

# Population Association of America Association of Population Centers

## Office of Government and Public Affairs

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December 9, 2020

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President-elect  
1401 Constitution Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear President-elect Biden:

On behalf of the over 3,000 scientists who belong to the Population Association of America (PAA) ([www.populationassociation.org](http://www.populationassociation.org)) 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 field of population research.

As you may know, PAA and APC are two affiliated organizations that together represent over 3,000 population scientists who conduct research on the individual-, societal-, and environmental-level causes and consequences of population change. 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 research 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, fertility, morbidity, mortality, and labor and employment patterns. As a result of the field's diverse expertise, population scientists are conducting research that inherently addresses your Administration's top priorities, including the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), economic recovery, climate change, and racial equity.

### Supporting the Population Sciences in the First 100 Days

To begin, we wish to convey short-term actions your Administration can take in the first 100 days of your Administration to fortify funding and support for key federal scientific and statistical agencies that support the population research field. We are highlighting these steps given the urgency of these actions and their potential to affect immediate operations, funding,

and leadership within specific federal agencies. More details about these short-term actions are detailed in our subsequent comments regarding the affected agencies.

### **Supporting the Population Sciences in the First 100 Days**

- (1) Extend the 2020 Census statutory reporting deadlines for delivering apportionment and redistricting data.
- (2) Eliminate four political appointments in the U.S. Census Bureau Office of the Director.
- (3) Rescind two census-related Executive Orders: [July 11, 2019 Executive Order on Collecting Information about Citizenship Status](#) and [July 21, 2020 Presidential Memorandum on Excluding Illegal Aliens From the Apportionment Base Following the 2020 Census](#).
- (4) Release a Fiscal Year 2022 budget that promotes robust investments in 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.
- (5) Promote supplemental funding for the National Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation in COVID relief measures.
- (6) Appoint a presidential science advisor by early January 2021 and nominate that person to serve as Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

### **Recommendations for Agencies Supporting the Population Sciences**

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 also 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 to generate findings and to train the next generation of population

scientists. We urge your Administration to consider recommendations affecting funding, leadership, and operations at the following federal agencies.

### **National Institutes of Health**

#### **Funding**

While the NIH enjoys strong bipartisan support in Congress, which has led to recent funding increases especially over the last five years, the agency has not always been funded at the rate of biomedical research inflation. To realize the maximum potential of the NIH to improve the public's health and well-being and to advance scientific research, the agency needs sustained, robust budget growth. As you consider your Administration's budget priorities for FY 2022 and beyond, PAA and APC, as members of the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research, recommends an ongoing commitment to meaningful growth above the cost of biomedical research inflation for the NIH. The stability associated with a budget trajectory that not only keeps pace with inflation but also allows investment in new research is essential to ensure we continue to push the boundaries of discovery toward meaningful basic and applied research outcomes.

With respect to supplemental funding, PAA and APC urge the Administration to sustain continued supplemental investments in the NIH to both hasten an end to the devastating global pandemic and to support other avenues of research displaced by COVID. Further, we encourage the Administration to consider supporting other NIH components, such as the National Institute on Aging and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, which are funding critical pandemic-related basic, clinical, and applied research involving vulnerable populations and, yet, have not received supplemental funding in previous COVID relief packages.

#### **Leadership**

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 leadership within the Department of Health and Human Services and the NIH will support the agency's broad mandate and invest in initiatives that promote basic social and behavioral research as well as biological research.

### **Census Bureau**

In 2020, the Census Bureau conducted its latest decennial census. The process was hindered by delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and a series of natural disasters. Regrettably, it was also marred by bruising political battles instigated by actions that the Trump Administration took to add a citizenship question on the 2020 Census, expedite delivery of apportionment data, and exclude undocumented immigrants from the apportionment count.

These efforts have collectively undermined the Bureau's operations and reputation, leaving the Biden-Harris Administration with, potentially, unfinished business to ensure data from the 2020 Census are trustworthy, accurate, and accessible.

Census stakeholders, led by the PAA and APC, have identified several short and long-term steps that the new Administration should take to strengthen the mission of the Census Bureau and to conclude the 2020 Census in an orderly, reliable fashion.

