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February 12, 2009

Charles E. Johnson
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Johnson:

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Scientific Counselors (BSC) of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), CDC/HHS to alert you to the reality that key health statistical programs of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) cannot be sustained with the current level of funding. The BSC is charged with reviewing the programs of the NCHS to ensure that they are meeting the Nation's needs. We are also charged to inform you when, in our judgment, a situation arises that fundamentally threatens the availability of rigorous, unbiased, statistical measures of the Nation's health.

Last year, we alerted your predecessor to these funding shortfalls which became apparent to us through our ongoing reviews of the Center's programs (**letter**). The lack of adequate funding is now threatening the continued viability of key NCHS data collection activities, and will reduce significantly the information available to you for planning health reform and for monitoring its impact. For example, NCHS does not have adequate funds to:

- monitor disparities in birth outcomes, use of prenatal care, and cause-specific mortality due to NCHS's inability to collect comprehensive national vital statistics data on births and deaths;
- provide critical information on health insurance coverage, utilization of health care services, and health status of the population at a level that permits examination of health and service disparities in the population through the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS);
- guarantee the continued provision of national level data on nutrition, diet and clinical health measures in addition to other key health indicators through the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES);
- provide information on characteristics of assisted living facilities and their residents through the National Survey of Residential Care Facilities, information needed for the planning of the needs of the growing elderly population in the next several years.



The Board strongly recommends that you take the above concerns into account as you develop the budget plans for NCHS, so that you and the Nation will continue to have the necessary unbiased, rigorous information needed to address current and future needs. It is the Board's judgment that at present the future existence of this information is severely threatened.

Members of the Board would be pleased to meet with you to discuss these matters further, if you would find that to be helpful.

On behalf of the Board of Scientific Counselors of the National Center for Health Statistics,

-s-

Irma T. Elo, Ph.D.
Chair, Board of Scientific Counselors

cc:

Mr. Mark Childress, Chief of Staff

Dr. Richard Besser, Acting Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dr. Edward Sondik, Director, National Center for Health Statistics