October 31, 2008

Rose Maria Li, Executive Secretary
NACA Review of DBSR
National Institute on Aging
6202 Melvern Drive
Bethesda, Maryland 20817

Dear Dr. Li:

On behalf of the over 3,000 members of the Population Association of America and over 30 population research centers comprising the Association of Population Centers, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on the National Institute on Aging’s Division of Behavioral and Social Research (BSR) Quadrennial Review.

The Population Association of America (PAA) (www.popassoc.org) is a professional organization of over 3,000 individual members who conduct research on the implications of population change. PAA members include demographers, sociologists, economists, health scientists, and statisticians. The Association of Population Centers (APC) (www.popcenters.org) is an organization comprised of over 30 universities and research groups nationwide whose mission includes fostering collaborative demographic research and data sharing and translating basic population research for policy makers.

First, we want to express our support for the outstanding work DBSR conducts. The Division has an impeccable reputation for supporting high quality, diverse, interdisciplinary research and providing good service to its grantees. The field of demographic research is especially appreciative of the Division’s commitment to supporting major data collection projects, such as the Health and Retirement Survey (HRS). These large-scale data sets are invaluable, accessible resources that benefit the entire field. We trust the review committee, particularly since it includes representatives from the fields of demography and economics, understands the importance of these projects and the need for DBSR’s continued investment.

We believe our members’ interests in the future of DBSR can be categorized into three major areas: (a) data collection and access; (b) research training; and (c) level and mix of research funding. Thus, our comments are organized under these headings.

**Data Collection**

Again, as we stated earlier, PAA and APC recognize and congratulate DBSR on its track record of supporting large-scale databases, such as HRS, international counterparts to HRS, and the Wisconsin Longitudinal Survey, and archiving projects, such as NACDA. DBSR’s decision is to support a new disability survey is also generating enthusiasm among our colleagues. We encourage DBSR to continue its
work in this area by facilitating greater access and linkages to program records, such as Medicaid, MDS, OSCAR, and OASIS.

**Research Training**
Research training is imperative to the future of our field, and we believe DBSR is committed to providing appropriate support and opportunities. Nonetheless, we encourage the Committee to consider if the Division is using its full range of possible training mechanisms and if any specific slots are not being filled. Also, we ask the Committee to look at the characteristics of recent grant recipients and to consider if there is good representation from both pre-and post-doctoral candidates.

**Level and Mix of Research Funding**
We encourage the committee to also review the range of grants DBSR is funding and to ensure sufficient representation from all of the grant mechanisms. One issue we hope the Committee will consider is the timing of the P30 funding cycle. Currently, all centers come up for renewal at the same time, at which time potential new centers must compete with all of the existing centers. This poses a particular problem for finding qualified reviewers. The NICHD centers have a very different funding cycle. We encourage the Committee to consider advising the DBSR on moving to a new model.

**Comments on Proposed Research Topic Areas**
The below comments are in response to the nine proposed research topic areas.

(a) expand "psychology of aging" to "psychology and physiology of aging."

(b) create or expand a category to include immigration (e.g., immigrants aging in the US versus returning to their source country; remittances; claims on U.S. programmatic resources outside the US, and so on).

(c) devote more attention to family/kin/social networks, including their spatial dispersion.

(d) emphasize the importance of "place," including not only the influence of place or community on the older population, but are also the consequences for local communities of having an aging population. These latter questions are plainly of interest and concern to county/city officials, especially in several Midwestern or plains states, where out-migration by the young (in some cases offset by in-migration of immigrants from other countries) is greatly changing the composition of the local population.

(e) encourage more attention on centenarians and the consequences of “extreme longevity.”
Once again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the NIA DBSR and to assist the Committee as it conducts the Division’s Quadrennial Review. If you have any questions or comments, please contact us or our representatives in Washington, D.C., Ms. Mary Jo Hoeksema or Ms. Juliane Baron at 202-939-5456.

Sincerely,

/s/
Greg Duncan, Ph.D.
President
Population Association of America

/s/
Michael White, Ph.D.
President
Association of Population Centers

cc: Richard Suzman, Director, Behavioral and Social Research