



COSSA

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CONGRESSIONAL ACTIVITIES & NEWS

Senate Appropriations Committee Releases Text of FY 2015 Labor-HHS Appropriations Bill

On July 24, the Senate Appropriations Committee released [bill language](#) and the accompanying [Committee report](#) for the fiscal year (FY) 2015 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS) Appropriations bill. The Labor-HHS Subcommittee approved the bill via voice vote in June. It is still unclear when or if the measure will be considered by the full Appropriations Committee. Instead, it is all but certain that Congress will enact a short-term continuing resolution (CR) to allow time to complete the FY 2015 appropriations process after the November elections. The Senate Appropriations Committee also released draft bills and subcommittee reports on July 24 for the Energy and Water and the Financial Services appropriations bills. Under regular order, these reports are usually not released before consideration by the full Appropriations Committee. COSSA's full analysis of the Labor-HHS bill will appear in the next *COSSA Washington Update*. COSSA's preliminary analysis can be found [here](#).

Senate Commerce Committee Releases Draft COMPETES/NSF Bill

Earlier this month, the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee released a draft of its [America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2014](#) for public input. The America COMPETES Act is bipartisan legislation originally enacted in 2007 and reauthorized in 2010 to revitalize the U.S. scientific enterprise by making critical investments in U.S. basic science agencies. COMPETES serves as authorizing legislation for the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Science, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and federal STEM education programs. The draft Senate bill is a major improvement over its House counterpart, the *Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science and Technology Act*, or FIRST Act (H.R. 4186), which was reported out of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee in May.

[Read on](#) for more details.

FEDERAL AGENCY & ADMINISTRATION ACTIVITIES & NEWS

Cora Marrett to Leave NSF

Earlier this month, the National Science Foundation (NSF) [announced](#) that Cora B. Marrett, NSF Deputy Director, will resign her position effective August 24. Marrett was confirmed as Deputy Director in 2011 and has served previously as NSF's acting director. More notably for the COSSA community, Marrett served as the first assistant director for the Social, Behavioral and Economic

Sciences Directorate, and is a former assistant director of the Education and Human Resources Directorate. She is a major voice for social and behavioral science, within NSF and publicly, and has been a familiar face at COSSA events over the years. Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), Ranking Member of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee, issued a [statement](#) on July 24 thanking Marrett for her service to NSF.

NIGMS Request for Information: Maximizing Investigators' Research Award

The National Institute of General Medical Science (NIGMS) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently issued a time-sensitive Request for Information (RFI) for input to assist in its planning for a potential new program tentatively called the Maximizing Investigators' Research Award (MIRA). According to NIGMS, MIRA is intended to be a grant in support of all of the research supported by the institute in an investigator's laboratory. The Institute is planning to issue a Funding Opportunity Announcement to test the new program on a pilot scale. Accordingly, it is seeking feedback from the scientific community.

During the July meeting of the NIH Scientific Management Review Board (SMRB), NIH director Francis Collins raised the issue of whether in difficult times science agencies should shift a larger proportion of their research dollars into funding investigators, as opposed to projects that can be very detailed in terms of what the proposal says the investigator is going to do (see [related story](#)).

According to the RFI, the Institute is attempting to address the consequences of its funding mechanisms, including efficiency and efficacy, associated with providing basic research support to individual investigators via a pilot program to fund investigators' overall research programs. The hope is that the new mechanism will:

- Increase the stability of funding for NIGMS-supported investigators, which could enhance their ability to take on ambitious scientific projects and approach problems creatively.
- Increase flexibility for investigators to follow important new research directions as opportunities arise, rather than being bound to specific aims proposed in advance of the studies.
- Improve the distribution of funding among the nation's highly talented and promising investigators to increase overall scientific productivity and the chances for important breakthroughs.
- Reduce the time spent by researchers writing and reviewing grant applications, in the long term.

For additional details, [read on](#).

