

# United States Senate

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
and Education  
135 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
and Education  
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you and your colleagues begin work on the fiscal year (FY) 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) appropriations bill, we respectfully ask that you support funding of programs that seek to address ethnic and racial health disparities by improving diversity in the health care workforce and increasing the distribution of health professionals to underserved communities.

Racial health disparities are associated with an estimated \$35 billion in excess health care expenditures, \$10 billion in illness-related lost productivity, and nearly \$200 billion in premature deaths.<sup>1</sup> To combat health disparities, it is necessary to produce health professionals that will serve in underserved communities.

Although much progress has been made, there is still much more work to be done. The United States must continue to invest in the programs that are critical to addressing health disparities in our communities and across the country. We urge your support for programs that help to produce those health professionals and/or seek to end health disparities by research and community involvement, as described below.

## Critical Research

- **Strong funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), including support for the NIH Institutional Development Award (IDeA):** Investment in the NIH is a national priority to accelerate discovery of medical cures, support our economy, and save lives. IDeA advances our nation's biomedical research capability by improving research in states that have historically been less successful in obtaining biomedical research funds.
- **Strong funding for the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) at NIH, including support for the Research Centers in Minority Institutions (RCMI) Program:** NIMHD funds and supports scientific research aimed to

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://hbr.org/2015/10/the-costs-of-racial-disparities-in-health-care>

improve minority health and eliminate health disparities. The RCMI program develops and strengthens the research infrastructure of minority institutions, thus expanding their human and physical resources for conducting basic, clinical, and translational research.

### **A Diverse Workforce for the Underserved**

- **\$25 million for Minority Centers of Excellence (COE) and \$20 million for the Health Careers Opportunities Program (HCOP):** COEs provide support for health professions schools that prioritize educating and training enhancement to increase opportunities for underrepresented minorities to enter and successfully complete a health professions education. HCOP has been instrumental in producing a pipeline of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds that become health professionals, who will likely then help those with similar backgrounds.
- **\$41.50 million for Area Health Education Centers (AHEC):** Congress created the AHEC program in 1971 to recruit, train, and retain health professionals committed to taking care of vulnerable populations. In Hawaii, for example, the John A. Burns School of Medicine has been leading an AHEC program since 1995 with significant results in terms of increasing diversity in the health care workforce and improving distribution, retention, and quality of health professionals in underserved communities.
- **Strong funding for Strengthening Historically Black Graduate Institutions (HBGI) at the Department of Education:** The Secretary awards grants to institutions making substantial contributions for African Americans to receive doctoral degrees in mathematics, medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and other graduate education opportunities toward the goal of equal educational opportunity in graduate education.

### **Strategic Programs and Services**

- **Increased funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) REACH program:** The Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) is a national initiative vital to the CDC's efforts to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health. Through REACH, the CDC supports partners that establish community-based programs and culturally-tailored interventions to eliminate health disparities among African-Americans, American Indians, Hispanics/Latinos, Asian-Americans, Alaska Natives, and Pacific Islanders.
- **Strong funding for the Office of Minority Health (OMH) at HHS:** OMH has been critical to identifying racial and geographic health disparities and creating and implanting programs to address those disparities. It is necessary that the OMH retain grant making authority and establish cooperative agreements in communities to support programmatic activity to end health disparities.

- Ensuring the **Prevention and Public Health Fund** is used the way it was intended to be used—to improve the nation's public health, and not be diverted to other programs—is also important. Programs like lead poisoning prevention, Chronic Disease Self-Management, and Million Hearts are supported by the Prevention and Public Health Fund and need continued support to be successful.

We cannot lose sight of the fundamental role the government must play in ensuring equitable access to quality health care, especially for our underserved and vulnerable populations. The programs mentioned above are critical to addressing ethnic and geographic health disparities. By investing in these programs and addressing disparities today, we can improve health outcomes and save money for tomorrow.

We look forward to working with you and thank you and your colleagues for your dedication and leadership.

Sincerely,

---

BRIAN SCHATZ  
United States Senator

---

/s/ Tammy Baldwin  
TAMMY BALDWIN  
United States Senator

---

/s/ Michael F. Bennet  
MICHAEL F. BENNET  
United States Senator

---

/s/ Richard Blumenthal  
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senator

---

/s/ Cory A. Booker  
CORY A. BOOKER  
United States Senator

---

/s/ Sherrod Brown  
SHERROD BROWN  
United States Senator

/s/ Catherine Cortez Masto  
CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO  
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein  
DIANNE FEINSTEIN  
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand  
KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND  
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris  
KAMALA D. HARRIS  
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono  
MAZIE K. HIRONO  
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar  
AMY KLOBUCHAR  
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy  
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY  
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders  
BERNARD SANDERS  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen  
JEANNE SHAHEEN  
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema  
KYRSTEN SINEMA  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen  
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN  
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren  
ELIZABETH WARREN  
United States Senator