



# Board of Scientific Counselors National Center for Health Statistics Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

July 1, 2006

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Director

National Center for Health Statistics

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Dear Ed:

On behalf of the Board of Scientific Counselors of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), I am pleased to forward the attached report of a recently completed outside review of the NCHS Mortality Statistics Program that we initiated at your request. You will see that the mortality statistics review panel, chaired by Dr. Randy Hanzlick, MD, conducted what the Board found to be a very thorough and thoughtful review of this important NCHS program.

While praising the high quality of the work of the mortality program, the review panel has set forth a detailed set of prioritized recommendations as part of its report. The overarching recommendations involve improvements to data input quality and regional comparability, improved data access and dissemination, development of a specific analytic/research plan for the Mortality Statistics Branch, working with NAPHSIS and the States to address issues of privacy and confidentiality in data release, and strengthening collaborative efforts and the Federal-State partnership. The panel also recommended the creation of an implementation workgroup to develop an implementation plan and time table. However, the Board is not recommending the creation of such a group. We have also reviewed your program staff's response to the draft recommendations and we recognize that you are already engaged in some of the recommended activities and are already making improvements in some of these areas. We also understand the resource limitations under which you are currently operating and concede that many of the panel's recommendations would require resources beyond that which are likely to come available in the near future. Nevertheless, we urge you and your staff to seriously consider the review panel's many useful ideas and suggestions in your future plans for NCHS. We look forward to your report back to us on the mortality program in a year.



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Since this was the first program to be reviewed under our recently formed review protocol, we also wish to pass along the following comments from the review panel and Board to improve subsequent reviews. The first suggestion is for the review panel to be given more time to deliberate over the material than the roughly two month period that the mortality statistics review panel was given. This can be accomplished by assessing panel information needs sooner after panel creation and by sending them the needed information more quickly. The first review panel also thought that it would have been helpful to talk to more program staff. Third, a little more communication between program staff and the review panel just prior to drafting the report would have been helpful. Specifically, it was suggested that getting program staff's initial reaction and its assessment of cost implications to the panel might make the panel's eventual recommendations more useful to NCHS. Finally, it was suggested that future review panels should have more representation of the "input end" of the program's process. For mortality statistics, this would mean from professionals like state program directors; for survey programs, it would mean from survey methodologists who focus on the design and implementation of surveys.

Sincerely,

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June O'Neill, Ph.D., Chair  
Board of Scientific Counselors, NCHS