

Population Association of America Association of Population Centers

Office of Government and Public Affairs

8630 Fenton Street, Suite 722 • Silver Spring, MD 20910
www.populationassociation.org • www.popcenters.org • 301-565-6710 x 1006



Population Association of America President

Dr. Judith A. Seltzer
University of California, Los Angeles

Vice President

Dr. Elizabeth Frankenberg
Duke University

President-elect

Dr. Amy Ong Tsui
Johns Hopkins University

Vice President-elect

Dr. Robert Hummer
University of Texas at Austin

Secretary-Treasurer

Dr. Liana C. Sayer
University of Maryland

Past President

Dr. Steven Ruggles
University of Minnesota

Dr. Lisa Berkman
Harvard University

Dr. Jason Boardman
University of Colorado at Boulder

Dr. Sarah Burgard
University of Michigan

Dr. Kathleen Cagney
University of Chicago

Dr. Marcia Carlson
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Dr. Rebecca Clark
National Institute of Child Health &
Human Development

Dr. Shelley Clark
McGill University

Dr. Parfait Eloundou-Enyegue
Cornell University

Dr. Jason Fields
US Bureau of Census

Dr. Kelly Raley
University of Texas at Austin

Dr. Michael Rendall
University of Maryland

Dr. Leah Van Wey
Brown University

Association of Population Centers President

Dr. Lisa Berkman
Harvard University

Vice President

Dr. Pamela Smock
University of Michigan

Secretary

Dr. Eric Reither
University of Utah

Treasurer

Dr. Jennifer Van Hook
Pennsylvania State University

December 19, 2016

President-Elect Donald J. Trump
Presidential Transition Headquarters
1800 F Street, NW, Room G117
Washington, DC 20270

Dear President-Elect Trump,

On behalf of the over 3,000 scientists who belong to the Population Association of America (PAA) and over 40 population research centers nationwide comprising the Association of Population Centers (APC), we congratulate you on your election and look forward to working with your new Administration. During this transition period, we want to raise several issues important to our professional organizations and the wellbeing of the U.S. population.

Population scientists, primarily demographers, economists, and sociologists, conduct rigorous scientific research and research training with discretionary, competitively awarded funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF). The population science field also relies on indirect support from the federal statistical agencies, including the Census Bureau, National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and the data these agencies produce. Population scientists study the consequences of demographic change, and, therefore, have diverse expertise in a broad range of research topics, such as population aging, adolescent development, internal migration and immigration, health and economic disparities, marriage and family, urban growth, and labor and employment patterns.

To begin, we wish to convey four short-term actions your Administration can take to fortify funding and support for key federal scientific and statistical agencies. We are highlighting these steps given the urgency of these actions and their potential to affect immediate funding and leadership with key federal agencies important to our field.



Supporting Population Sciences in the First 100 Days

- (1) Work with Congress to eliminate the harmful spending caps and sequester imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011 and to apply sequester relief equally to defense and non-discretionary defense programs.
- (2) Complete work on the fiscal year (FY) 2017 appropriations bills before the current continuing resolution (CR) expires on April 28, 2017 to avoid programmatic, management, and funding disruptions across the federal government.
- (3) Release a FY 2018 budget that promotes robust investments in the federal scientific research and statistical agencies, including the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and National Center for Health Statistics.
- (4) Appoint a Science Advisor to the President and nominate highly qualified candidates to fill senior Executive Branch positions that have responsibility over agencies important to the population sciences, in particular the directors of the National Institutes of Health and Census Bureau.

Our most urgent priorities fall into three major categories:

- **Funding**
- **Leadership**
- **Data**

Funding

As part of their legislative mandates, numerous federal agencies, including the NIH and NSF, fund the behavioral and social sciences. Federal investment in the behavioral and social sciences has yielded critical research findings that have not only advanced scientific progress, but also improved the health and well-being of the American people. The population sciences, which are informed by evidence from the behavioral and social sciences, have collectively contributed towards these advances in knowledge that benefit not only human development today but for future generations. Broadly speaking, these advances include identifying how social, behavioral, and biological factors influence the onset of disease and disability; how parental involvement influences long-term health and achievement outcomes in children; and, how retirement and work influence the health and longevity of older people.

The population sciences rely on key federal scientific and statistical agencies. We urge your Administration to support funding for the following agencies:



National Institutes of Health—While the NIH enjoys strong bipartisan support in Congress, which has led to recent funding increases, since 2004, the agency has been funded below the rate of biomedical research inflation. We urge your administration to support sustained, steady increases for the NIH above the annual rate of biomedical research inflation and to defend the agency’s peer review process to ensure the best, unbiased science is funded.

Bureau of Labor Statistics—Since FY 2010, BLS funding has been flat, leading to a 12 percent decrease in the agency’s purchasing power. As a result, the agency has, for example, delayed numerous program improvements, postponed or canceled new initiatives, and deferred necessary information technology upgrades. We urge your administration to restore the agency’s funding and to propose sufficient future funding increases to sustain its core mission of delivering high quality labor and employment data vital to U.S. economic planning and development.

National Center for Health Statistics—After years of flat funding, the agency is below its FY 2010 levels (adjusted for inflation). As a result, NCHS is contemplating reducing the sample sizes of its signature health surveys, which will adversely affect its ability to provide state-level estimates, especially for smaller, predominately rural states, and to release timely estimates of key health indicators, such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. We urge your administration to restore funding to the NCHS and propose sufficient future funding increases to sustain its mission as the nation’s principal health statistics agency.

