COSSA Washington UPDATE

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In This Issue

NICHD Council Discusses Institute's Proposed Reorganization Plans

On January 26, the National Advisory Child Health and Human Development (NACHHD) Council held its 146th meeting. The meeting's agenda also included a discussion of the proposed reorganization plan for the National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHD.) Institute director Alan Guttmacher outlined the underlying principles of the plan noting that form follows function. He emphasized that the plan was informed by the Institute's ongoing Scientific Visioning initiative launched by the Institute in 2011 to identify "the most promising scientific opportunities of the next decade across the breadth of the Institute's mission." (The Institute is now finalizing the vision statement.) The proposed reorganization is also designed to "maximize opportunities for interdisciplinary work" and "maximize clarity to the external community," Guttmacher stressed. The proposed plan:

- Creates a Division of Extramural Research. A search is currently underway for an Associate Director for Extramural Research. The extramural branches will now report to the new Associate Director. The Office of Extramural Policy, Grants Management Branch, Extramural Scientific Branches, Office of Committee Management, and the Scientific Review Branch will also report to the Division of Extramural Research.
- Eliminates the current "center" structure. The Center for Population Research, Center for Developmental Biology and Perinatal Medicine, and Center for Mothers and Children are gone, while the National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research (NCMRR), which has its own legislative authority and would need action by Congress to abolish, remains.
- Moves the Division of Special Populations to the Office of the Director and renames it the Office of Health Equity.
- Creates trans-NICHD Scientific Working Groups.
- Renames some of the Extramural Scientific Branches, others will remain unchanged:
    - Child Development and Behavior --> Child Development and Behavior
    - Contraception and Reproduction Health --> Contraceptive Discovery and Development
    - Demographic and Behavioral Sciences --> Demography and Population Science
    - Developmental Biology, Genetics, and Teratology --> Developmental Biology and Morphogenesis
    - Endocrinology, Nutrition, and Growth --> Growth and Metabolism
    - Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities --> Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
    - Obstetric and Pediatric Pharmacology --> Obstetric and Pediatric Pharmacology and Therapeutics
    - Pediatric, Adolescent, and Maternal AIDS --> Pediatric, Adolescent, and Maternal Infectious Diseases
    - Pregnancy and Perinatology --> Pregnancy and Perinatology
    - Reproductive Sciences --> Fertility and Infertility
- Creates two new Extramural Scientific Branches.
    - Gynecologic Health and Disease
    - Pediatric Injury Prevention and Acute Care

The Plan also proposes preliminary changes for NCMRR and awaits the report of a Blue Ribbon Panel that is examining the program. These changes also propose alterations for the Center's programs. The current programs are:

- Behavioral Sciences and Rehabilitative Technologies
- Biological Sciences and Career Development
- Pediatric Critical Care and Rehabilitation
- Spinal Cord and Musculoskeletal Disorders and Assistive Technology
- Traumatic Brain Injury and Stroke Rehabilitation

The proposed programs include:

- Assistive Devices and Technology Development
- Behavioral Sciences, Participation, and Health Services
- Cognitive and Linguistic Rehabilitation
- Plasticity, Adaptation, and the Lifespan Trajectory
- Sensory, Motor, and Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation

The Institute is accepting comments on the proposed reorganization through March 1 at

NICHDDirectorsOffice@mail.nih.gov.

GAO Investigates STEM Education Programs: Finds Significant Overlapping

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education remains a major focus of the effort to reform America's schools and curricula and to produce a competitive workforce for the 21st Century. The federal government in fiscal year 2010 invested over $3 billion in 209 programs designed to "increase knowledge of STEM fields and attainment of STEM degrees." Over the years there has been considerable consternation that these efforts are duplicative and uncoordinated. Rep. John Kline (R-MN), Chair of the House Education and Workforce Committee, and Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA), Chair of that panel's Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to take another look at the situation.

GAO had previously examined STEM programs in 2005 and reported that 207 federal STEM education programs across 13 different agencies spent $2.8 billion in federal funds in fiscal year 2004. In 2006, President Bush's Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings appointed the Academic Competitiveness Council (ACC). It created an inventory and assessed the effectiveness of federal STEM programs. GAP reported that the ACC recommended further coordination among federal agencies administering STEM programs, states, and local school districts. In addition, the ACC advised the agencies to adjust program designs and operations in order to assess programs and to achieve measurable results. The government should provide no funding increases, the ACC declared, unless a plan for rigorous, independent evaluation of these programs occurs. At the same time, the National Academies' report *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* argued strongly for greater investment in STEM education.

In 2010, President Obama's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) published a report in response to the President's request to develop specific recommendations concerning the most important actions that the administration should take to ensure that the United States is a leader in STEM education in the coming decades. According to the GAO, PCAST found that approaches to Kindergarten-12th grade (K-12) STEM education across agencies emerged largely without a coherent vision or careful oversight of goals and outcomes. PCAST also found "that relatively little funding was targeted at efforts with the potential to transform STEM education, too little attention was paid to replication efforts to disseminate proven programs widely, and too little capacity at key agencies was devoted to strategy and coordination." (On February 7, 2012 PCAST will release a report on STEM education at the undergraduate level.)

In conducting the latest study, GAO reviewed relevant federal laws and regulations as well as previous GAO work on overlap, duplication, and fragmentation. It interviewed officials from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and officials from other federal agencies that administer STEM education programs. GAO also surveyed over 200 programs across 13 agencies that met GAO's definition of a STEM education program, asking questions about program objectives, target populations, services provided, interagency coordination, outcome measures and evaluations, and funding.

GAO found that the number of programs within agencies ranged from three to 46, with the Departments of Health and Human Services and Energy and the National Science Foundation administering more than half of these programs. Almost a third of the programs had obligations of $1 million or less, while some had obligations of over $100 million. Beyond programs specifically focused on STEM education, agencies funded other broad efforts that contributed to enhancing STEM education.

Eighty-three percent of the programs GAO identified overlapped to some degree with at least one other program in that "they offered similar services to similar target groups in similar STEM fields to achieve similar objectives." Many programs, GAO reported, have a broad scope-serving multiple target groups with multiple services. However, even when programs overlap, the services they provide and the populations they serve may differ in meaningful ways and therefore are not necessarily duplicative. Nonetheless, GAO concluded, the programs are similar enough that they need greater coordination and guidance from a robust strategic plan.

Currently, though, less than half of the programs GAO surveyed indicated that they coordinated with other agencies that administer similar STEM education programs. Efforts underway to inventory federal STEM education activities and develop a five-year strategic plan, GAO suggests, present an opportunity to enhance coordination, align government-wide efforts, and improve efficiency of limited resources by identifying opportunities for program consolidation and reducing administrative costs.

GAO recommended that OSTP lead a government-wide STEM education strategic planning effort that would "better align their activities with a government-wide strategy, develop a plan for sustained coordination, identify programs for potential consolidation or elimination, and assist agencies in determining how to better evaluate their programs."

The full GAO report is available at: http://gao.gov/assets/590/587839.pdf

Hearing Examines Social Security Death Records and Identity Theft

The Social Security Administration (SSA) since November 1, 2011 is no longer making public the death records that it receives from the states. The Death Master File (DMF) serves as a source for researchers conducting epidemiological and long-term outcome studies. These include two major longitudinal studies in the social and behavioral sciences, the Panel Study on Income Dynamics and the Health and Retirement Survey. On February 2nd Rep. Sam Johnson (R-TX), Chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Social Security, held a hearing on the accuracy and uses of the DMF. Johnson's major concern is the use of these files for identity theft and he has introduced legislation, H.R. 1375, to safeguard these records.

The SSA maintains the DMF, a file of all deaths reported to the SSA since 1936. The DMF is available to the Department of Commerce, which sells the file to private and public sector customers, including government agencies, financial institutions, investigative entities, credit reporting organizations, medical researchers, genealogical researchers and others. Unfortunately, the DMF has become a source for thieves to capitalize on the identities of children and others who have died. Also, according to the SSA, each year approximately 14,000 individuals are incorrectly listed as deceased on the DMF. Those affected have experienced termination of benefits, rejected credit, declined mortgages, and other consequences.

Michael J. Astrue, SSA Commissioner, explained to the Subcommittee how death information is collected and verified; how the DMF meets existing legal mandates and the needs of Federal benefit-paying agencies to prevent fraud and abuse; and how electronic death registration by States is making death information more accurate. He called identity theft "a spreading plague on our Nation," one that has affected him personally. He commented on the legislation proposed by Johnson that would limit access to SSA death information to federal and state research and statistical activities. This would keep criminals from using the DMF for identity theft and would avoid erroneously releasing information on living people because the public would not have any access to the SSA death records. On the other hand, this would also affect the uses of DMF for the legitimate needs of a broad spectrum of organizations outside government. The SSA is part of an interagency group reviewing legislative options in this area, but finding the right balance between the legitimate uses of the DMF and the risks that access can create abuses is very challenging, Astrue concluded.

Stuart K. Pratt, Chief Executive Officer of the Consumer Data Industry Association, said that the uses of the DMF by U.S. businesses for fraud prevention and legal compliance processes benefits the

U.S. economy. There is no substitute for the DMF available in the market, Pratt contended, so cutting off this access would increase fraud and in some cases make it impossible for businesses to comply with other state or federal requirements. He suggested that identity thieves can obtain information about decreased individuals in other ways. He also expressed concern about a recent decision by SSA to no longer include death information obtained from states in the public DMF. He urged the Committee to amend the Social Security Act to codify appropriate business-to-business access to DMS and to allow state records to be included in the public DMF.

John Breyault, Vice President of Public Telecommunications & Fraud of the National Consumers League (NCL), testified that his organization opposes a total ban on the sale of DMF data because they are used for fraud protection effort. The NCL supports various reforms, including limiting the personally identifiable information in the public DMF; notifying living consumers who have been mistakenly listed in the DMF; restricting access to certain personally identifiable information in the DMF to organizations that can certify that they have a legitimate need; and increasing penalties for those DMF recipients who misuse the information.

Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr. Inspector General, SSA, told the panel that audits identified methods the agency could implement to protect death data and to improve the accuracy of its death reporting. It refused to implement a several-month delay in the release of DMF updates, so that SSA could correct erroneous death entries. In addition, SSA, O'Carroll indicated, continued to disclose far more detailed personal information in the DMF (including first name, middle name, and date of birth) than legally required.

Patricia W. Potrzebowski, National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems, described how vital records' jurisdictions provide the federal government with data collected through birth and death records to compile national health statistics, facilitate secure Social Security number issuance to newborns, and report individuals' deaths. She described how the Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS) enhances death reporting accuracy, timeliness, and security. She also discussed the ways Electronic Verification of Vital Events (EVVE) prevents fraud and identity theft.

Rep. Kevin Brady (R-TX) included a statement as part of the record on the importance of continued access to the DMF of surveys and social science research.

The testimony from the hearing is available at:
http://waysandmeans.house.gov/Calendar/EventSingle.aspx?EventID=276835.

Statistics and Public Policy Examined at Conference

To celebrate the inauguration of its new electronic journal, *Statistics, Politics, and Public Policy*, the American Statistical Association convened a two-day conference on February 2 and 3 to consider how data and the people who collect, use, and understand it can have more influence on policy making.

Former Census director and current COSSA President, Columbia University Professor Ken Prewitt, keynoted the event. Using the historical narrative created by Margo Anderson and others, he traced the use of census numbers through American history. He argued that in the 19th Century data use for public policy often involved the issue of race. For example, the Census in the 1850s began asking a question about mulattos. The Census also demonstrated that one of the many disadvantages the South faced during the Civil War period was stagnating population growth. Census data were important input to General William Sherman during his march through Georgia, Prewitt indicated.

In the early 20th Century, Prewitt posited, the most important use of census data was to help enact laws to restrict immigration. However, even with the emergence of a "professional social science" that sought to explain social conditions with social variables, race remained focus. In addition, Prewitt noted, World War I brought the beginning of the "testing industry."

The development of sampling theory and the growth of surveys in the 1930s also boosted the creation of data collection organizations such as the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). World War II saw the development of propaganda analyses through the use of content analysis, while the post-war need to understand the rise of Nazism and the Holocaust led to a call to try and understand people's behavior. Thus, a new emphasis on voting studies began, according to Prewitt.

Another result of the Second World War, he argued, was the belief in "big science," which resulted in the creation of the National Science Foundation. Prewitt remarked that it would take a while before the social sciences got to play in this sandbox, but by the 1960s big social science "was now on the table," once again focusing on questions of race and civil rights. Prewitt cited the report produced by James S. Coleman on *Equality of Educational Opportunity* as a milestone.

In recent years, the extension of experiments using randomized control trials to social questions, the rising influence of evidenced-based policy, impact assessments, and a world "awash with data," led Prewitt to conclude that social scientists have done a "good job of creating a data system for society."

We have succeeded, he contended, in solving the issues of representativeness, quality, access, and for the most part, privacy and confidentiality. However, new problems have arisen. Response rates to surveys have declined, costs have skyrocketed, and the household as the unit of analysis probably does not make sense anymore, Prewitt noted.

In a month, Prewitt will Chair a new committee at the National Research Council that will examine new ways to think about and measure civic health/engagement. He sees this panel as a way to move to the next level of exploring the information base of society for the next fifteen to twenty years.

Groves: Organic Data Taking Over

Current Census Director Robert Groves spoke on the second day of the conference. Echoing his remarks at the COSSA 30th Anniversary Colloquium (see Update, November 10, 2011 Issue B), Groves talked about the future of data. He maintained that in the current environment it is increasingly difficult to measure modern society since it costs more to do the same things we have been doing. At the same time, he suggested, the demands are increasing for more timely information, new technologies exist to make public participation more convenient, and there is a huge increase in digital data resources both public and private. The bad news, Groves indicated is that federal budgets for statistical agencies will continue to go down in the near-term. With all this, Groves concluded "current practices are unsustainable."

After reviewing the growth of the sample survey - "the most important social science invention of the 20th Century" - Groves remarked that post-1990 those concerned with information gathering have been "scurrying around" trying to patch the sample survey and despite these efforts response rates continue to decline.

Citing a report from the McKinsey Company in May 2011 on *Big Data: The Next Frontier for Innovation, Competition and Productivity,* Groves noted the importance of the private sector in future information collection. He discussed what he called "organic data," giving as examples Google Flu, the MIT "scraped data" from Websites on prices, tweets, closed circuit TV cameras, retail scanners, credit card transaction data, and data.gov. All of these are the part of the new data world, he maintained.

These "organic data" measure behavior, not internalized states (attitudes, opinions) and are collected in real-time. However, they are "lean" in variables and "grossly incomplete on coverage of the usual target populations," he suggested.

Therefore, for Groves, the future will see multiple modes of data collection through internet behaviors, administrative records, internet self-reporting, as well as the old-fashioned sample survey. Issues of how these data are used, what kind of knowledge they produce, and how to control quality are still unknown, he concluded.

Tsunami of Data and the Difficulties This Presents

Patricia Hu, director of the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, discussed how her agency provides vital data on how people and goods are moved, but that like many other federal programs there is a real shortfall of resources. A casualty of that shortfall, Hu mentioned, is the discontinuation of the Vehicle Inventory and Use Survey, which provided information on the age of trucks in the U.S.

The conference also heard Sharon Lohr of Arizona State University decry the high-stakes, Value-Added Measures utilized by school districts to evaluate teachers, which is part of the administration's Race to the Top education reform. She argued for the application of Edward Deming's systems approach quoting his many admonitions about using numerical quotas for evaluation. Andrew White of the National Center for Education Statistics also indicated that we have "learned much watching No Child Left Behind fail."

Sallie Ann Keller of the Institute for Defense Analyses' Science and Technology Policy Institute also noted the McKinsey report in her presentation adding that we have a "tsunami of data." Echoing Groves, she also argued that there is a data revolution in the social sciences moving from the traditional survey and experiments to "organic flows" of information. She called for the establishment of Urban Observatories that would use these flows of information from some of the same sources Groves outlined.

Steve Cohen of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) presented on the role of that agency's Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) on the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). He noted that the administration used MEPS data in developing the ACA and the survey will also collect data on its provisions as they become operational. Alan Zaslavsky of Harvard called for the integration of statistical methods and data collection to evaluate the coming changes in medical use and expenses.

Thomas Louis of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health discussed the difficulties statisticians face in providing help to policymakers. He noted that often statistical optimality, which is filled with uncertainty, gets trumped by politics and the need for predictability.

Finally, perhaps most intriguing was an early attempt, described by Larry Cox and Alan Karr of the National Institute of Statistical Sciences, to develop a simulation laboratory for federal surveys.

Although Karr is still working on writing code for the project, could this really be the future?

New Federal Interagency Task Force to Promote Research on the Arts and Human Development

Led by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), thirteen federal agencies and departments, including the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [the National Institutes of Health (Aging, Office of Science Education, Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research, Child Health and Human Development, Mental Health and the Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine), Administration on Children and Families, Administration on Aging, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration,] the Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the National Science Foundation's Science of Learning Centers, have come together in a mutual goal designed to encourage building capacity for future research and evidence-sharing about the arts' role in human development. At a November 2011 meeting, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius remarked that she hoped that this session leads to a "deeper collaboration in research and in identifying new ways to engage the arts to improve people's lives."

Many studies have found the links between the arts and positive cognitive, behavioral, and social outcomes. Key research findings highlighted in the report, *The Arts and Human Development: Framing a National Research Agenda for the Arts, Lifelong Learning, and Individual Well-Being*, include:

- Three- to five-year olds from low socioeconomic status (SES) families demonstrated significant gains in nonverbal IQ, numeracy, and spatial cognition after they had received music training and attention training in a small-class setting, compared to a regular Head Start control group.
- Arts-engaged low-income students were more likely than their non-arts-engaged peers to attend and do well in college, obtain employment, volunteer in their communities, and participate in the political process by voting.
- Student behavior, measured by numbers of suspensions and discipline referrals, improved in schools involved in an arts integration initiative, as did student attendance.
- Older adults participating in a chorale program reported higher overall physical health, fewer doctor visits, less medication use, fewer instances of falls, and fewer health problems when compared to a control group. The chorale group also displayed evidence of higher morale and less loneliness than did the control group.
- Older adults with Alzheimer's disease and those with related dementias who participated in a creative storytelling intervention became more engaged and more alert than those in a control group.

Most of this research, however, is small scale and short term. Additionally, there are research gaps in federally sponsored arts research, including how the arts influence both youth and aging populations. Likewise, there is no national representative research on how the arts affect people with illness, injury, or disability. Art research has not been a part of significant research on human development. Similarly there has been little coordination among federal agencies, researchers and practitioners.

Challenges identified by meeting participants include:

- A lack of coordination among federal agency departments and investigators and practitioners from various disciplines in pursuing a vigorous research agenda to understand the role of arts and arts education in human development.
- The small size of study populations participating in research on the arts and human development currently limits generalizability of the results.
- Low visibility of research findings, program evaluation data, and evidence-based models integrating the arts in health and educational programs provided at various segments of the lifespan.

The participants agreed that "the moment is ripe for federal leadership in the design, conduct, and dissemination of rigorous research and evidence-based practices documenting the arts' contributions to human development - from early childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood to middle-aged and older adults." Recommendations included:

> 1) Establish a federal interagency task force to promote the regular sharing of research and information about the arts and human development. The task force would convene two to three times a year to review progress on the following:

- Host a series of webinars highlighting examples of compelling research and evidence-based practices that have integrated the arts in human development. The webinars will be available to the public but aimed especially at researchers and providers of the arts, health, and education for various segments of the lifespan.
- Coordinate the distribution of information about funding opportunities. Conduct or commission an inventory and gap analysis of federally sponsored research on the arts and human development so that future research opportunities can be developed by and across agencies, departments, and the private sector.
- Develop an online clearinghouse of research and evidence-based practices that examine or utilize the arts in health and educational programs across the lifespan.

2) Convene a series of technical workshops to help develop research proposals that represent robust and innovative study design methods to investigate the relationship between the arts and human development-what are the appropriate outcome, how might successful randomization be achieved, how can diversity in the study populations be promoted, and how can artists and arts educators contribute fully.

3) Bring the arts to national and international conversations about integrating the concept of well-being into policy development. The report emphasizes that this recommendation aligns with two National Institute on Aging-sponsored efforts to advance the measurement of subjective-well being for application to research on aging and health. They include: 1) development of a National Research Council panel on "measuring subjective well-being in a policy-relevant framework," and 2) a series of National Academies workshops that will conclude in September 2012 with recommendations on the "evaluation of measures of subjective well-being" and development of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) guidance for national statistical agencies on the measurement of well-being.

The report is available at: www.nea.gov/pub/TheArtsAndHumanDev.pdf.

COSSA President Named Chairman of DBASSE

The National Academies' Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (DBASSE) Advisory Committee has a new Chair. Former Census Director and current COSSA President Ken Prewitt took over the reins on January 12. He replaces former National Science Foundation Director and former President of the University of California, Richard Atkinson.

Prewitt is currently the Carnegie Professor of Public Affairs and the Vice President for Global Centers at Columbia University. His professional career also includes the following: director of the United States Census Bureau, director of the National Opinion Research Center, president of the Social Science Research Council, and senior vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation.

The advisory panel also has four new members: Christopher Cross, President Emeritus and Chairman, Cross & Joftus, LLC and former Assistant Secretary for Research and Improvement at the Department of Education; Julie Davanzo, Director, The RAND Corporation Center for the Study of Family Economic Development; Susan Fiske, Eugene Higgins professor of psychology, Department of Psychology, Princeton University; and William Marras, Professor and Director, Honda Endowed Chair, Integrated Systems Engineering Department, Ohio State University.

DBASSE helps advance the frontiers of the behavioral and social sciences and their applications to public policy. Robert Hauser remains the Division's Executive Director.

International Food Security Focus of Forum

On February 2, international agriculture and nutrition science giant, DuPont, hosted a forum on *Achieving Global Food Security*. The event featured a panel composed ofTom Daschle, former U.S. Senator Majority Leader (D-SD) and current Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress; James Borel, Executive Vice President of DuPont; Gene White, founder of the Global Child Nutrition Foundation; and Jo Luck, former President of Heifer International.

In 2011, DuPont convened an Advisory Committee on Agricultural Innovation and Productivity, chaired by Daschle, to make recommendations about how to approach the task of attaining global security. The report that was produced by this committee can be found here. Three chief challenges were documented by the committee: producing more food and increasing the nutritional value of food; making food accessible and affordable for everyone; and addressing the challenge in a continuously more sustainable and comprehensive way.

The panel at the forum emphasized that to feed the world's projected nine billion people by 2050 will require a 70 percent increase in agricultural output. Luck emphasized that hunger could not be solved without research at the grass roots, because frequently the problem isn't producing food these days, it's getting that food to hungry people. She noted that in many areas of the world there is a significant need to train people not only how to farm, but also in how to preserve and prepare their products. The report findings agree that productivity must be improved through "investment in extension, education and best practices." Agricultural extension is generally recognized as a way to assist farmers in identifying and understanding their production issues, and gaining awareness of the opportunities to improve and how to best to do so.

Daschle focused attention at the forum on aid. He remarked that all around the world, even in the US, food aid funds will soon decline. He views partnerships between public and private organizations as the only means to fill the void and declared that interest in this idea is growing. Public policy actions are the silver bullet, Daschle claimed, to start the process. The report noted that "governments should strengthen social safety net programs to ensure that the most vulnerable have access to food," calling specifically for "long-term investment in economic development in rural and urban areas to ensure private sector growth and job creation."

White highlighted many of the issues having to do with nutrition. She discussed the high prevalence of under-nutrition in women globally, and how producing more food isn't the simple solution. We must also be concerned about what we are producing, she proclaimed. White also brought attention to research that has indicated that school feeding programs greatly increase enrollment in schools, simultaneously increasing education in an area and reducing hunger. Of particular pertinence, White noted that more girls are permitted to go to school in certain areas around the world if there is food provided at no cost to their families.

For more information on this event, please go here.

Building the Science of Public Reporting: AHRQ Seeks Grant Applications

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is seeking developmental grant applications that propose to build the scientific evidence base for effective public reporting for consumers through innovative, actionable studies that address pressing questions in the field. Public reporting is defined as any effort to provide a broad audience of health care consumers with information that allows rating or comparison of providers according to certain performance standards of quality, resource use, or a combination of the two. The process may involve voluntary or mandatory data collection from a mixture of health care providers, plans, payers, and consumers; processing of that data into measures and comparisons to standards of quality and resource use; and final dissemination to a public audience. With the growth of information technology and rising public and governmental demand for information on health care quality and resource use, measurement and reporting of provider performance has grown and diversified rapidly.

According to AHRQ, a number of studies suggest that consumers' infrequent use of public reports of health care quality and resource use is due to the reports' poor design, irrelevant content, and inadequate dissemination, rather than a lack of interest. AHRQ itself does not produce public reports directly, but has a long and active role in helping those who do through measure development, improving data for public reporting, building the science of public reporting, and providing public reporting tools. States, communities, and organizations are also actively involved in public reporting.

The funding opportunity announcement (FOA), Building the Science of Public Reporting (RFA-HS-12-004) will fund exploratory and developmental studies that seek to fill knowledge gaps around public reporting and establish an evidence base to inform the content, design, dissemination and use of public reports. Its focus is on consumers' use of reports, and accordingly, all proposals should take a consumer-focused approach.

The FOA notes that a wide range of research and experimental approaches may be appropriate to advance the science of public reporting based on the area of study and primary research question. Studies may include, but are not limited to: pilot programs, products, and reports; evaluation of products, programs, and organizations; meta-analysis; theory development and testing; experiments and quasi-experiments. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method analyses are acceptable. The research initiative seeks to fill three major gaps in the public reporting evidence base in order to:

1) Improve the design and presentation of public reports to meet the needs of consumers.
2) Increase consumer use and the dissemination of public reports, including subgroups such as AHRQ's priority populations and Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries.
3) Improve the underlying data and methodology of public reports to make them more credible, meaningful and useful.

AHRQ seeks to support high value, actionable research and encourages applications of a variety of sizes and durations that emphasize efficiency of study design. Accordingly, the agency will fund a mix of one, two, and three year studies. Similarly, it is anticipated that the size and duration of each award will also vary. The total amount awarded and the number of awards will depend on the number, quality, duration, and costs of the applications received.

Letters of intent are due on February 27, 2012. Applications are due on March 28, 2012. For more information and/or to apply see the FOA at http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-HS-12-004.html.

PCORI Seeks Input on National Priorities for Research and Research Agenda

The Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institutes (PCORI) is seeking public comments on its first draft of National Priorities for Research and Research Agenda. PCORI is an independent, non-profit, health research organization with the mission to fund research that offers patients and caregivers the information needed to make important healthcare decisions. One of PCORI's first responsibilities is to establish and publish for comment national priorities for research and a research agenda designed to lay the foundation for a portfolio of comparative clinical effectiveness research.

The agenda will be used to guide funding announcements for comparative clinical effectiveness research designed to give patients and caregivers the ability to make better-informed health decisions. Comments will be accepted until 11:59 p.m. EST on March 15.

PCORI also intends to conduct additional forums to obtain and incorporate feedback on the draft national priorities for research and research agenda via focus groups involving patients, caregivers and clinicians. It also plans to hold a national forum on February 27 in Washington, D.C. The forum will be webcast. Following these efforts PCORI will publish a report that summarizes the input with an explanation of how it led to changes in the draft priorities and agenda. Before the Institute can issue funding announcements, however, the priorities and agenda must be adopted by the PCORI Board of Governors. PCORI intends to issue its first funding announcements in May.

Proposed National Priorities for Research

Five research areas have been prioritized by PCORI. According to PCORI, its initial approach specifies a set of questions and topics it believes are most in need of attention across a range of conditions and treatments. Accordingly, PCORI believes that research should focus on:

1. Comparative Assessments of Prevention, Diagnosis, and Treatment Options - 1) clinical options with emphasis on patient preferences and decision-making, 2) biological, clinical, social, economic, and geographic factors that may affect patient outcomes.

2. Improving Healthcare Systems - 1) ways to improve access to care, receipt of care, coordination of care, self-care, and decision-making, 2) use of non-physician health care providers, such as nurses and physician assistants, and the impact on patient outcomes, 3) system-level changes affecting all populations, diseases and health conditions.

3. Communication and Dissemination - 1) strategies to improve patient and clinician knowledge about prevention, diagnosis and treatment options, 2) methods to increase patient participation in care and decision-making and achieve desired outcomes, 4) ways to use electronic data ("e-health records") to support decision-making , 5) best practices for sharing research results.

4. Addressing Disparities - 1) ways to reduce disparities in health outcomes, 2) benefits and risks of healthcare options across populations, 3) strategies to address healthcare barriers that can affect patient preferences and outcomes.

5. Accelerating Patient-Centered and Methodological Research - 1) ways to improve the quality and usefulness of clinical data in follow-up studies, 2) methods to combine and analyze clinical data that follow patients over time, 3) use of registries and clinical data networks to support research about patient-centered outcomes, including rare diseases, 4) strategies to train researchers and enable patients and caregivers to participate in patient-centered outcomes research.

