FRIENDS OF NCHS

March 9, 2023

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
    Labor, Health and Human Services, and
    Education
Chair, Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
    Labor, Health and Human Services, and
    Education
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Appropriations
    Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
    Human Services, and Education
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member, Appropriations
    Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
    Human Services, and Education
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Baldwin, and Ranking Member Capito,

As Friends of NCHS, we write to thank you for the subcommittee's support for the National Center for Health Statistics in recent years. Through its data collection and analysis, NCHS provides enormous value to researchers and policymakers at all levels of government. To that end, the undersigned organizations respectfully request an appropriation of $215 million for NCHS in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024. This increased funding will strengthen the agency's ability to provide unbiased health data to policymakers and reinforce NCHS's role as the world's gold-standard producer of health statistics.

The enclosed Friends of NCHS FY24 priorities document details specific areas in which additional investment will help NCHS enhance its work. The U.S. is emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic with a renewed understanding that timely, frequent, and granular data on America's health and health care are essential to guide the public policy decisions that protect and improve our nation's health. With additional funding, NCHS will be able to modernize and diversify its data collection efforts and more quickly provide meaningful information.

The Friends of NCHS greatly appreciates the House and Senate Subcommittee's longstanding support of NCHS and we look forward to continuing to work with you. Thank you for supporting this essential agency and its role in monitoring the health of our nation.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
AcademyHealth
Advocates for Better Children's Diets

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Anthropological Association
American Association for Clinical Chemistry

American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research

American Association of Colleges of Nursing

American Association on Health and Disability

American College of Clinical Pharmacy

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American Educational Research Association

American Heart Association

American Pediatric Society

American Physical Therapy Association

American Society for Nutrition

American Society for Reproductive Medicine

American Society on Aging

American Sociological Association

American Statistical Association

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs

Association of Black Cardiologists

Association of Population Centers

Association of Public Data Users

Association of Public Health Laboratories

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

Consortium of Social Science Associations

Cornell Population Center

Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics

Data Coalition Initiative

Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences

Foundation for Sarcoidosis Research

Healthy Teen Network

Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado Boulder

Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research

Lakeshore Foundation

March of Dimes

National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems (NAPHSIS)

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association

National League for Nursing

National Safety Council

North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition

Pediatric Policy Council

Population Association of America

Power to Decide

Prevent Blindness

Safe States Alliance

Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine

Society for Pediatric Research

Society for Women's Health Research

University of Washington Center for Studies in Demography & Ecology

WE in the World

Invest in the future of US health statistics:
The case for funding the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) at $215 million in FY24

NCHS' Two Overarching Drivers for Innovation and Investment

1. Data-user demand for
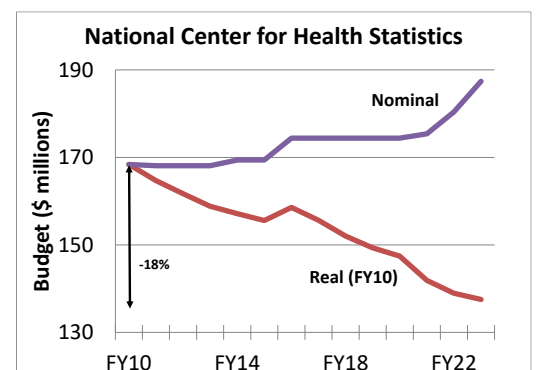   a. More real-time data to inform core indicators of health and healthcare and be prepared for the next public health crisis;
   b. More granular data on key population subgroups including those defined by age, gender, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and geographic area;
   c. Data on health and healthcare equity especially in regard to the immediate and long-term consequences of the COVID pandemic; and
   d. Expanded information on social determinants of health and healthcare, including economic stability, healthcare quality/access, education, community context, and physical environment.

2. NCHS challenges/threats
   a. Existing programs will become outdated in terms of topics covered, methodology, and technology due to a 18% loss of purchasing power since FY10. This has reduced the scope of NCHS data collections and made significant methodological and *technology* improvements impossible when they are most needed.
   b. Declining response rates require additional investment in data collection *methods and new technologies* that not only improve response but *also* allow for the determination and correction of non-response bias. Investments are needed to support research in a variety of areas to improve data quality, granularity, and timeliness.
   c. To capitalize on the Data Modernization Initiative (DMI) investments in NCHS' vital statistics program, continued investment is necessary to expand reporting on maternal health, high risk births, and fetal deaths, improve cause of death ascertainment and expand NCHS' support of DMI-funded state vital records systems modernization and other state data modernizations efforts.

THE CHALLENGE: NCHS must fulfill demand for new data products that are more real-time, higher frequency, and more granular while maintaining its current data products.

NCHS data have long been the gold standard for measuring health status and changes in health outcomes for the most vulnerable and identifying emerging health issues for the nation. To remain so and to meet evolving data needs, NCHS' statistical systems need to be overhauled over the next several years. NCHS' challenge is to continue to provide data products while the necessary wholesale changes take place. Without funds to innovate in a significant way, NCHS is left to innovate around the edges to try to maintain quality.

National Center for Health Statistics

Budget ($ millions); Nominal; Real (FY10); -18%; 190; 170; 150; 130; FY10; FY14; FY18; FY22

The Friends of NCHS recommend a minimum of $215 million in FY24. The $28 million increase over the FY23 level, which approximately restores NCHS to its FY10 level when adjusted for inflation, could be used in the following ways:

1. **Electronic Health Records:** Data collections based on existing Electronic Health Records (EHRs) provide a great resource to better understand care provided by the US healthcare system at the national, state, and local level, but investments are needed to harness this resource so that it can provide more real time interpretability. An increased investment of **$11 million** is recommended (EHR purchasing, staffing, research, cloud migration).

2. **Expand data linkage and modeling:** The usefulness of data obtained through surveys and from administrative systems is substantially increased when linked, *especially when examining the impact of social determinants of healt*h. However, the interpretability of the linked data is directly related to the linkage methods used and the evaluation methods applied. The growing need for information on the drivers of health differences across the U.S. population also call for more investment in modeling. Expansion of NCHS' linkage program and Investment in modeling would support the use of predictive analytics and produce estimates of health differences at smaller geographic areas, thereby helping CDC and HHS to target resources more effectively and efficiently. An increased investment of **$4 million** is recommended (research, staffing, privacy protection).

3. **Expand the content, granularity, and timeliness of data products:** More granular and timely data products are needed including those that identify key social determinants of health and health disparities. With additional resources, NCHS could increase sample sizes in the agency's signature surveys, including the National Health Interview Survey and Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, to produce stable subgroup estimates which also will support modeling activities. New staff would also be necessary to develop and implement the range of data products that NCHS will be able to release on a more rapid basis. An increased investment of **$8 million** is requested (data collection, research, staffing).

4. **More rapid, relevant vital statistics:** With additional, annual investments, NCHS would continue to improve the vital records sharing process with states and jurisdictions and expand its relationship with the medical examiner and coroner community through support of the Coordinating Office of Medical Examiners and Coroners (COMEC). These investments will result in a fully modernized system capable of tracking critical mortality trends, such as opioid overdoses, suicides, and COVID-19 deaths. An increased investment of **$4 million** is recommended (research, staffing, implementation).

How the 4 components of the $215 million recommendation meet NCHS needs and challenges

	More real-time data	More granularity	Equity data	Social determinants information	Selected topics requiring expanded scope	Existing program maintenance	Addressing declining response rates
Electronic health records	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Data linkage & modeling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Expanded content, granularity, & timeliness fo data products	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
More rapid, relevant vital statistics	✓		✓		✓	✓	