



March 9, 2016

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

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

Dear 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 draft the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS) appropriations bill for fiscal year (FY) 2017, **the undersigned members of the Friends of NCHS respectfully request \$170 million in budget authority for the agency, \$10 million more than FY 2016 and the president's FY 2017 request.** NCHS 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. The level we request will provide a down payment to help NCHS address 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.

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 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.

We greatly appreciate the Subcommittee'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 of public health importance, 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.

Our request of \$170 million in budget authority would allow the agency to maintain core data collection activities and:

- Improve the quality and specificity of death data reported to the states by physicians, coroners, and medical examiners to more accurately track causes of death, particularly those related to suicide and substance abuse;
- Rebuild the architecture of the state-based system used to share accurate, timely, and secure vital events data with the federal government and across states to better monitor our nation's health and reduce waste, fraud, and abuse in federal benefits programs;
- Streamline the 2018 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) questionnaire and conduct necessary pre-testing of the redesign to reduce respondent burden and improve response rates while maintaining the ability to monitor health trends over time;
- Stabilize core funding for the expanded sample sizes of NHIS and the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey that have yielded better data to assess Americans' access to, and use of, health care services; and
- Produce new and innovative tools to make NCHS data more accessible and easily interpretable, including an online data visualization gallery with national and state data on critical health topics.

Your leadership has helped NCHS rebuild after many years of underinvestment and stabilize the collection of essential health data. 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](mailto: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 College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP)  
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  
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc. (COA)  
Consortium of Social Science Associations  
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics  
March of Dimes  
NAPHSIS—National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems

Pediatric Policy Council  
Population Association of America  
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine  
Society for Pediatric Research  
Society for Women's Health Research  
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy