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Labor, HHS, Education FY 2013 Spending Bill Emerges from Senate Appropriations Panel

On June 14, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved the FY 2013 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education and Related Agencies Appropriation bill. For FY 2013, the spending bill provides \$30.7 billion for the National Institutes of Health. It is an increase of \$100 million over FY 2012 and the President's request. This sum includes \$8.2 million in transfers available under section 241 of Public Health Services Act (PHS).

In the report accompanying the bill the Committee noted that the net amount for NIH in the budget request would have actually been a cut of more than \$200 million below the FY 2012 level if the administration's proposal to increase the program evaluation tap on PHS agencies from 2.5 percent to 3.2 percent was accepted. The Committee "rejects that proposed increase and maintains the tap at 2.5 percent."

The report indicated that the funding levels for the Institutes and Center appropriations for FY 2012 reflect the transfers announced by the HHS to increase funding for Alzheimer's disease research.

The Committee provided \$544.9 million for the NIH Common Fund, the same amount as the budget request and the FY 2012 funding level. The Committee expressed its support for Alzheimer's research but "strongly disagrees with the President's budget request to allocate \$80 million of the Prevention and Public Health (PPH) Fund for Alzheimer's disease research at NIH. NIH research is not an appropriate use of the PPH Fund." Additionally, the Committee declared that it would set a dangerous precedent to provide specific amounts of NIH funding for individual diseases. This is a similar position the Committee took in FY 2010 when the administration proposed allocating specific levels of funding for cancer and autism research. The Committee further noted that "NIH has flexibility to prioritize funding for individual diseases when scientific opportunities and the number of high-quality applications warrant an increase."

NCS - The Committee noted that it is "troubled" that after appropriating nearly \$1 billion for the National Children's Study since FY 2000, only a few thousand children have been enrolled and fundamental questions about the project's implementation still remain, particularly regarding the methods that will be used to recruit participants. "The Committee hopes that the budget request, a 15 percent reduction below the FY 2012 funding level, represents a positive sign that NIH intends to bring the costs of the NCS under control and spend its appropriation more efficiently."

The Committee expressed its hope that the "NIH's recently announced plan to switch to a provider-based rather than a household-based recruitment strategy will help achieve some of the necessary savings and may offer scientific benefits as well. At the same time, special efforts must be made to ensure that the new strategy will not leave out disadvantaged or underrepresented groups that are most negatively affected by health disparities." Conversely, the Committee also noted that "most important, it remains unclear whether a provider-based approach can accommodate the original goal of constructing a national probability sample that can be generalized to the entire U.S. population. The Committee believes that NIH should make every possible effort to fulfill that goal within a sustainable long-term budget."

The Committee directed the Secretary to enter into an agreement within 90 days of enactment of this act with the National Academy of Sciences to review the sampling strategy. It also acknowledged that it is aware "of the confusion and disruption caused by NIH's decision to let the Vanguard Study contracts expire - a decision that caught many academic institutions by surprise. The Committee strongly urges NIH to "improve its level of communication with the research community about any future changes to the project."

OBSSR - New mobile and wireless health technologies, known as mHealth, are likely to have profound impact on biomedical research and the delivery of healthcare. The Committee applauds OBSSR for leading efforts to systematically evaluate the impact of new technologies. The Committee is pleased that virtually all of the NIH Institutes and the National Science Foundation are collaborating in this area.

The Committee also commends OBSSR for its work to establish a comprehensive and cohesive

process to track the efforts of government, universities, private foundations, and associations to enhance minority participation in the sciences.

NCI - The National Cancer Institute is urged to fund basic, translational, and clinical research on cancer disparities in regions of the country that have a high predominance of economically disadvantaged African Americans. Areas of research cited by the Committee include cancer areas relevant to smoking and obesity. The Committee expresses its concern at the disproportionately high rate at which minority populations suffer from virtually every form of cancer. The Committee requested that NCI and the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) "prepare a joint report on efforts to end this disparity and effective ways to communicate with minorities on this important issue."

The Committee also encouraged NCI's collaboration with the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSRO) to study shared medical decision-making and to identify ways to improve communications between healthcare providers and their patients.

NHLBI - The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute is encouraged to speed the translation of basic research results in the behavioral and social sciences to clinical or other applications.

