

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2019

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
H-307, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As you draft your Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we urge you to appropriate \$189 million for the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This amount reflects an increase to NCHS's base budget of \$14.6 million from its FY 2020 appropriation, in addition to formalizing an ongoing transfer from Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Informatics.

NCHS collects data on chronic disease prevalence, health disparities, teen pregnancy, infant mortality, disproportionate maternal mortality among African American women, emergency room use, causes of death, and rates of insurance to name a few. These data sets are used across the Federal government and play an essential part in making up the nation's statistical and public health infrastructure. For example, NCHS health data is critical to helping officials better understand and confront some of our most pressing health concerns, including the opioid crisis and the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19. Some common stakeholders that utilize this data include the Census Bureau in informing its population estimates and projections; by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in developing nutrition policies that guide multibillion dollar federal food assistance programs; by state and local governments and public health officials; by federal policymakers; and health services researchers.

Critically, NCHS's work helps us better understand and confront some of our most pressing health concerns. For example, NCHS's National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) releases timely information on drug overdose deaths thereby enabling officials to better understand the nation's opioid crisis. Additionally, NCHS works with the World Health Organization (WHO) as co-chairs of the ICD Coordination and Maintenance Committee and identifies new guidance or codes amid urgent health needs. Such instructions and protocols could prove crucial with the spread of infectious diseases such as COVID-19. Increased funding will improve the quality and timeliness of NCHS's reporting activities as we face these ongoing or potential public health crises.

NCHS has received flat funding of \$160.4 million since FY 2016, and its purchasing power has greatly diminished while the costs of conducting surveys have only grown. As a result, NCHS has had to focus nearly all available resources on continuing to produce the high-quality data that communities across the country depend on to understand their health. An appropriation of \$189 million would restore NCHS's budget to its inflation-adjusted FY 2010 funding level, giving it the funding it needs to continue to produce its essential existing surveys and reports without interruption while being able to invest in much-needed innovation.

Investing in the agency now will allow NCHS to put its expertise to transformative use to create a true twenty-first century statistical agency and reaffirm NCHS's status as the world's gold-standard producer of health statistics. With additional funding, NCHS would be able to link and integrate electronic health records (EHRs) with other data collection systems into NCHS's own data production processes. Such innovation would enable NCHS to create efficiencies among its largest population health surveys and capitalize on advances in survey methodology, big data, and computing. These investments will help NCHS spot trends in Americans' health earlier and ensure all states' vital records systems are able to respond to new and emerging trends in health and mortality.

Thank you again for your attention to our request. With your support, NCHS will continue to shape our understanding of Americans' health with objective, relevant, accurate, and timely information.

Sincerely,



Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

FY21 Funding for National Center for Health Statistics

List of Signatories

March 13, 2020

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