For several years, flat and decreased funding levels threatened the collection of this important information, most notably vital statistics from the NHANES. Beginning in FY 2009, Congress made a renewed commitment to this agency by appropriating an additional \$11 million to the agency—for nearly \$125 million total—in FY 2009 and a \$14 million boost in FY 2010. Actions in FY 2009 halted what would have been the beginning of drastic cuts to the agency's premier health surveys—NHANES and the National Health Information Survey—that were slated to occur should the agency not receive additional funds. Last year's continued support enabled the agency to rebuild after years of underinvestment. ASN appreciates very much the

leadership this subcommittee has shown in securing steady and sustained funding increases for NCHS over the past three fiscal years.

To continue support for the agency and its important mission, **ASN supports the President's FY 2011 budget request of \$162 million for the agency.**

The obesity epidemic is a case in point that demonstrates the value of the work done by NCHS. It is because of NHANES that our nation became aware of this growing public health problem, and as obesity rates have increased to 31 percent of American adults (which we know because of continued monitoring), so too have rates of heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers. It is only through continued support of this program that the public health community will be able to stem the tide against obesity. Continuous collection of this data will allow us to determine not only if we have made progress against this public health threat, but also if public health dollars have been targeted appropriately. A recent report from the Institute of Medicine recognized the importance of NHANES and called for the enhancement of current surveillance systems to monitor relevant outcomes and trends with respect to childhood obesity.¹

Now that health care reform has been signed into law, collecting health statistics is of even greater importance. Providing an additional \$23 million in FY 2011 continues the progress on a path that can mitigate previous years of flat-funding and ensure we have a 21st century health statistics system in the U.S.

ASN thanks your Committee for its support of the NIH and NCHS in previous years. If we can provide any additional information, please contact Mary Lee Watts, ASN Director of Science and Public Affairs, at (301) 634-7112 or mwatts@nutrition.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert M. Russell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Robert M. Russell, MD
President, American Society for Nutrition

¹ Institute of Medicine. *Progress in Preventing Childhood Obesity* Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2006.