The Committee applauded NIH's Sleep disorders Research Plan, published by the National Center on Sleep Disorders Research. The Committee urged NHLBI to work with other Institutes and Centers to implement the plan's recommendations for improving sleep research and training, and for advancing multi-Institute collaborations.

NIDDK - The Committee requested that the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) update its report on the burden of digestive diseases in the United States to provide more accurate information on the current economic and health impacts of these conditions.

The Committee commended NIDDK for its continued efforts to build on the successes of the Diabetes Prevention Program and encouraged the use of additional resources to improve prevention and treatment of diabetes.

NIGMS - The Committee provided \$276.5 million to continue increased support for the IDeA program. The Committee recognizes the importance of the Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) and the IDeA Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence (INBRE) programs.) The Committee expressed its belief that the IDeA program has made a significant contribution to biomedical research and creating a skilled workforce. Accordingly, the Committee continued the \$45.9 million increase from FY 2012 and recommends that one-half the increase go toward new COBRE awards. The increase should be paid for by a reduction in funding across NIH institutes and centers.

The Committee encouraged the NIH Director to expand the program to support co-funding IDeA projects across NIH institutes and centers to foster the development of efforts in IDeA State programs. The Committee noted that many institutions in the Office of Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research [EPSCoR]-qualifying States are ineligible for funding and directed the IDeA Director to expand IDeA eligibility to all National Science Foundation EPSCoR-eligible States.

NICHD - The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development is commended for supporting research on the impact of deployment of a parent on nearly 2 million children who live in military families and 700,000 children who have been affected by a recent or current deployment of a parent. The Committee noted that studies are needed to examine the unique developmental challenges of children when the mother or female head of household is deployed to a combat zone, the process of adjustment when military personnel return home, and the long-term consequences of separation and reintegration on children's development.

The Committee commended NICHD for supporting large-scale databases, such as the National

Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the Child Development Supplement of Panel Study of Income Dynamics, and the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, and demographic research activities, such as the Population Research Infrastructure Program. It noted that these investments have generated key scientific findings, illuminating in particular the relationship between socioeconomic status and individuals' health and well-being. As NICHD implements its ambitious reorganization and scientific visioning process in FY 2013, the Committee urged the Institute to continue its commitment to supporting demography and population science.

NIA - In order to build upon the strong body of work already being done in NIH-funded Alzheimer's Disease Research Centers, the Committee recommended that the National Institute on Aging take advantage of existing well-characterized, longitudinal, population-based cohort studies, and the existing research infrastructure these large-scale cohort studies have already established, to provide new insights into risk factors and protective factors related to cognitive decline and dementia. The Committee emphasized that it "feels strongly that additional research is needed in minority populations that are particularly high risk for cognitive decline and dementia."

The Institute is encouraged to continue support of studies to identify environmental, behavioral, and social factors that could protect against age-related cognitive decline as well as randomized studies to test the efficacy of behavioral and social interventions to slow or reverse age-related cognitive decline.

NIA is recognized by the Committee for supporting research on the demographic, economic and social consequences of an aging population in the U.S. and world-wide. The Health and Retirement study, a longitudinal survey of more than 26,000 Americans that is now being replicated in more than 30 countries is cited by the Committee as a "premier example of this research."

The Institute is also commended for working with the Economic and Social Research Council in Great Britain to develop subjective measures of well-being as a complement to objective health measures and traditional economic indicators of progress. The Committee encouraged the continued development of these metrics and their incorporation into national surveys.

NIAAA - The Committee applauded the release of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's new youth alcohol screening guide and encourages the Institute to continue to promote alcohol screening of children and adolescents. The Institute is urged to pursue its plans to evaluate the guide both for detecting risk of alcohol problems and as an initial screen for other risky behaviors. NIAAA is also commended for its efforts to develop a matrix of interventions for addressing alcohol problems on college and university campuses and in the surrounding communities. The Committee recognized the critical role of psychological research in understanding and addressing underage drinking.

NIDA - The National Institute on Drug Abuse is recognized by the Committee for its educational efforts to inform the public of the deleterious effects of abused substances and the life-threatening dangers of drug addiction. The Committee cited adolescents and returning veterans and their families as being at high risk for drug abuse and noted that these should be areas of focus. Additionally, NIDA is commended for its efforts to coordinate and support research with the Department of Veterans Affairs and other NIH institutes on substances abuse and associated problems among U.S. military personnel, veterans, and their families. NIDA is encouraged to continue work in this area.

