



March 15, 2010

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

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

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Cochran:

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 our health care system through data cooperatives and surveys that serve as a gold standard for data collection around the world. The Friends of NCHS endorses the President's FY 2011 request of \$162 million. This funding will build on your previous investments and put the agency on track to become a fully-functioning, 21st Century, national statistical agency.

NCHS collects data on chronic disease prevalence, health care 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 USDA 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, as demonstrated by the breadth of organizations participating in the Friends of NCHS.

The undersigned organizations greatly appreciate your leadership in securing steady and sustained funding increases for NCHS over the last three fiscal years. Your support has helped NCHS rebuild after years of underinvestment and restore the collection of essential health data. With your continued support, NCHS will modernize its data collection efforts to produce higher quality, more timely data. The President's budget request will provide funding to:

- Expand the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) to allow for state and community estimates for approximately 30 of the largest states and the large metropolitan areas. NHIS is the core of HHS' data collection and is the nation's largest household health survey, providing information about the uninsured,

barriers to care, and risk factors across racial and ethnic populations.

- Support an increased sample size of physician and patient records in the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, which will allow for some state-level data. This investment will improve CDC's ability to track providers' practice patterns, including the adoption and meaningful use of HIT.
- Collect at least a full 12 months of birth and death data from vital records jurisdictions through the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) and support states and territories in adopting the 2003 standard birth certificate, implementing Web-based electronic birth records, and phasing in electronic death records. Vital statistics provide the most complete and continuous data on births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, and divorces to public officials at the national, state, and local levels.
- Continue to conduct the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) on a nationally representative sample of 5,000 individuals from 15 U.S. cities. NHANES is the only national source of data on conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and high cholesterol. It is the only survey that provides data on nutrition, directly connecting diet with health indicators. And it provides critical information on nutrition health behaviors, genetics, and the environment.

As you prepare the FY 2011 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill, we respectfully ask that you provide NCHS with **\$162 million**, consistent with the President's budget request, to strengthen these and other important data collection and quality improvement initiatives. At a time when you, your congressional colleagues, and members of the administration are considering major health reform, NCHS will provide the data you and others need to improve and continuously evaluate health and health care. The Friends of NCHS thank you for your ongoing support of health data and look forward to helping you further strengthen the agency.

The Friends of the NCHS is a coalition of over 200 organizations that want to ensure the agency's continued vital role in monitoring our nation's health. For more information on the Friends of NCHS, contact David Helms with the Coalition for Health Services Research at 202.292.6700 or e-mail at david.helms@academyhealth.org.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
Alliance for Aging Research
American Academy of Nutritional Sciences
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Dental Research
American Association for Health Education
American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AAHPERD)
American Association for Respiratory Care
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American College of Clinical Pharmacy
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American Dietetic Association
American Gastroenterological Association
American Heart Association
American Organization of Nurse Executives
American Osteopathic Association
American Pediatric Society
American Psychiatric Association
American Public Health Association
American Society for Nutrition
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
American Statistical Association
Arthritis Foundation
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Association of Population Centers
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN)
Coalition for Health Services Research
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Department of Health Puerto Rico
Grocery Manufacturers Association
March of Dimes
National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems
National Health Council
National Osteoporosis Foundation
Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA National)
Population Association of America
Public Health Foundation
Marketing Research Association
Research!America
Society for Medical Decision Making
Society for Pediatric Research
The Consortium of Social Science Associations
Well Spouse Association