NIH Issues Challenge to Find Advances Tied to NIGMS Support

The National Institute of General Medical Science (NIGMS) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is seeking the public's help in capturing the Institute's progress toward its strategic goal: "to advance awareness and understanding of the basic biomedical research enterprise, including its value, requirements, and potential impact." The Institute has issued a challenge to the scientific community with the goal of identifying past advances that are serving (or have served) to improve human health and well-being. It excludes ongoing studies that may, in the future, have a major impact.

NIGMS intends to use the examples to help inform the historical context of scientific breakthroughs and the Institute's role in supporting them. The examples will supplement NIGMS' ongoing efforts to link advances in human health and well-being to taxpayer-supported basic research and to stimulate further innovation by explaining the value and the impact of basic research on human health.

Submissions are expected to be a written document that describes the basic research and how it directly led to improvements in human health, well-being, or other tangible benefits to the public; NIGMS support must have played a major/critical role in one or more of the underlying discoveries. A history of continuous or exclusive NIGMS support is not required.

The focus of the submission must fall into one or both of the following categories:

1. Major advances funded by NIGMS that have led to improvements in human health, well-being, or other tangible benefits to the public.
2. Applications in medicine, industry, technology, or elsewhere that have their roots in NIGMS-funded research projects. Examples include commonly used diagnostics, therapeutics, devices, or technologies used in medical, industrial, agricultural, or other fields.

NIGMS plans to select up to ten winners, who will receive \$500 prizes and recognition on the NIGMS website. Submissions are due by October 20, 2014. For additional requirements, judging criteria, FAQs, and other information, see NIGMS' [website](#).

SMRB Discusses Pre-College Engagement in Biomedical Science; NIH Director Reflects on Impact of the Sequester

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Scientific Management Review Board (SMRB) held a two-day meeting on July 7-8. The SMRB was authorized by the [NIH Reform Act of 2006](#). The statute provides certain organizational authorities to the Department of Health and Human Services and NIH on which the SMRB provides advice. The meeting's agenda included reflections from NIH director Francis Collins and a full day discussion of pre-college engagement in biomedical science led by the SMRB Working Group on Pre-college Engagement in Biomedical Science (PEBS).

The SMRB's PEBS working group is chaired by Clyde Yancy, Northwestern University. PEBS is charged with "recommending ways to optimize NIH's precollege programs and initiatives that both align with the NIH mission and ensure a continued pipeline of biomedical science students and professionals."

[Read on](#) for more details.

Rising Mortality Rates in Women in the U.S.: Role of Drug Abuse and Addiction

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) director Nora Volkow recently discussed the role of substance abuse in the "Rising Mortality Rates in Women in the U.S.," the subject of a July 15 Women's Policy, Inc.- sponsored congressional briefing. Susan Dentzer, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), moderated the session.

According to Dentzer, the briefing was designed to address the data in the 2013 National Research Council (NRC) and Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, *U.S. Health in International Perspective: Shorter Lives, Poorer Health* (see [Update, October 7, 2013](#)), also the subject of an earlier congressional briefing sponsored by the Coalition for the Advancement of Health Through Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (CAHT-BSSR), a COSSA-led coalition co-chaired by deputy director Angela Sharpe. Dentzer highlighted research by David A. Kindig and Erika R. Cheng which examined the trends in age-adjusted mortality rates in U.S. counties between 1992 and 2006 and found that "even as mortality fell in most U.S. counties, female mortality rose in 42.8 percent of counties during this period."

The NRC/IOM report found that Americans are at a distinct health disadvantage relative to populations of peer nations. With regard to female mortality, new research reveals particularly troubling trends across the U.S. Specifically, the trends show that for many women, there is a reversal of the long-term trend of rising life expectancy. Dentzer also pointed out that we know less than we need to know about the causes and stressed the "need for more research and action."

[Read on](#) for more details regarding the briefing.

National Humanities Council Meets as NEH Faces Budget Uncertainty, New Chairman

The National Council on the Humanities, the advisory body to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), met on July 10 and 11. The meeting was presided over by NEH's Acting Chairman Carole Watson, who has been leading the agency since Jim Leach left in May. Watson observed that it has been a time of change for NEH, which recently relocated from its home of more than 30 years in the Old Post Office Building to new offices in Constitution Center. In addition, President Obama's nominee to lead the agency, William "Bro" Adams, former president of Colby College, had recently been confirmed by the Senate. Adams was sworn in on July 22, beginning his tenure as Chairman.

