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Dr. Diana Bianchi
Director, NICHD
31 Center Drive
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Bianchi,

On behalf of the members of the Population Association of America (PAA) and Association of Population Centers (APC), we are writing to express our alarm and concern about recent proposed cuts to NICHD supported large-scale longitudinal studies and to highlight how these cuts will impede broader scientific progress on a wide range of issues impacting individual health and well-being, especially for infants, children, and adolescents. In addition, we are writing to request an opportunity to collaborate on a possible resolution.

Since the beginning of Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, several studies, including the Panel Study of Income Dynamics Child Development Supplement and the Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Study (formerly the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study), which scored exceptionally well in review and were recommended for funding, have been told they could be funded at 60% or less of their requested level. We understand and appreciate that the Institute is working to address these proposed reductions by, for example, seeking co-funding from other Federal agencies. However, we remain concerned given the uncertain and precarious nature of the current deliberations.

As you can imagine, funding reductions of this magnitude will have immediate adverse effects, forcing the studies' principal investigators (P.I.s) to drastically curtail the surveys' scope and content, which has implications for advancing broader scientific progress. The impact of these cuts is not limited to the P.I.s and their research teams. These cutbacks will reverberate throughout the entire population research community given these data are public goods that are used widely to inform research and training activities at universities nationwide, including underserved institutions that rely heavily on these publicly available datasets.

Praised by Congress, including, most recent reports accompanying the FY 2023 U.S. House of Representatives and Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (LHHS) Appropriations bills, as well as the FY 2024 Senate and House LHHS appropriations report released in July and November, respectively, these studies are consistently recognized for their unique contributions to science.

Below are examples of major recent contributions and ways in which proposed funding cutbacks will adversely affect scientific progress.

Panel Study of Income Dynamics Child Development Supplement (PSID CDS)

- PSID, which is an ongoing survey of a nationally representative sample of US families that began in 1968, has collected data on the same families and their descendants for 43 waves over 54 years (as of 2023). Data from the PSID CDS-2023 will allow researchers to study how parental and grandparental characteristics affect children's outcomes and provide the *only* nationally representative data source in the US for conducting an analysis of this critically important scientific topic.

- CDS-2023 will provide an unparalleled new resource for studying *effects of the Covid pandemic* on children and families. CDS-2019 was largely complete when the pandemic began, providing invaluable baseline data: we know of no other nationally representative all-age sample of children with recent pre-Covid benchmark data. With CDS-2023, we will obtain a comprehensive assessment of the effects of Covid on children's cognitive achievement, behavior, health, well-being, and other child and family outcomes.

- As of April 2023, CDS data have been the source for 657 known *publications*: 469 journal articles, 59 books or book chapters, and 129 doctoral dissertations. For PSID as a whole, there were 7,266 publications, including 1,245 dissertations. At least 56 *grant awards* from NIH—primarily from NICHD—have supported secondary analysis using CDS data, with at least 21 of these grants funded since 2017.

- CDS supports important research on the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on life course outcomes, including intergenerational relationships between parents' ACEs and their children's behavioral health problems, that is leading to clinical interventions to address ACEs and promote child health and well-being across generations.

- CDS is unique in collecting detailed data on children's time use for a nationally representative sample, including information on sleep timing and duration. These data have provided important evidence on school start times and children's academic performance and informed school policy changes. CDS has also supported key studies on the benign or positive effects of digital screen use on adolescents' academic outcomes and well-being.

Reduced funding will immediately adversely impact CDS in the following ways:

- The budget cuts threaten CDS's plan to provide an unparalleled new resource for studying effects of the Covid pandemic on children and families. In particular, key measures of children's acquisition of reading and math skills will be lost; these measures

would capture not just the devastating effects of the pandemic on learning, but also factors associated with catch-up as well as disparities in these trajectories. NICHD's recent support for adding new immigrants to the PSID sample mean that in CDS for the first time almost one-fifth of children are Hispanic (while almost two-fifths are black).

- The PSID team has determined that as a result of their reduced award, they will have to eliminate in-home visits, which are a foundation for high response rates, provide the only opportunity to collect several valuable and scientifically important measures such as children's cognitive assessments, and are the proven gold standard for collecting anthropometry, time diaries, and saliva samples for genetic and epigenetic measures. Eliminating these components and critical collection activities translates into the permanent loss of invaluable data scientists could have used to assess and track life course outcomes in infants, children, and adolescents.

Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS)

- Since its inception at the turn of the 21st century, FFCWS has been a unique source of information for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers about all things family. A particular strength of the study is its inclusion of non-resident fathers, allowing researchers to study factors that contribute to father involvement, the ways in which fathers are involved in their children's lives, and the impact of this involvement. FFCWS is also unique in the diversity of its sample and its attention to policy and contextual factors.

- More than 8,700 researchers from a multitude of disciplines including sociology, public health, and social work have used data from the FFCWS. Since January 2022, 31% of users have been from public universities, 53% from private universities, 9% from international universities, and 6% from other institutions (e.g., government and think tanks); these researchers come from about 250 schools and institutions. To date, more than 1,300 articles and 170 dissertations have been published using the data.

- The FFCWS team fosters usership among emerging and minority scholars through hosting annual summer data workshops and a regular working group seminar series. The FFCWS has also been the basis for many federally funded collaborative studies, often led by young scholars focusing on topics such as genetics, cardiovascular health, sleep, brain development, child abuse and neglect, and criminal justice exposure and involvement.

Without full funding for the age 27 FFCWS wave, we face multiple scientific consequences:

- The FFCWS is the only contemporary birth cohort study of American young adults. Unlike most other national studies, the FFCWS oversamples racial and ethnic minorities:

about ¾ of the sample is Black of Hispanic. More than 8700 researchers have used the data to publish more than 1,300 papers and 170 dissertations. This FFCWS is a crucial data source for understanding contemporary families in the United States and its loss would be extremely detrimental for the scientific community.

- Without full funding, we risk losing critical data from one of the US's great, and unique, data resources. The FFCWS has informed public knowledge on father involvement, family relationships, and child and young adult development, among many other topics. Because of its design, the FFCWS enables rich multigenerational data analyses (including the focal child's parents and own children). The dataset also contains genetic, sleep, and biomarker data. Uninterrupted, quality continuity of this dataset will allow us to follow respondents throughout the life course, providing unparalleled data to deepen our understanding of the impacts of multigenerational and early life experiences on outcomes throughout respondents' lives.

- Greater attrition, lower response rates, and possible bias in participation would dramatically compromise data utility. Without full funding, we will not be able to pursue all FFCWS sample members, leading to a smaller sample size with reduced statistical power. Additionally, because the most disadvantaged members of our sample are typically the hardest to locate, we would be more likely to have a skewed sample with higher participation among more advantaged, easier to reach participants.

- Further, given high rates of mobility among young adults and destabilization caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the longer we wait to interview these respondents, the less likely we are to be able to contact them. Interviewing young adults at age 27 will allow us to clearly assess the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on their lives.

- Age 27 is of particular importance developmentally, particularly among disadvantaged youth who often do not complete schooling or establish stable career entry until their late 20s. Without full funding, we will miss collecting data on crucial young adult outcomes including school completion, career entry, and family formation. Our last wave of data collection occurred when young adults were 22 years old when many were still enrolled in higher education or training, a high percentage were finding their professional footing, and relatively few had long-term partnerships or had started having children. By age 27, those processes will be completed for most of our sample and if we miss that moment, we would have to collect that data retrospectively, which would introduce measurement error and recall bias.

We appreciate the fiscal constraints that NICHD is facing. Yet, funding challenges are not solely responsible for the current predicament. The Institute's policy limiting the total number of awards that exceed $500,000 in annual direct costs also plays a significant role. Large-scale longitudinal surveys are expensive to design, maintain, and conduct. However,

their payoff is considerable given the breadth of their use and value, as illustrated above. The unique nature of these studies and their benefit to the broader scientific research community warrants a more flexible approach to ensure they can be adequately funded and sustained.

We urge the Institute to work with the population research community to restore funding to the affected surveys and to modify the existing policy so that future large-scale projects that the Institute accepts for review and score well can be funded at the highest possible level.

Thank you for considering our views regarding this very urgent matter. We look forward to working with you to find a solution that preserves the integrity of these invaluable resources and to, as always, promote the NICHD mission, which includes supporting population research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lisa Berkman
2023 PAA President

Dr. Jennie Brand
2023-2024 APC President

cc Alison Cernich, NICHD
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