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## Coalition for the Advancement of Health Through Behavioral and Social Science Research

June 17, 2014

The Honorable Jack Kingston  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States of House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States of House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kingston and Ranking Member DeLauro:

The undersigned scientific and academic organizations encourage you to support and protect all sciences funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the markup of the Fiscal Year 2015 bill. In the past, the Subcommittee has adopted or allowed unfortunate amendments targeting some areas of supported NIH research, including health economics and other behavioral and social science research. Our combined membership strongly urges you to reject any such amendments this year. We also encourage the Subcommittee to continue its tradition of supporting the NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR).

The underlying causes of diseases and disabilities are complex. Many factors, including genetic, social, biological, environmental, and behavioral, must be understood and unraveled to fully appreciate how these conditions occur and can be prevented and treated effectively across different populations. The social and behavioral sciences are instrumental to this progress, and researchers from economics, psychology, sociology, demography, social work, nursing and other disciplines have all made contributions that build our collective knowledge of the determinants of health and provide the foundation for future policy action.

As you know, the **NIH's mission is "to seek *fundamental knowledge* about the nature and behavior of living systems and the *application of that knowledge* to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability."** The behavioral and social sciences have been an integral part of that mission since NIH's inception. Some of NIH's proudest achievements have involved the support of these sciences. For example, the Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) trial demonstrated that a modest exercise and diet intervention was more effective than the drug Metformin at preventing the conversion from metabolic syndrome to diabetes, especially in older trial participants. In addition, behavioral and social scientists identified a vision factor called *Useful Field of View* that, when constricted, contributes to auto accidents at intersections. They then developed a means of training drivers to improve it. This is the sort of evidence-based information that consumers, families and insurance companies need to keep drivers safe and independent.

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Angela L. Sharpe, MG  
Consortium of Social Science Associations  
1701 K Street, NW, Suite 1150  
Washington, DC, 20005  
Tel: 202/842-3525 Fax: 202/842-2788

Pat Kobor, MA  
American Psychological Association  
750 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
Tel: 202/336-5933 Fax: 202/336-6063

NIH-supported research led to the effective "Back to Sleep/Safe to Sleep" campaign to change the position in which people put their infants down to sleep, significantly lowering the incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

NIH's support of economics research has generated a number of findings that address some of the most pressing issues in health research including how to promote healthy behaviors, stem the onset of chronic conditions, improve the productivity of medical care, and understand how socio-economic factors interact with communities to perpetuate health disparities among population groups. In some instances, this research has had the added benefit of generating significant cost savings, such as the NIH-funded study that led to changes in the pharmacy benefit system and eliminated \$100 million in annual costs without causing adverse health effects.

NIH-funded economics research also has global implications. For example, James Heckman, a Nobel Prize-winning, NIH-funded economist, demonstrated that early interventions in the cognitive and socio-emotional development of disadvantaged children have much higher economic returns than interventions that occur later in life. This research has improved the health of children around the world.

These examples are just a very few of the contributions made by NIH-supported behavioral and social research both at the Institute and trans-NIH level. OBSSR plays a critical role in coordinating trans-NIH initiatives across all of the behavioral and social sciences and representing NIH on numerous inter-agency committees and collaborations. Further, OBSSR leverages its small budget to co-fund grants and other projects in the NIH Institutes and Centers. We are pleased that the Subcommittee has historically recognized the value of OBSSR, as it does all of the Offices within the NIH Office of the Director, and urge you to continue to do so.

In closing, we urge members of the Subcommittee to give full support to NIH and all of the sciences that make important contributions to the nation's health.

Sincerely,

**American Anthropological Association  
American Educational Research Association  
American Sociological Association  
American Psychological Association  
Association of American Geographers  
Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine  
Consortium of Social Science Associations  
Federation of Associations in Behavioral & Brain Sciences  
Population Association of America/Association of Population Centers  
Society of Behavioral Medicine**

cc: Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education