

Testimony on behalf of the  
**Population Association of America/Association of Population Centers**  
Regarding the Fiscal Year 2017 Appropriation for the  
**National Institutes of Health, National Center for Health Statistics,  
and Bureau of Labor Statistics**  
Submitted to the  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education  
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### **Introduction**

Thank you, Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, and other distinguished members of the Subcommittee, for this opportunity to express support for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). These agencies are important to the members of the Population Association of America (PAA) and Association of Population Centers (APC) because they provide direct and indirect support to population scientists and the field of population, or demographic, research overall. In FY 2017, we urge the Subcommittee to adopt the following funding recommendations: \$34.5 billion for the NIH, consistent with the level recommended by the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research; \$170 million for the NCHS, consistent with the Friends of NCHS recommendation; and \$640.9 million, for the BLS, consistent with the Administration's request.

The PAA and APC are two affiliated organizations that together represent over 3,000 social and behavioral scientists and approximately 40 population research centers nationwide that conduct research on the implications of population change. Our members, which include demographers, economists, sociologists, and statisticians, who conduct scientific research, analyze changing demographic and socio-economic trends, develop policy recommendations, and train undergraduate and graduate students. Their research expertise covers a wide range of issues, including adolescent health and development, aging, health disparities, retirement, and labor. Population scientists compete for discretionary grant funding from the NIH and rely on data from the nation's statistical agencies to conduct research and research training activities.

### **National Institutes of Health**

Demography is the study of populations and how or why they change. A key component of the NIH mission is to support biomedical, social, and behavioral research that will improve the health of our population. The health of our population is fundamentally intertwined with the demography of our population. Recognizing the connection between health and demography, NIH supports extramural population research programs primarily through the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

PAA and APC thank the subcommittee for supporting a \$2 billion increase for the NIH in Fiscal Year 2016 and look forward to working with the Congress to ensure NIH can continue to receive sustainable, steady increases in Fiscal Year 2017 and beyond.

### **National Institute on Aging**

By 2030, there will be 72 million Americans aged 65 and older. To inform the implications of our rapidly aging population, policymakers need objective, reliable data about the antecedents and impact of changing social, demographic, economic, health and well being characteristics of the older population. The NIA Division of Behavioral and Social Research (BSR) is the primary source of federal support for basic population aging research.

In addition to supporting an impressive research portfolio, that includes the prestigious Centers on the Demography and Economics of Aging, the NIA BSR Division also supports several large, accessible surveys. For example, the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), provides unique information about economics transitions in work, income, and wealth, allowing scientists to study how the domains of family, economic resources, and health interact. Since 1992, the HRS has collected data, including, most recently, biomarkers, from a representative sample of more than 27,000 Americans over the age of 50 every two years. These data are accessible to researchers worldwide and have informed numerous scientific findings.

In 2015, NIA grantee using vital statistics data as well as data from the HRS, published findings confirming rising mortality rates among middle aged, white, non-Hispanic Americans. This change reversed decades of progress in mortality and was unique to the United States. The study found increasing death rates resulted largely from “diseases of despair” - drug and alcohol poisonings, suicide, and chronic liver diseases and cirrhosis. The most dramatic increases in mortality occurred among the poorly educated. The findings point to alarming trends in populations previously thought to be healthy and underscore the need for broad public health strategies to combat their causes.

With additional support in FY 2017, the Institute can sustain and expand its investment in population aging research, including contributing to the Institute’s efforts to address the scourge of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. The BSR division is also eager to support research and data collection on the causes of widening disparities in health and longevity at older ages, and the role of social factors, such as education and income, in the health and well-being of older people. As members of the Friends of NIA, we urge the Committee to provide the NIH with an additional \$500 million in FY 2017 to support aging research activities not only at the NIA, but also across the agency.