The Committee supported NIDA's continued efforts to understand how genetics, age, environment, and other factors affect the use of experimental drugs and the development of addiction.

NIMH - The Committee declared that with recent scientific advances demonstrating the promise of biomedical HIV prevention interventions, behavioral research is needed more than ever to bolster medication, adherence and treatment uptake, document real-world decision-making processes associated with biomedical interventions, and better understand potential unintended and/or undesired consequences of biomedical interventions. The National Institute of Mental Health is

urged by the Committee to support a robust HIV/AIDS behavioral prevention research agenda that examines these factors and includes operation research to optimize combination HIV prevention.

The Institute is encouraged to fund research efforts to find innovative ways to address mental health disparities in underserved populations. The Committee noted that greater rates of poverty among some ethnic and minority groups and rural populations, relationships between low socioeconomic status and some mental disorders, and greater risk of poverty among people with certain mental illnesses can create a vicious cycle.

NIMHD - The Committee recognizes that more research and education are needed on the disparate effects of diabetes on minority populations. The Committee urged NIMHD to expand its research on pre-diabetes and diabetes, particularly type-2 diabetes in minority populations. This research should identify clinical, socio-economic, geographical, cultural, and organizational factors that contribute to diabetes in such populations. Specifically, the Committee encouraged NIMHD to analyze behavior and obesity.

It is noted by the Committee that the Strategic Plan for NIH Obesity Research emphasizes the need for a transdisciplinary, multifaceted approach to address the complex factors that have resulted in the growing obesity problem in the U.S. The Committee supported NIH's actions to date and the findings of the task force, but remains concerned that while the essential plan and direction may be in place, a better mechanism is needed to coordinate a trans-NIH, multidisciplinary efforts to address the complicated nature of the obesity problem. The Committee urged NIH to intensify its investment in obesity research, in particular in populations that are most affected - racial and ethnic minorities, low-income populations, and rural populations. The Committee again strongly recommended that NIH review the benefits of establishing a Comprehensive Center of Excellence for Obesity Research and Prevention within NIMHD to better coordinate efforts within NIH and with other Federal agencies.

NCATS - The Committee is encouraged by the direction of the new Center. It encourages NCATS to continue the focus of the Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSAs) program on the full spectrum of translational research.

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality - The Senate Committee provided \$364.1 million in funding for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) through transfers available under section 241 of the Public Health Services (PHS) Act. The Committee recommended transferring \$12 million to AHRQ from the PPH Fun. The total program level assumed in the bill for AHRQ is \$376.1 million.

The Committee noted that AHRQ's research portfolio focuses predominantly on patient safety and healthcare quality. It urged AHRQ to develop a more balanced research agenda, supporting all aspects of healthcare research outlined in its statutory mission, including: the cost and utilization of, and access to, healthcare; and the ways in which healthcare services are organized, delivered, and financed.

Education

The Senate panel provided \$75.7 million for **international education and foreign language programs** in FY 2013. Although this is a \$1.7 million increase over FY 2012 as recommended by the Administration, the figure remains considerably below the FY 2010 appropriation of \$125.9 million. The domestic programs of Title VI of the Higher Education Act would receive \$68.3 million, up from \$66.6 million in FY 2012. The Committee directed that the Department should use the increase "to support new awards in the Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language program." The Fulbright-Hays Act overseas programs would receive \$7.5 million, the same as in FY 2012.

The **Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)** received \$43.5 million from the Senate panel for FY 2013. This is a considerable increase from FY 2012's level of \$3.5 million.

The Committee provided \$39 million of the requested \$55 million for the Administration's "First in the World" initiative. The program, according to the Administration, would help ensure institutions of higher education have access to and implement innovative strategies and practices that have been shown to be effective in improving educational outcomes and making college more affordable for students and families. The Committee recommended that up to \$14 million of these funds go to minority-serving institutions to improve their students' persistence and completion rates while keeping costs under control.