The funding model, according to PCORI, will seek to fulfill the Research Agenda through a combination of grants and targeted contracts and will remain flexible and responsive to emerging challenges and community-generated questions that fall within priority areas and meet its selection criteria.

Funding allocation includes:

- Comparative Assessment of Options for Prevention, Diagnosis, and Treatment - approximately 40 percent;
- Improving Healthcare Systems - approximately 20 percent;
- Communication and Dissemination Research - approximately 10 percent;
- Addressing Disparities - approximately 10 percent; and
- Accelerating PCOR and Methodological Research - approximately 20 percent.

Comments on the National may be provided via PCORI's online survey on its website: http://www.pcori.org/provide-input.

Additional information about the stakeholders' meeting and webcast is available at http://www.pcori.org/meetings-events/event/pcori-national-patient-and-stakeholder-dialogue/.

Modeling Social Behavior: Applications Wanted

The National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) are seeking research applications designs to develop and test innovative theories and computational, mathematical, or engineering approaches that deepen our understanding of complex social behavior. Appropriate proposals should examine phenomena at multiple scales to address the emergence of collective behaviors that arise from individual elements or parts of a system working together. The funding opportunity announcement (FOA) Modeling Social Behavior (RFA-GM-13-006) is designed to support research that explores the often complex and dynamical relationships among the parts of a system and between the system and its environment in order to understand the system as a whole.

The institutes encourage applications that build transdisciplinary teams of scientists spanning a broad range of expertise. Minimally, this team should include senior investigators with expertise in the behavioral or social sciences as well as in computational and systems thinking (computer science, mathematics, engineering, systems-level methodology). Research can involve model organisms or humans. The FOA will support small research projects focusing on theory building and testing, development and testing of innovative methods or methodological approaches, as well as small infrastructure projects focusing on development and testing of shared resources (in the context of a driving biological, basic behavioral or social, or human health issue). The FOA also will fund larger and more integrative research projects focusing on the modeling of complex social behavior.

NIGMS is interested in the following research areas:

- Emergence of new functionality from simple behaviors (how the hierarchical organization of biological and social systems results in the emergence of new functionality)
- Spread of multiple health and/or risk behaviors within social networks (e.g., sleep; diet, nutrition, and food choice; physical activity; tobacco, alcohol, drug use, and other addictions) and use of internet-based communities and other dynamical social networks to understand principles of collective behavior and improve human health
- Influence of interrelationships between affect and cognitive processing on collective behavior
- Role of resilience (the ability of a system at the individual, community, population, and society level to recover from a perturbation or crisis) in collective behavior
- Effect of narratives on collective human behavior
- Integration of knowledge at multiple levels and scales (including biological, behavioral, social, and environmental) to understand and alleviate health disparities

NIGMS is also interested in specific infrastructure development focus areas (generally applicable to broadly defined domains in systems biology, basic behavioral or social sciences, or human health; and in the context of a driving biological, basic behavioral/social, or human health issue)

- Common modeling/computational environments
- Shared data sets or other research resources (e.g., animal models)
- Interoperable toolkits (containing reusable and standardized measures, research protocols, data collection instruments and procedures, analytical and evaluation tools, algorithms, software programs/code, sourcebooks, executables, etc.) and enabling technologies

NIMH is interested in supporting applications that propose:

- Integrative approaches to understanding the neurobiological systems governing social behavior and cognition in humans and animals, and

- The development of realistic models for understanding brain function and the combination of mathematical and computational tools with neurobiological techniques

The Institute is particularly interested in applications in response to this FOA that seek to build transdisciplinary teams that can apply appropriate modeling techniques to multidimensional social neuroscience data.

Letters of Intent are due on March 3, 2012. Applications are due on April 3, 2012. For more information see http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-GM-13-006.html.

New COSSA Member

COSSA is pleased to announce that North Dakota State University has joined the Consortium. The university ranks in the top 50 in the receipt of federal funds for social and behavioral science research. We look forward to working with them to promote and support these sciences.

Consortium of Social Science Associations

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COSSA

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The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) is an advocacy organization promoting attention to and federal support for the social and behavioral sciences.

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