### **Executive Orders**

PAA and APC oppose the Trump Administration's efforts to marginalize participation in the 2020 Census. To that end, we call on the Biden-Harris Administration to immediately rescind two census-related executive orders that would affect the inclusion of all individuals in the 2020 Census, as supported by the U.S. Constitution. Specifically, we urge the new Administration to rescind:

- [July 11, 2019 Executive Order on Collecting Information about Citizenship Status](#) in Connection with the Decennial Census; and,
- [July 21, 2020 Presidential Memorandum on Excluding Illegal Aliens From the Apportionment Base Following the 2020 Census](#).

### **Data and Funding**

The recent discovery of 13 anomalies affecting more than 900,000 census records underscores the need for the incoming Administration to act and give the Census Bureau more time to review data, analyze, and release 2020 Census data as well as to engage objective, outside experts and data users in this process. PAA and APC encourage the adoption of the following recommendations to address concerns regarding the outcome of the 2020 Census and to initiate preparations for the 2030 Census:

- Enact one-time postponements of statutory deadlines for delivery of apportionment and redistricting data codified in 13 USC § 141. Bipartisan legislation has been introduced in the Senate and House of Representatives (S. 4571 and H.R. 8250, the 2020 Census Deadline Extensions Act) to extend the deadlines, which the new Administration is urged to support.
- Urge Congress and the Commerce Inspector General to use metrics identified in the independently developed [2020 Census Indicators Report](#) to determine the quality, accuracy, and coverage of the 2020 Census.
- Support existing advisory committees, including the Census Scientific Advisory Committee, National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations, and ACS Data Users Working Group, to ensure data users and outside experts are involved in ongoing efforts to assess the quality of 2020 Census data.

- Approve [recommended changes](#) to the Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity.
- Support robust funding for the Census Bureau that reflects the agency’s needs as it prepares or “ramps up” for the 2030 Census and to support its ongoing surveys and data collection activities.

### **Nominations and Personnel**

In the first 100 days of the new Administration, we urge immediate action on key leadership positions within the Department of Commerce and Census Bureau, including:

- Nominate a new, highly qualified Commerce Secretary who is committed to ensuring the accuracy and reliability of census data, and the integrity and scientific independence of the Census Bureau; and,
- Eliminate all new political appointee positions created under the previous Administration at the Census Bureau, including, but not limited to, the positions of Deputy Director for Policy, Senior Advisor to the Deputy Director for Policy, Deputy Director for Data, and counselor to the Bureau's director.

The term of the current Census Bureau Director does not expire until December 31, 2021. We urge the Administration to ensure that the next Director, in accordance with the Presidential Appointment Efficiency and Streamlining Act of 2011, has an exemplary background in advancing statistical science, a demonstrated ability in managing large organizations and experience in the collection, analysis, and use of statistical data, as well as a commitment to ensuring the accuracy and reliability of census data and the support of the census stakeholder community.

### **National Science Foundation**

#### **Funding and Merit Review**

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) 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. Over the last several years, American preeminence in public investment in basic research has slipped, and other global powers such as China are poised to overtake the U.S. A recent report by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, entitled, “Perils of Complacency,” details this dilemma and further recommends that federal funding for basic research be increased at a sustained real growth rate of [at least 4 percent](#) per year. In recent years incremental funding increases for

NSF have been limited to between 2-3 percent. In addition to committing to support steady and sustainable funding for the NSF, we urge the Administration to affirm and, if necessary, defend the agency's merit review process for selecting the most meritorious science.

### **Deputy Director for NSF**

NSF has not had a Senate-confirmed Deputy Director since 2013. Since that time, career employees have been assigned the position of "Chief Operating Officer," and handed a portfolio of expansive duties that warrant Senate approval. NSF recently welcomed a newly confirmed Director, Dr. Sethuraman Panchanathan, who should have the support of a seasoned executive that can help advance his vision for the agency with a focus on operations and implementation – in line with most other federal agencies, including the NIH.

### **Economic Relief for Impact of Pandemic on Federally Supported Research**

The protracted nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted great harm—both financial and operational—on many research institutions and individual scientists. Researchers and research institutions need economic relief to remain viable and sustain critically important research projects, infrastructure, and a trained work force. Congress has recognized this dilemma with the introduction of legislation such as the RISE Act (Research Investment to Secure the Economy Act, H.R. 7308/S. 4286) and inclusion of roughly \$3 billion in funding in pending COVID-19 relief legislation. We urge the incoming administration to include funding to offset the negative impact of the pandemic on federally supported research activities.

### **Bureau of Labor Statistics**

Population scientists who study and evaluate labor and related economic policies use data produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) extensively. The field also relies on unique BLS-supported surveys, such as the American Time Use Survey and National Longitudinal Surveys, to understand how work, unemployment, and retirement influence health and well-being outcomes across the lifespan.