In FY 2012 the Administration recommended and the Congress accepted the proposal to subsume the Javits Fellowship program into the **Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN)** program. For FY 2013, the Senate Committee proposed funding GAANN at \$30.9 million, the same as FY 2012. Aware that the GAANN program has not considered the social sciences, arts, and humanities, whose graduate students were funded by the Javits program, as areas of national need, the Senate panel urged the Department to make these disciplines "eligible fields for new and continuing grant competitions" under the consolidated program. The Committee requested that the Department provide a plan for the implementation of the consolidation within 30 days of the enactment of this act.

The Senate Committee commended the **Institute of Education Sciences' (IES)** "attempts to improve the rigor, relevance, and utilization of education research that leads to enhanced education policy and classroom practices." It provided \$189.8 million, the same as the FY 2012 and \$12.5 million below the President's request for education research, development, and national dissemination activities. The Committee also directed IES to "support a National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented and to ensure that gifted and talented education is reported in national reports produced by IES."

The **National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)** received \$114.7 million, an increase of slightly less than \$6 million above FY 2012 and the same as the request, to "allow NCES to provide partial support to States that would like to benchmark their student performance against countries that participate in the Program for International Student Assessment."

The Committee recommended \$53.1 million, a \$15 million increase from FY 2012 and the same as the request, for **Statewide Data Systems**. IES' assessment activities received \$132.6 million, the same as the budget request and \$6 million below FY 2012.

Under the Department of Education management account, the Senate Committee report includes language expressing concern "with deficiencies in **geography education** at the elementary and secondary education levels and geographic education research in the United States." The Committee therefore directs the Government Accountability Office "to conduct a study on the status of geographic education and the ability of U.S. graduates to fill and retain skilled jobs, particularly in geospatial technologies."

Bureau of Labor Statistics

The Senate Committee recommended \$619 million for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in FY 2013. This is almost a \$10 million increase over FY 2012 and a little less than \$1 million above the President's request. Of these funds, \$67.2 million will come from the unemployment trust fund.

In the report, the Committee commended the BLS "for its roughly 4-decade commitment to gather, extrapolate, and disseminate critical information about the experiences of youth, women, and men in the labor market through the National Longitudinal Surveys [NLS]." The report also noted that "these longitudinal surveys serve as an essential national data source for long-term and ongoing analysis of the economic health of America and are an invaluable resource for Congress, as well as the public and private sectors, especially during times of economic uncertainty." The Committee concluded that BLS should continue to support the NLS and recommended that "the frequency of NLS data collection should not be less than biennially."

The Committee report directed the Secretary of Labor to commission a study, either by the National Academy of Public Administration or the National Academy of Sciences' Committee on National Statistics. The study would report "on a comprehensive assessment of the proper purpose, structure, methods, and operations of the Federal-State cooperative statistics system, particularly regarding the appropriate roles and responsibilities of the BLS, the ETA (Employment and Training Administration), the State labor market information agencies, and the system's relationship with the Census Bureau, the NCES (National Center for Education Statistics), State workforce agencies, State education agencies, and private vendors." The Committee also asked that whoever does the study should issue an interim report that would contain a rigorous assessment of the Current Employment Statistics Program.

Furthermore, the report indicated that BLS should "initiate a pilot input price index that would track price changes as establishments shift from domestic to foreign sources," and "prioritize work on the Contingent Work Supplement to the Current Population Survey."

NIH ACD Meets: Focuses on the Biomedical Workforce and Workforce Diversity

On June 14, the Advisory Council to the NIH Director (ACD) met for the first of its two annual meetings. National Institute of Health (NIH) director Francis Collins received recommendations from the ACD's working groups convened to look at workforce issues, including diversity.

Biomedical Research Workforce Working Group

The working group of the NIH Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD) chaired by Shirley Tilghman, President of Princeton, and Sally Rockey, Director of the NIH Office of Extramural Research, was charged by NIH director Francis Collins with developing a model for a sustainable and diverse U.S. biomedical research workforce that can inform decisions about training the optimal number of people for the appropriate types of positions that will advance science and promote health.

The Working Group's report summarizes the workforce data collected and its recommendations. "The working group did not have either the time or the expertise to propose details on how the recommendations should be implemented. Noting that it appreciates that K - 12 and undergraduate education "are major factors that influence the success of building of the biomedical research workforce," the working group confined its recommendations to graduate training and beyond as NIH funding and training focuses on those stages.