### **Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute on Child Health and Human Development**

Since 1968, NICHD has supported research on population processes and change. This research is housed in the Institute’s Population Dynamics Branch, which supports research and research training in demography, reproductive health, and population health and funds major national studies that track the health and well-being of children and their families from childhood through adulthood. These studies include Fragile Families and Child Well Being, the first scientific study to track the health and development of children born to unmarried parents, and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), tracing the effects of childhood and adolescent exposures on later health. The Add Health study received a 2016 Golden Goose Award, recognizing its significant and unique scientific contributions and innovations.

In 2015, scientists, using data from these large-scale data sets published numerous findings. For example, scientists, used data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Survey, found a negative association between father engagement and children's behavioral problems, independent of the mother's characteristics and her level of engagement. Using data from the Add Health study, scientists determined that social relationships affect individual's physical health, including chronic disease and longevity. (<http://www.populationassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/PAAAPC-Advances-in-Population-Research.pdf>).

In addition to supporting individual research grants and surveys, NICHD supports the Population Dynamics Centers Research Infrastructure Program. These highly productive centers, based at U.S. universities and private research institutions nationwide, have advanced U.S. science by fostering groundbreaking interdisciplinary research on human health and development, and increased the scientific pipeline by nurturing the careers of junior researchers. With additional funding in FY 2017, the Institute will be able to maintain its strong commitment to these centers of research excellence. As members of the Friends of NICHD, PAA and APC request that the Institute receive a funding level of \$1.441 billion in FY 2017.

### **National Center for Health Statistics**

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is the nation's principal health statistics agency, providing data on the health of the U.S. population and backing essential data collection activities. Most notably, NCHS funds and manages the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS), which contracts with the states to collect birth and death certificate information. NCHS also funds a number of complex large surveys to help policy makers, public health officials, and researchers understand the population's health, influences on health, and health outcomes. These surveys include the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey and National Survey of Family Growth. The wealth of data NCHS collects makes the agency an invaluable resource for population scientists.

In recent years, NCHS has made significant progress toward modernizing the NVSS, moving many states from paper-based to electronic filing of birth and death statistics and expediting the release of these data to the user community. However, persistent flat funding levels in recent years, and the loss of funds from the Prevention and Public Health Fund, are hampering the agency's ability to enact additional innovations and make necessary survey redesigns and system improvements. That is why as members of the Friends of NCHS, PAA and APC request that NCHS receive \$170 million in budget authority in FY 2016, an amount \$10 million above the Administration's request. Among other things, NCHS could use this additional money to support ongoing implementation of electronic death records nationwide to provide faster, better vital statistics and to pursue a thoughtful, well-conducted redesign of the National Health Interview Survey.

### **Bureau of Labor Statistics**

BLS produces essential economic information for public and private decision making. Population scientists who study and evaluate labor and related economic policies and programs use its data extensively. The agency also supports the National Longitudinal Studies program and the American Time Use Survey, which are invaluable datasets that the population sciences use to

understand how complex factors, such as changes in work status, income, and education, interact to affect health and achievement outcomes in children and adults.

PAA and APC joins other organizations comprising the Friends of Labor Statistics in thanking the subcommittee for providing BLS with a \$17 million increase in FY 2016. However, the agency is still struggling to overcome years of insufficient support. Between FY 2009 and FY 2015, the absolute value and/or the purchasing power of BLS appropriations decreased *every year*. As a result, the agency eliminated several programs in FY 2013 and FY 2014 and in FY 2015 had to rely on a one-time transfer from the Department of Commerce to maintain BLS' Export Price Program. The agency also cut back its rate of replacement of staff and staff training and development to unsustainable levels in 2015.

Given the importance and unique nature of BLS data, we urge the Subcommittee to support the Administration's request, \$640.9 million, an increase of \$31.9 million above the FY 2016 funding level. This funding would allow BLS to support its core programs and surveys and to conduct other postponed activities, including a supplement to the Current Population Survey and changes to the Consumer Expenditure Survey to support development of a supplemental statistical poverty measure.

Thank you for considering our organization's positions on these agencies under your subcommittee's jurisdiction.