Between Fiscal Year 2010 and 2020, BLS funding was essentially flat, leading to a 12 percent decrease in the agency's purchasing power. As a result, the agency delayed numerous program improvements, postponed or canceled new initiatives, and deferred necessary information technology upgrades. Fortunately, the agency received a meaningful funding increase in FY 2020, which BLS data users hope leads to more predictable, adequate support for the agency going forward. We urge your Administration to embrace the opportunity to support BLS and 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. In addition, we urge your Administration to sustain current planning activities at the BLS to plan for a new youth cohort for the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). The current NLSY 1979 and 1997 cohorts cannot provide adequate information about teens and young adults entering the labor market. PAA and APC hope that this planning process will provoke a new, necessary NLSY cohort.

## **National Center for Health Statistics**

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is the nation's principal health statistics agency. Population scientists rely on large NCHS-supported health surveys, especially the National Health Interview Survey and National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, to study demographic, socioeconomic, and behavioral differences in health and mortality outcomes. They also rely on the vital statistics data that NCHS releases to track trends in fertility, mortality, and disability. NCHS health data are an essential part of the nation's statistical and public health infrastructure.

Despite the agency's preeminent status, NCHS has been underfunded for years. In fact, the agency has been flat funded (receiving no more than \$160 million) since Fiscal Year 2016. As a result of its bleak funding outlook, the agency has in recent years been forced to consider reductions to the sample sizes of its signature health surveys (which would 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). Inadequate resources have also precluded the agency from fully pursuing necessary re-engineering of its current surveys, creating new opportunities for data linkages, and realizing the full potential of electronic health records as a primary source of measuring morbidity and related health care at the national, state, and local level. We urge your administration to restore funding to the NCHS and propose sufficient future funding increases to sustain and expand the agency's unique, important mission.

We also urge NCHS, with support from new leadership at HHS and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to consider changes to current policies that limit the ability of scientists to access NCHS data in our nation's Research Data Centers.

## **National Center for Education Statistics**

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the Department of Education's (ED) Institute of Education Sciences (IES) provides objective, reliable, and trustworthy statistics about the condition of education through administrative data collections, statistical surveys, longitudinal studies, and assessments. NCES is the second oldest and third largest in budget among the Office of Management and Budget's 13 principal federal statistical agencies, with statistics and assessments activities totaling \$260 million annually. Currently authorized through the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA), the NCES covers a wide spectrum of topics, including: The Nation's Report Card (congressionally mandated); Condition of Education Report (congressionally mandated); Digest of Education Statistics; grants, services, resources to states for development of statewide longitudinal data systems; longitudinal studies tracing experiences of early childhood students, secondary students and transition to post high school, and college and beyond experiences. NCES is currently facing a severe shortage of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff trained in statistical sciences, the result of years of stagnating funding levels. Indeed, the NCES statistics budget line has depreciated

in value by more than 25 percent since 2010. We urge the Administration to prioritize both increased funding and administrative flexibility to enable NCES to address the critical staffing issues at the agency and ensure that the nation can continue to rely on accurate and objective data about the nation's education system and those it serves.

### **Support for Global Health Programs at USAID**

Many population scientists conduct international research or use international data to contextualize their domestic based research. The Global Health Programs Account within the budget of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supports demographic data collection in developing countries through the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS). The data collected through DHS inform a wide array of research as well as policy. We urge continued support for the Global Health Program at USAID, as well as consideration of potentially expanding the program.

### **White House Office of Science and Technology**

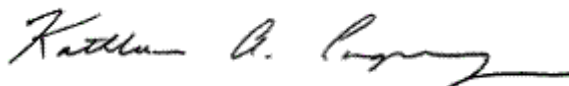
Leadership within the White House is essential to ensuring a smooth transition across all federal scientific and statistical research agencies. Therefore, our organizations join other national scientific societies and advocacy groups in urging your Administration to appoint a presidential science advisor in early January 2021 and nominate that person to serve as Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. The individual should be a nationally respected leader with the appropriate scientific, management, and policy skills necessary for this critically important leadership role. We encourage the new advisor to support the inclusion of the behavioral and social sciences in the work that the OSTP conducts and to designate a staff member within OSTP responsible for communicating with and seeking input from the behavioral and social science research community.

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.

Sincerely,



Eileen Crimmins  
PAA President



Kathleen A. Cagney  
APC President