Graduate students - The working group recognized that the "overall number of Ph.D. students in biomedical research is in large part determined by the budget of the NIH." It also noted that the majority of graduate students in the U.S. are supported on a combination of NIH training grants, fellowships, and research project grants.

- NIH should create a program to supplement training grants through competitive review to allow institutions to provide additional training and career development experiences to equip students for various career options, and test ways to shorten the Ph.D. training program. The working group felt that including diverse types of training would be particularly valuable for those who go on to conduct NIH-funded research as well as benefitting those students who do not follow the academic research career track.
- To encourage timely completion of graduate degrees, NIH should cap the number of years a graduate student receives support from NIH funds (any combination of training grants, fellowships and research project grants), with institutional average five years and no one individual allowed to receive support for more than six years.
- To ensure that all graduate students supported by the NIH receive excellent training, NIH should increase the proportion of graduate students supported by training grants and

fellowships compared to those supported by research project grants, without increasing the overall number of graduate student positions.

- NIH should revise the peer review criteria for training grants to include consideration of outcomes of students in the relevant Ph.D. programs at those institutions, not only those supported by the training grant. Study section reviewing graduate training programs should be educated to value a range of career outcomes.
- The very different requirements and characteristics of training programs at each NIH institute and Center (ICs) constitute a substantial burden on the institutions. All NIH ICs should offer comparable training programs and fellowships and their requirements should be harmonized.

Postdoctoral Researchers - There is very little reliable data on the number of postdoctoral researchers in the U.S. and the length of their training. Nonetheless, after analyzing the available data, the working group believes that postdoctoral experience should be considered an extension of the training period primarily intended for those Ph.D. graduates who intend to pursue research-intensive careers. The working group also recognizes that postdoctoral fellows have spent years in graduate training, and should be compensated accordingly.

- To ensure that all postdoctoral fellows supported by the NIH receive excellent training and mentoring, NIH should increase the proportion of postdoctoral researchers supported by training grants and fellowships and reduce the number supported by research project grants, without increasing the overall numbers of postdoctoral researchers.
- NIH should create a pilot program for institutional postdoctoral offices to compete for funding to experiment in enriching and diversifying postdoctoral training, including partnerships with other entities (industry, private foundations, government, etc.).
- The current stipends for NIH-supported postdoctoral fellows need to be adjusted to levels that better reflect their years of training. The working group recommends that the NIH should adjust the starting stipend levels of the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) to \$42,000 and indexed the starting stipend according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U) thereafter. Stipend levels should increase with each year of experience in any postdoctoral position irrespective of their titles by four percent for the second and third years and six percent for years four through seven.
- To encourage larger numbers of Ph.D. graduates to move rapidly into permanent research positions, NIH should double the number of Pathway to Independence (k99/R00) awards, and shorten the eligibility period for applying to this program from the five years to three years of postdoctoral experience.
- NIH should also double the number of NIH Director's Early Independence awards to facilitate the "skip-the-postdoc" career path for those who are ready immediately after graduate school.
- NIH should require individual development plans for all NIH-supported postdoctoral researchers. Assessment of implementation of this requirement should be included in the review criteria of training grants.

Diversity- Increasing diversity of trainees and the workforce is critical to the future of the biomedical research in the U.S., particularly with the increase of underrepresented groups as a share of the U.S. population. The committee recognizes that this is the responsibility of the entire scientific community but feels NIH should set an example.

Finally, the working group points out similar recommendations have been made in the past by other groups that studied the biomedical research workforce. It notes that many of those recommendations were not implemented, in part because of funding constraints and in part of resistance from the scientific community. Accordingly, the working group urges NIH to provide the funds necessary to implement these recommendations and encourages institutions to work with NIH on the implementation.

Diversity Working Group

The ACD Working Group on Diversity in the Biomedical Research Workforce was charged by the director to examine the findings and implications of the Ginther, et al. study results, *Race, Ethnicity, and NIH Research Awards* (see Update, [September 12, 2011](#)). Collins asked the working group to provide concrete recommendations toward improving the recruitment and retention of underrepresented minorities, people with disabilities, and people from disadvantaged backgrounds across the lifespan of biomedical research career, from graduate study to acquisition of tenure in an academic position or equivalent in a non-academic setting. The Working Group was chaired by Reed Tuckson, Executive Vice President and Chief of Medical Affairs, UnitedHealth Group, John Ruffin, Director of the National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities, and Lawrence Tabak, NIH's Deputy Director.