At the time of the meeting, the House Appropriations Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee had just approved a cut of \$8 million (more than 5 percent) to the NEH's \$146 million budget for fiscal year (FY) 2015, which would have brought the agency to its lowest funding level since 1972. In the days following, the full House Appropriations Committee restored the cut, proposing to maintain NEH's FY 2014 budget. However, as the Congressional appropriations process has all but ground to a halt, all federal agencies are facing a certain amount of fiscal uncertainty.

During the meeting, the Council heard a presentation about the [Digital Public Library of America](#) (DPLA) from Dan Cohen, DPLA's executive director. Supported by funding from the NEH as well as private foundations, DPLA is a repository of digitized items (photographs, artwork, manuscripts, etc.) made freely available to the public and organized according to categories including topic, location, format, and time period. Its content comes from a network of regional hubs located around the country. When it launched in April 2013, the library consisted of 2.4 million items provided by six hubs, comprising 500 contributing institutions (local libraries, historical societies, museums, etc.). Today, less than a year and a half later, DPLA's collection has grown to 7.3 million items, coming from 11 hubs and 1300 contributing institutions. DPLA also maintains an open data policy, allowing for the development of a vibrant ecosystem of third-party apps. Cohen explained that DPLA's next goal is to expand its hubs and partnerships so it truly covers the entire country. He

noted that NEH's initial support for the project was critical, not just in terms of funding but because the NEH's "seal of approval" was a draw for other partners.

NCHS Releases Data on Weight Misperception in Children, Sexual Orientation-Based Health Disparities

A recent National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) data brief looks at [children's \(8-15 years old\) misperception of their weight status](#). When asked if they felt they were too thin, overweight, or about right, 30 percent of children's responses did not match their weight status. This misperception was more common among boys (32.2 percent) than girls (28 percent). Seventy-six percent of overweight children and 41.9 percent of obese children described themselves as "about right." Nearly half (48.5 percent) of underweight children also described themselves as "about right." More than 12 percent of healthy weight children (over 2 million) believed themselves to be too thin or too fat. Weight misperception also varied by race and ethnicity; it was higher among non-Hispanic black (34.4 percent) and Mexican-American (34 percent) children than non-Hispanic white children (27.7 percent). The data comes from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), 2005-2012.

NCHS has also released its first sexual orientation-based health data, drawn from the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), as a new National Health Statistics Report, [Sexual Orientation and Health Among U.S. Adults: National Health Interview Survey, 2013](#). Based on interviews with adults ages 18-64, the report indicates that 96.6 percent of adults identified as straight, 1.6 percent as gay or lesbian, and 0.7 percent as bisexual, with the remainder answering "don't know," "something else," or refusing to answer. The report found higher rates of smoking and binge drinking among gay or lesbian and bisexual adults. Overall, there were no significant differences between straight-identified and lesbian-, gay-, or bisexual-identified adults based on physical activity, self-reported health, or uninsurance rates (although there was some variation by gender). A higher percentage of gay and lesbian adults received an influenza vaccine (42.9 percent) than straight adults (35 percent).

Interagency Statistical Forum Publishes Special Report on Young Adults

The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics has published a report, [America's Young Adults: Special Issue, 2014](#), that pulls data from nationally representative federal surveys on the demographics; education; economic circumstances; family formation; civic, social, and personal behavior; and health and safety of adults aged 18-24. A [press release](#) about the report notes: "American young adults are more racially and ethnically diverse, more likely to graduate from high school, and attend college, and less likely to smoke than previous generations... However, the young adults have more student debt than generations past, earn less than their counterparts in the year 2000, and more than 1 in 5 are obese." Some highlights include:

- More than half a million young adults were serving on active duty in the armed forces in 2012.
- Over 180,000 young adults were imprisoned in state correctional institutions in 2011.
- College enrollment increased from 26 percent in 1980 to 41 percent in 2012.
- The mean cumulative debt for a fourth-year student in 2011-12 was \$25,400, compared to \$14,700 in 1989-90.
- Median annual earnings in 2012 (in constant dollars) were lower for young adults at all

levels of education than they were in 2000.

