



# COSSA

CONSORTIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

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SOCIETY

SOCIETY FOR RESEARCH  
IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

**HOWARD J. SILVER,  
PH.D.**

*EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR*

**SUSAN CUTTER, PH.D.**  
*PRESIDENT*

January 5, 2009

Dear Dr. Collins and Members of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Transition Team:

The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) is pleased to offer the following policy recommendations for consideration by the NIH Transition Team on behalf of the 110 professional associations, scientific societies, universities and research institutes concerned with the promotion of and funding for research in the social, behavioral and economic sciences it represents. Thank you for the opportunity.

**Provide sufficient, stable, and sustainable resources to the NIH that allows it to carry out the extraordinary scientific promise of biomedical, behavioral and social sciences research.**

Investment in science and research is critical to improving the nation's health. Adequate funding for research would allow the agency to fulfill the extraordinary scientific promise of biomedical, behavioral and social science research set in place by the completed campaign to double the nation's investment in the promising research supported and conducted by the NIH. COSSA fully supports President-elect Barack Obama's pledge to double the budget of the federal science agencies.

**Appoint an NIH director who clearly understands the complexity and breadth of NIH's mission, including the importance of social and behavioral factors on health.**

The completion of the Human Genome Project has helped us understand the genetic influences on health. We now need to focus on how genes interact with our physical, chemical, social and behavioral environment to impact our health and well-being. Recognizing the importance of basic and applied behavioral and social science research to preventing and treating most diseases or disorders, the NIH supports this research across most of its 27 institutes and centers. In 1993 Congress also recognized the importance of these sciences to the nation's health and created the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) at NIH. OBSSR supports the development and application of systems integrative science approaches to study how multiple factors - behavioral, social, and biological - interact with each other and change over time to influence health.

**Increase the effectiveness of the OBSSR by utilizing the Office's expertise on the NIH Steering Committee that focuses on NIH-wide policies and operational decisions.**

Given the OBSSR's trans-NIH mission, the Office's leadership is crucial at a time when exciting scientific opportunities, persistent public health needs, and emerging public health challenges face our nation. OBSSR has demonstrated its commitment to bringing together the biomedical, behavioral, and social science communities to develop the research base designed to address the increasing complex health challenges facing the nation. The NIH Steering Committee, as the Transition Team is aware, was created to respond to the increased need for a more efficient means of trans-NIH coordination.

**Increase resources designed to enhance the diversity of those participating in scientific labor force.**

The United States is the world's leader in science, but that leadership may be at risk. Maintaining this status is considered to be a national priority. To preserve the U.S. prominence as the world's leader in science will require that the U.S. respond to the critical challenges impacting science, including a shrinking "pipeline" of talented people interested in science, technology, and clinical careers. It is incumbent that we tap and develop *all* of the diverse talents that make up this country's human capital. The scientific enterprise is strengthened by the intellectual diversity of thought.

**Invest in the broad range of basic science research vital to health.**

The greatest challenge we face is understanding the brain, behavior, and society -- from global warming to responding to short term pleasures; from self destructive behavior, such as addiction, to lifestyle factors that determine the quality of life, infant mortality rate and longevity. While remarkable advances in biomedical research have greatly improved understanding of the biological mechanisms underlying the effects of social and behavioral factors on health, there is an enormous need for basic inquiry into the complex and interacting factors that affect health, health policy, and the delivery of health services. To build consensus and stronger partnerships within NIH regarding the most important research areas that will affect the Nation's most pressing public health problems, a common research language and terminology among behavioral and social scientists and with the broader scientific community is needed. Such a development has the potential to encourage the development of new theoretical models, methodologies, and tools necessary to fulfill the promise of the science.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our recommendations. COSSA and the organizations it represents are fully committed to assisting the NIH Transition Team and the new Administration as it seeks to "once again put science at the top of our agenda and work to restore America's place as the world leader in science and technology."

Sincerely,

Howard J. Silver, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

Angela L. Sharpe, MG  
Deputy Director for Health Policy