The Diversity Working Group pointed out that while it had "sufficient data to formulate the recommendations in [the] report...it recognizes that the NIH needs to be more attentive to collecting the data on an ongoing basis to better inform next steps and future actions that are required to address this problem."

The Diversity Working Group issued 13 recommendations that fell into five broad categories: data collection/evaluation; mentoring/career preparation and retention; institutional support; bias-related research and intervention testing; and NIH diversity strategy and infrastructure.

1. NIH must ensure that appropriate resources for systematic tracking, reporting and evaluation of the immediate and long-term outcomes of all trainees, regardless of NIH-funding mechanism. Tracking individuals over time is essential to ascertaining the quality and efficacy of predoctoral and postdoctoral training.
 - Assign a unique identifier to every NIH-supported trainee, fellow, and career development recipient, including those supported on research project groups.
 - Require that all programs undergo systematic review and evaluation every five years. Those found to be particularly effective in increasing underrepresented minority participation in the biomedical workforce should be used as models for other programs that are not as effective, and should be considered for expansion.
2. The NIH should take a direct leadership role in developing the interest and curiosity of greater numbers of K-12 and undergraduate URM students in biomedical and behavioral sciences through the design and dissemination of NIH-specific activities; providing an increase number of research experiences for high school students and their teachers; and by advocating for and promoting cooperative efforts across Federal agencies and with private and philanthropic organizations.
3. Additional support should take the form of an increased number of scholarships for undergraduates that include "payback" through participating in a meaningful research experience and additional fellowships for the anticipated increased number of URM graduate students in biomedical research.
4. The NIH should assess the reason(s) for the disparity in the frequency of awards to African American applicants for postdoctoral positions on T32 training grants and F32 fellowships, and take appropriate remedial actions once the reason(s) for this disparity has been determined.
5. NIH, through the National Institution of Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) serving the coordinating function, should partner with established minority scientific and professional groups and other trusted organizations to implement a system of mentorship "networks" for underrepresented minority students that will provide career guidance throughout their career development.

6. NIH should establish a working group of the ACD, of racially and ethnically diverse scientists, to provide regular input to the Director of NIH, and the Institutes and Centers, regarding the state-of-art in effective programs that overcome or reduce disparities in research awards.

7. Investigators whose applications are unscored should be provided with a more detailed explanation of the factor(s) that led to this determination, thus enabling an applicant to better understand the areas of concern leading to the decision about his or her proposal. Ideally, these comments from peer reviewers should help the applicant decide whether he or she should "resubmit or rethink" unscored applications.

8. Under the leadership of NIMHD, and in coordination with other STEM initiatives underway in Health and Human Services and across other Federal government agencies, NIH should undertake a bold, well-funded, multi-year, incentive-based, competitive grant process to support infrastructure development in those comparatively under-resourced institutions with a documented track record of producing and supporting URM scientists as well as stimulating creative partnerships among these institutions and, where appropriate, including more resource-rich institutions.

9. The NIH should expeditiously establish a new Working Group of the ACD comprised of experts in behavioral and social sciences and studies of diversity with a special focus on determining and combating real or perceived biases in the NIH peer review system. In particular, this new Working Group should:

- Oversee the collection and analyses of quantitative and qualitative data relevant to research project grant review and grant-making decision process.
- Oversee other efforts that investigate potential effects of unconscious bias in peer review.

10. NIH should first pilot different forms of validated implicit bias/diversity awareness training for NIH scientific review officers and program officers to determine the most efficacious approaches. Once the best training approaches have been identified with NIH staff, pilot these programs with members of study sections to ascertain if their value is sustained. If they are, provide to all study section members.

11. NIH should design an experiment to determine the effects of anonymizing applications with respect to applicant identity as well as that of an applicant's institution.

12. Appoint a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) and establish an Office of Diversity with a suitable budget. The CDO should be an established biomedical scientist with considerable expertise in diversity in academic and academic medical settings. The CDO should report directly to the NIH director and be responsible for ensuring the coordination of diversity-focused efforts across the NIH, including:

- Developing diversity training programs for investigators
- Providing resources to facilitate the recruitment of URM scientists, women, persons with disabilities, and veteran candidates
- Supporting scientific research in diversity in related to STEM professions, health care, the interrelationship of a diverse health care workforce to a diverse scientific community, health care policy, health care delivery, and other related areas
- Undertaking a systematic and thorough review of all Intramural Research Programs and determining appropriate intervention points
- Recruiting and retaining diverse tenure-track scientists
- Training post-baccalaureate, postdoctoral, and other levels of scientists at the NIH.

13. Using the trans-NIH Earl Stadtman Investigator search process as a model, and learning from its experience, the NIH should institute a more comprehensive search process for tenure-

track investigators to ensure the identification of a diverse pool of candidates.

To read more about the ACD and/or to review the Working Group report's executive summary see: <http://acd.od.nih.gov/working-groups.htm>

House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee Holds NIH Oversight Hearing to Discuss Reauthorization and Sequestration

On June 21, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health held an oversight hearing, "*The National Institutes of Health - A Review of Its Reforms, Priorities, and Progress*," to review the implementation of the 2006 NIH Reform Act, the progress of the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS), and the determination of NIH funding and research priorities.

Subcommittee Chair, Rep. Joseph Pitts (R-PA), welcomed NIH director Francis Collins, the hearing's only witness and provided a short overview of the history of the agency's creation in 1887 "when it operated as a one room laboratory." Pitts noted that "faced with so many good causes," he would like to know how NIH identifies the highest priorities in biomedical research and then uses the review process to fund the best research.

In his opening statement submitted for the record, Full Committee Chair, Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI) noted that "many members, including myself, are curious to hear how NIH determines its research priorities and why some diseases receive significant attention and funding while others don't seem to be on the NIH's radar. Or, how, NIH selects topics in behavioral research and whether these topics reflect the best science and common values."

Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, echoing most of the others, noted that the "NIH is a driving force behind biomedical research that has advanced, and continues to improve, the health of Americans and strengthened the U.S. economy...declining or stagnant federal funding for research and development has an impact on all sectors of our workforce." He noted that while these "are difficult economic times...our counterparts in Europe and Asia are steadily increasing their investments for biomedical research despite limited resources because of long-term impacts on their citizens, health and economy."

Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX), the author of the NIH Reform Act of 2006, thanked Chairman Pitts and Ranking Member Pallone, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) and Chairman Upton and noted that the hearing was called at his behest. Barton reminded the Subcommittee that it was back in 2006, when he was chairman, the Congress passed the NIH Reauthorization Bill - the agency's first major reauthorization in more than 13 years.

He also noted the doubling of the NIH's budget, which occurred between 1998 and 2003, and lamented that "in the last few years, we have not been able to give NIH those sorts of additional resources." He further noted that the NIH Reauthorization bill provided the agency with "extra flexibility, created the Common Fund, and helped reorganize the NIH." He shared his belief that the Act had been implemented "in a fairly effective fashion." The hearing, Barton explained, was designed to hear from Collins how that reauthorization is proceeding and "also get his input on the things that perhaps need to be done and need to be done legislatively that haven't been done." The Subcommittee wants to make sure that the NIH is productive, effective and "to the extent that we can increase funding we want to provide transparency so ...that the public knows how their money is being spent," Barton continued.

Barton further noted that the Subcommittee also "want to increase the communication and collaboration within the NIH and to as large an extent possible to eliminate duplicity and redundancy."

He pointed out the NIH's reauthorization had expired and he hopes that the "hearing will lay the foundation to perhaps in this Congress and if not in this congress, perhaps in the next Congress to do

another Reauthorization Bill of the NIH."

Collins reported to the Subcommittee that the agency is using new structures and mechanisms to enable and expedite trans-NIH research managed by the Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives (DPCPSI) and funded by the Common Fund. The agency has increased transparency with online research inventories and portfolio databases. The NIH has also worked closely with the Scientific Management Review Board (SMRB), instituted by the NIH Reform Act. The SMRB has proven an effective advisor for providing expert advice about NIH's organization, management, and performance, Collins noted in his written testimony.

Impact of Sequestration?

How does operating on continuing resolutions and the threat of the sequestration affect your ability to maintain constant funding to the best brightest scientists and adequately address the numerous health burdens represented in the NIH research portfolio, asked Pallone.