Census Bureau--Three years from now, Census 2020 will be underway. After many years of research, testing, evaluation, and development, activities will culminate in the 2018 End-to-End Census Test, when all systems and operations are integrated in a census-like environment. The success of the 2018 End-to-End Test is imperative to ensuring an accurate and cost effective Census 2020. We urge your Administration to support the Census Bureau at this critical juncture when plans move from the testing to implementation phase and to prioritize funding for Census 2020 in your FY 2018 budget submission and to provide ongoing support as plans unfold for the next decennial.

National Science Foundation--The NSF is the only major federal agency that supports world-class, basic scientific research across all scientific disciplines. The Social, Behavioral and Economics Directorate (SBE) (one of seven directorates organized around complementary disciplines), which funds many population research projects, comprises a small portion of the overall NSF research budget (no more than 5 percent); however, it represents over 50 percent of all federal research funding for social science at universities nationwide. It is essential that NSF receive steady and sustainable funding and that its merit-review process for selecting the best science be affirmed.



Leadership

Supporting the behavioral and social sciences requires not only funding, but also leadership in key positions. We urge your Administration to prioritize leadership appointments within the following agencies:

White House Office of Science and Technology

Leadership within the White House is essential to ensuring a smooth transition across all of the federal scientific and statistical research agencies. Therefore, our organizations join other national scientific societies and advocacy groups, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in urging your Administration to “quickly appoint a science advisor [in the Office of Science and Technology] with the title of Assistant to the President for Science and Technology who is a nationally respected leader with the appropriate engineering, scientific, management and policy skills necessary for this critically important role.” This individual should be appointed before the end of January so he or she can participate immediately in coordinating relevant policy and personnel decisions relating to science and technology. By appointing a qualified science advisor at the beginning of your Administration, you will be sending an important message about the role science and technology will play during your presidency.

NIH

The NIH research mission is “to seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability.” Achieving this ambitious goal requires that NIH support and encourage research from a vast range of scientific disciplines, including the behavioral and social sciences. The Administration should reflect this perspective by ensuring the Department of Health and Human Services and NIH officials it appoints can lead and enable NIH to improve the nation’s health and prolong its citizens’ longevity, and reduce their risks of disability.

Census Bureau

The current Census Director, John Thompson, is eligible for reappointment to a second, five-year term in 2017, or may continue serving as Director for up to one year until a successor is appointed. We urge you to provide the Census Bureau with steady leadership, particularly this close to the 2020 Census, by quickly nominating and urging the Senate to confirm a Census Director, and to ensure that the next director has demonstrated management skills and expertise in complex data collection activities, in accordance with the Presidential Appointment Efficiency and Streamlining Act of 2011, as well as the support of the broad census stakeholder community.

Data

Tremendous innovations in data collection, dissemination, and preservation are occurring throughout the federal government. Agencies are pursuing enhanced uses of administrative records, data linkages, and data sharing—and not just in the context of Census 2020. The NIH is

Population Association of America Association of Population Centers

Office of Government and Public Affairs

8630 Fenton Street, Suite 722 • Silver Spring, MD 20910
www.populationassociation.org • www.popcenters.org • 301-565-6710 x 1006



now requiring scientists who intend to generate data sets to submit a public data sharing plan as part of their grant application. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census Bureau, and Bureau of Economic Analysis have identified strategies to improve how they share business information. These are just a few examples of the exciting data-related activities underway. We urge your administration to support these ongoing initiatives and promote public data sharing as a central tenet of these trans-agency efforts. Within the behavioral and social science research community, there is significant expertise, especially in the demographic or population research field, that your administration should rely on for guidance and support.

The bedrock of the federal statistical system is the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS, which replaced the census long form in 2005, is the only source of comparable, (across geography), consistent (across time), timely (updated annually), high quality demographic and socio-economic data for *all* communities in the country. The private commercial sector uses ACS data to make key investment decisions because of its unique representative, comprehensive, timely nature, while the public non-profit sector uses ACS data to allocate over \$400 billion of federal funds to the states and localities and to identify where key services, including roads, schools, and hospitals, should be located.

We urge the new Administration to support the American Community Survey (ACS) and to maintain the survey's mandatory status. Based on a congressionally required test the Bureau conducted in 2003, it was determined that making the ACS a voluntary survey would undermine its utility and value by significantly reducing response rates and dramatically increasing the survey's annual costs (an additional \$90 to \$100 million). Further, the test found that data reliability, especially for small communities and less populous areas, was adversely affected. As a result, the Bureau estimates that it will be unable to produce usable data for more than 40 percent of all U.S. counties if the ACS becomes a voluntary survey. Any loss of ACS data will affect adversely the needs of data users in the private, public, and academic sectors. We urge the new Administration to defend a mandatory ACS and to fund the survey sufficiently to sustain a robust sample size as well as continue the Bureau's important work to reduce respondent burden and improve the survey's content.

Thank you for considering our field's views throughout the Administration's transition and first formative years. Please do not hesitate to contact us if our organizations can be of assistance to you.

Best regards,

Judith A. Seltzer, Ph.D.
2016 PAA President

Lisa Berkman
2016 APC President