



March 27, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education and  
Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray,

As you and your colleagues begin work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you fund the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) at the level of \$471 million, commensurate with the agency's FY 2010 appropriation. AHRQ is an essential element of the nation's health care ecosystem, charged with improving the quality and delivery of health care. This funding level would allow AHRQ to rebuild portfolios terminated as a result of years of past cuts and expand its research and training portfolio to address our nation's pressing and evolving health care challenges.

To be sure, *discovering* cures is critical to patients, providers, and our communities. But understanding how to most effectively *deliver* those cures to patients through health services research is equally critical. AHRQ is the only federal agency whose sole focus is to generate reliable research on how to deliver the highest quality care, at the greatest value, with the best outcomes to all patients. It is the only agency that funds research on the "real-world" patient—the one who doesn't have diabetes alone, for example, but also has cardiovascular disease and renal disease; or the patient who has cancer, as well as heart disease. AHRQ-funded research and databases allow us to understand where waste, inefficiencies, and gaps exist within the health care system, and allows patients, payers, providers, and others to harness American innovation and make the health care system safer, more efficient, and more effective.

An example of AHRQ's successful work includes efforts to reduce hospital acquired conditions. New, preliminary data from AHRQ finds that by implementing transformational, AHRQ-funded research, hospitals, health systems, and other providers have prevented an estimated 20,500 hospital deaths and saved \$7.7 billion in health care costs from 2014 to 2017. In another example, AHRQ funded research grants are finding ways to ensure rural primary care practices are equipped to respond to the opioid crisis. An explosion in the incidence of opioid addiction and overdoses, particularly in rural areas of the country, has elevated this issue to

crisis-level in the United States. Primary care practices are often the first line of defense against this and other substance use disorders.

Restoring AHRQ's budget to the inflation-adjusted FY 2010 level of \$471 million will allow for reinvestment in critical initiatives that were terminated or have eroded since. Among those terminated was the agency's research portfolio to optimize care for America's nearly 60 million patients living with multiple chronic conditions. It was estimated that by 2020, an estimated eighty-one million people would have multiple chronic conditions and the costs of their care would consume 80 percent of publicly funded health insurance programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. Investing in AHRQ now may help defray those costs.

Health services research shows that as much as one-third of the more than \$3 trillion our nation spends on health care each year is waste—care that is inappropriate, ineffective, or harmful. Every dollar we invest in generating evidence to eliminate that waste is a sound fiscal investment. Just as we fund national war colleges to ensure that our military is the most effective fighting force in the world, funding AHRQ ensures that our health care system becomes the most efficient one in the world. We urge you to make AHRQ, and its critical research, a priority in FY 2021.

Sincerely,

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RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate

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ANGUS S. KING JR.  
United States Senate

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JEANNE SHAHEEN  
United States Senate

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RICHARD J. DURBIN  
United States Senate

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KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND  
United States Senate

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MARGARET WOOD HASSAN  
United States Senate

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CORY A. BOOKER  
United States Senate

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DEBBIE STABENOW  
United States Senate

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DIANNE FEINSTEIN  
United States Senate

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MICHAEL F. BENNET  
United States Senate

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CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY  
United States Senate

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GARY C. PETERS  
United States Senate

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BENJAMIN L. CARDIN  
United States Senate

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CHRISTOPHER A. COONS  
United States Senate

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EDWARD J. MARKEY  
United States Senate

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SHERROD BROWN  
United States Senate

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ELIZABETH WARREN  
United States Senate