



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

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June 1, 2007

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Edward Sondik, Ph.D., Director  
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Dear Ed:

At its meeting on April 26 and 27, 2007, the NCHS Board of Scientific Counselors received information on the budget challenges facing the NCHS. We appreciate the opportunity to provide you with some guidance on approaches to actively addressing these financial issues. In offering these suggestions, it is important to emphasize that we have limited knowledge of the operations, financing and users of the individual programs. The following recommendations, therefore, may serve as general principles to help guide your specific programmatic adjustments.

First, we encourage the NCHS leadership to address the short-term fiscal issues with an eye towards the longer-term strategic vision of the Center. While all of the Center's activities are important, in a time of limited resources, it is necessary to prioritize efforts. These strategic priorities should drive budget considerations in the immediate future, so that NCHS can move forward toward its long range goals.

Second, the Board is unanimous in its belief that any financial reductions should be targeted, rather than across-the-board. Uniform budget cuts to all NCHS programs run the risk of degrading the quality of all of the Center's work. The NCHS has a well-earned reputation for the quality of its data, which should not be compromised during this time of limited funding. Looking forward, we advocate for continued emphasis on quality, even if that implies some reduction in the number of activities conducted by NCHS.

Third, the Board advocates the exploration of any opportunities to introduce efficiencies into the Center's operations. We do not have sufficient information available to us to offer specific recommendations, but we encourage the NCHS leadership to consider any approaches that would allow the collection of high quality data at reduced costs, or to take advantage of complementarities between NCHS activities and related programs outside the center. The Board is currently revising its program review criteria to ask reviewers to give greater emphasis in their recommendations to ways in which the Center could operate more efficiently within existing budgets.



Fourth, the Board recognizes that the data collected by NCHS are utilized by many constituencies. We encourage the Center's leadership to consider the impact of any programmatic changes on these constituent groups and inform them of the consequences. We understand that some external constituents already are mobilized on behalf of NCHS and others would be motivated similarly if they were aware of the implications of the current budgetary situation.

Fifth, the Board recognizes that many other agencies help to fund the NCHS data collection activities. Any reductions in either sample size or data elements may adversely affect the value of these data for the co-funders. Loss of support from the sister agencies could further jeopardize the ability of NCHS to collect information. Therefore, every effort must be made to coordinate the NCHS budget initiatives with those of the partner agencies. It may be necessary to prioritize some programs over others if NCHS programs must compete for funds from other agencies, which may also be faced with reduced budgets.

In summary, the Board appreciates the opportunity to provide input into your budgetary decision-making process. We share your concern that further fiscal constraints could threaten the work of the NCHS. Similarly, the Board intends to write to both Dr. Gerberding and Secretary Leavitt under separate cover to express our concerns. Under your leadership, we are confident that the Center will optimally utilize the resources available to it and we hope that these general guidelines are useful to you and to the NCHS.

Sincerely,

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