



October 2, 2018

Dr. Robert R. Redfield
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Redfield,

We, the undersigned members of the Executive Committee of the Friends of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), are writing to express our strong support for funding NCHS in Fiscal Year 2020.

The Friends of NCHS (www.friendsofnchs.org) is a voluntary coalition of more than 250 organizations that support the NCHS. Our members, which include think tanks, patient, provider, public health, and scientific associations, and universities, rely on data collected and maintained by NCHS to conduct research, support advocacy efforts, and inform health policy. As members of the executive committee, we lead the Friends of NCHS by formulating annual funding requests and sponsoring activities to inform policymakers about the important work NCHS conducts.

As you know, the President recently signed into law, H.R. 6157, a bill funding the Department of Health and Human Services in FY 2019. The bill includes \$160 million to support NCHS. While this figure is \$5 million more than the Administration's FY 2019 request, it is the same level of funding that the agency has received since FY 2016. NCHS stakeholders are concerned how years of flat funding are affecting the nation's principal health statistics agency.

As you know, NCHS has an ambitious mandate, which includes collecting data on chronic disease prevalence, health disparities, emergency room use, teen pregnancy, infant mortality, causes of death, and rates of insurance, as well as managing the National Vital Statistics System. Federal, state, and local agencies rely on NCHS data to inform population estimates and projections and to guide key policy and funding decisions. Scientists use NCHS data to conduct life-saving research and research training. In the last decade, NCHS has spearheaded efforts to modernize the collection of birth and death statistics, increasing, for example, the percentage of mortality records reported within 10 days from 14 percent in 2012 to almost 50 percent in 2016. These are just a few illustrations of the agency's expansive scope of responsibility and its achievements. Given the agency's current funding outlook, stakeholders are concerned NCHS will not be able to fully meet its mandate as well as sustain such a record of success.

Since 2011, NCHS has been essentially flat funded, greatly diminishing the agency's purchasing power. Current base funding remains below FY 2010 levels, adjusted for inflation, and the agency does not expect to ever recover the roughly \$25 million in supplemental Prevention and Public

Health Fund dollars it lost in 2013. NCHS also faces 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.

Stakeholders understand that if NCHS is cut below its current level of funding, it will need to consider eliminating or radically altering one of its two seminal surveys: the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)—the principal data source for studying demographic, socioeconomic, and behavioral differences in health and mortality outcomes since 1957—or the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), which has assessed the health and nutritional status of adults and children in the United States since the early 1960s. Despite making marginal adjustments to accommodate years of budget cuts, including reducing sample size and delaying necessary survey innovations, the agency cannot responsibly sustain these surveys if its funding level dips below \$160 million.

As NCHS faces its fourth consecutive year of flat funding, we urge you to consider its current fiscal and operational challenges and to work with the HHS leadership and the Office of Management and Budget to propose increasing the agency's budget in FY 2020. The Friends of NCHS recommended **providing the agency with \$175 million in FY 2019, \$15 million more than the agency received since FY 2018.** We anticipate promoting this funding level in FY 2020 as well. As the nation grapples with complex public health issues, such as the ongoing opioid crisis and diminishing U.S. life expectancy, now is the time to invest in NCHS and help the agency meet its critical mission. We are eager to work with you to realize our mutual goal of supporting the NCHS and welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your staff at any time.

Thank you for supporting NCHS and for working to strengthen the agency. If the Friends of NCHS can be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact us via the current chair, Ms. Mary Jo Hoeksema, at maryjo@popassoc.org.

Sincerely,



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Population Association of America/
Association of Population Centers



Emily Holubowich
National Association for Public Health
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cc: Chesley Richards, CDC
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