- In 2013, 58 percent of young adult men and 51 percent of young adult women lived with their parents.
- After a significant increase in obesity between 1988-1994 and 1999-2002, there was not a significant change in the obesity rate between 1999-2002 and 2007-2010.

The Forum is a working group of [22 federal agencies](#) that "fosters coordination, collaboration, and integration of Federal efforts to collect, analyze and report data on conditions and trends related to child and family well-being."

NOTABLE PUBLICATIONS & COMMUNITY EVENTS

AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition Reflects on Five Years

The [Science and Human Rights Coalition](#) of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) held its biannual meeting on July 14 and 15. COSSA is a member of the Coalition, which is a "network of scientific and engineering membership organizations that recognize a role for scientists and engineers in human rights." This year marks the fifth anniversary of the Coalition's founding; an anniversary celebration is planned for October. The meeting was a chance for members to look back on what has been accomplished and consider new directions for the future. The meeting featured a keynote on the State Department's science and human rights activities, presentations on innovative applications for new science and technologies to human rights efforts, and a panel offering funders' perspectives on science and human rights work.

Click [here](#) to read COSSA's complete report on the meeting.

IOM Workshop Asks "Can Food Be Addictive?"

The Food Forum at the National Academies' Institute of Medicine (IOM) held a workshop on July 9 and 10 on [Relationships between the Brain, Digestive System, and Eating Behavior](#). The Food Forum is chaired by Francis Busta, University of Minnesota, St. Paul. Eric Decker, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, chaired the workshop planning committee. Early presentations explored the physiological interactions between the brain and the digestive system, and later sessions assessed the science and methodologies behind the "food addiction" model.

[Read on](#) for COSSA's full report on the workshop.

COSSA MEMBER ACTIVITIES

New COSSA Member: American Academy of Arts & Sciences

We are delighted to welcome the [American Academy of Arts & Sciences](#) to the COSSA membership. Headquartered in Cambridge, MA, the Academy is one of the nation's oldest learned societies and serves as an independent policy research center, providing "authoritative and nonpartisan policy advice to decision-makers in government, academia, and the private sector." We are thrilled that they have joined the COSSA community. COSSA's full membership list can be viewed [online](#).

COSSA ACTION & OUTREACH

COSSA Endorses AAAS Statement on Disabilities Treaty Ratification

COSSA has endorsed the [statement of the American Association for the Advancement of Science \(AAAS\) Board of Directors](#) urging the Senate to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Adopted in 2006 by the United Nations General Assembly, the CRPD has been ratified by 146 countries. The U.S. was a signatory on the treaty, but previous attempts to ratify it in the Senate have failed. The Convention may again be brought to the Senate as early as this summer. The AAAS statement explains why scientific organizations are vocally supporting ratification:

"The Convention explicitly recognizes the rights of persons with disabilities to enjoy equal access to medical facilities, education, workplaces, and communications technologies. Furthermore, it calls on nations to support research and development on adaptive goods and services, as well as new assistive technologies; encourages international cooperation in research, facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge, and standards for sharing medical and technological advances; and reiterates the prohibition against medical or scientific experimentation on any person without their free consent."

To read more on the connections between science and technology and disability rights, read COSSA's [report](#) on the January 2014 meeting of the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition. See also [our related story](#) in this issue on the Coalition's summer 2014 meeting.

COSSA Urges Increased Funding for Transportation Statistics Agency

On July 15, COSSA joined several other national associations on a [letter](#) to Transportation Committee chairs and ranking members in the House and Senate urging increased funding for the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) at the U.S. Department of Transportation in fiscal year (FY) 2015. As the letter reads, "The BTS is the principal source of timely, accurate, and objective information on the current state, safety, and performance of highway, rail, air, maritime, and pipeline transportation systems."

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