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July 16, 2021

The Honorable Diana DeGette
The Honorable Fred Upton
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
sent via email to: Cures2@mail.house.gov

Dear Representatives DeGette and Upton,

On behalf of the members of the organizations we lead, the [Population Association of America](#) and Association of Population Centers, we are pleased to submit comments in response to the 21st Century Cures Act 2.0 (Cures 2.0) discussion draft and the accompanying Request for Information (RFI) on the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) proposal. PAA and APC appreciate the opportunity to comment on the discussion draft and thank you for your leadership to expand scientific research opportunities, including opportunities for the behavioral and social sciences.

The PAA and APC are two affiliated organizations that together represent more than 3,000 population scientists, an interdisciplinary field that includes demographers, sociologists, economists, epidemiologists, and statisticians, who study the implications of population change. The APC is comprised of the over 40 federally supported population research centers based nationwide at universities and private research institutions. Population scientists have made groundbreaking and meaningful contributions on a wide array of topics relevant to society, including the social determinants of health, child and adolescent development, aging, migration, fertility, economic well-being, education, retirement, and post-disaster resiliency.

The RFI seeks input in response to a series of very targeted questions regarding the potential structure and focus of ARPA-H. Rather than responding to each item separately, our comments broadly address our interests regarding ARPA-H and its potential for advancing the population sciences. We should note that DARPA has not been a source of support for our field, so we are not as familiar with the possible opportunities and challenges that an ARPA-H presents.

With respect to the organizational placement and funding of ARPA-H, we associate ourselves with other research stakeholders in urging Congress to ensure ARPA-H is located and funded separately from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The proposed mission of ARPA-H is very distinct from the basic research mission of the NIH. Therefore, we feel it should reside outside of the NIH. Instead, it should reside within the Department of Health and

Human Services as a separate entity. Incorporating ARPA-H within the Department of Health and Human Services would be beneficial and facilitate appropriate coordination of efforts between ARPA-H and other HHS agencies.

With respect to funding for ARPA-H, our organizations do not believe it should come at the expense of sustained, robust increases for the NIH. The creation of ARPA-H should complement, not supplant core NIH funding. Establishing the appropriate firewalls to keep ARPA-H funding distinct from the NIH budget, including working with appropriators to explore alternative, dedicated funding mechanisms to support ARPA-H, will be key to prevent entangling the budgets and missions of the two agencies in ways that may be problematic.

To ensure ARPA-H supports the full spectrum of research—biomedical, behavioral, and social—we support the designation of an entity, and dedicated personnel, within ARPA-H to promote appropriate research opportunities designed for the behavioral and social sciences. The population research community is especially supportive of ARPA-H embracing a research agenda that, for example, prioritizes research on health disparities and inequities and expands funding for population-based, representative surveys. These are areas that we believe ARPA-H should focus on and having experts within the agency who can develop and monitor these research activities is essential.

Once again, thank you for seeking input from the community. We appreciate your consideration of our views as the Cures 2.0 proposal advances through the legislative process.

Sincerely,



Dr. Vida Maralani
Chair, Government and Public Affairs Committee
Population Association of America



Dr. Sara R. Curran
President
Association of Population Centers