Collins responded that "it does make it challenging when science really is best sustained by having stability so that investigators out there in all the states of our nation and some outside our nation are able to pursue research with the confidence that there is going to be some support that will not just become somewhat questionable the next year or the next month." He related that the NIH budget has to be decided upon every year and it rarely has been decided by October 1, the beginning of the fiscal year, which makes it challenging to manage the agency. Collins explained that most scientific projects have a cycle time of three or four years. The expectation is to assure that investigator that the NIH is going to provide support for that three or four years, "otherwise, the initial money may go to waste." But when the agency doesn't know from year to year exactly what its resources will be makes it very tough, remarked the NIH director.

Waxman continued the line of questioning, empathizing with Collins regarding the difficulty associated with going "year by year without knowing what your budget is going to be. It could lead to a lot of instability but you're facing something as are other parts of our government much more dramatic at the end of this year. The sequestration or what it really means is the across-the-board cuts that were called for in last year's budget agreement and that will go into effect in January [2013] unless the Congress changes things," said Waxman. By the Congressional Budget Office's estimate this would mean an approximately eight percent reduction in NIH's budget or roughly \$2.4 billion less available funding, taking NIH back to its 2004 funding levels, he explained.

He pointed out that if this funding went into effect, at least 2,300 fewer grants would be awarded. "I assume this is on your mind and it's on the minds of a lot of people. .. And I know as a government leader you have to make plans for your sequestration. How would NIH absorb this \$2.4 billion in lost funding? What cuts would you make? Would you make it across the board? Would you pick and choose which institutes and centers get hit by how much and if you made a decision not just across the board, what criteria would you use to pick and choose?"

Collins replied that sequestration is "certainly" on his mind. "If there is something that I'm most concerned about in terms of an event that could really disrupt and do serious damage to the progress that we now see in medical research, this is it," Collins stated. The loss of 2,300 grants which would come already three months into the fiscal year would represent about a quarter of the total grants the NIH would give for that entire year. He explained that exactly how that would be distributed would depend upon scientific priorities but it would clearly stretch all areas: cancer, diabetes, heart disease, common diseases, rare diseases, basic science and training. The agency would "basically spread the pain" but would not do it in a completely blind fashion.

The NIH director noted that the agency is already at the lowest rates in history for success in getting your grant funded, about 17 percent. Traditionally, the success rate has been at 30 percent. To drop that even further which would clearly happen dramatically were sequestration to occur "might deal a blow to many investigators that they simply would not be able to sustain."

Rep. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) questioned Collins regarding the NIH's level of support for HIV/AIDS research as compared to its support for "ischemic heart disease even though ischemic heart disease is the leading cause of death. And obesity which you mentioned in your written testimony as being so important affecting 30 percent of our population is, I think, 40th in terms of the ranking of your priority as you have enlisted."

Collins responded by cautioning Cassidy regarding "this kind of analysis based on DALYs (Disability Adjusted Life Years) in which decisions are made about research opportunity. He explained that in addition to public health needs there are circumstances where science provides lots of opportunities for things to go quickly and others where you're simply throwing the money at the problem. There's no great new idea. In his written testimony, Collins explained that "frustratingly, not all disease or scientific problems are equally ripe for new advances, nor do such advances come at the same rate across the portfolio, no matter how pressing they might be the public's health. He also emphasizes that the NIH "simply cannot predict the next scientific revelation or anticipate the next opportunity."

Continuing this line of questioning, Cassidy asked "how often do your councils actually redirect funding?" Collins answered that it is the job of the advisory councils to decide what new requests for applications to approve.

House Science Panel Hears from President's Science Adviser

On June 20, the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, chaired by Rep. Ralph Hall (R-TX), held an oversight hearing on the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to examine the "Priorities and Effectiveness of the Nation's Science Policies." The sole witness was John Holdren, OSTP director and President Obama's Science Adviser.

In his opening statement, the Chairman acknowledged that: "We may not always agree with the advice the Director provides to the President, but science and technology have played a vital role in the making of this Nation and will continue to fulfill that role in the future." At the same time, he expressed his concern "about a number of this Administration's science and technology policy issues, ranging from an unprecedented emphasis on clean energy at the expense of other priorities to a larger focus on applied research at the expense of basic scientific research to the lack of a clearly defined and compelling long-term mission for human space flight."

Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), the Ranking member on the Science Panel, noted: "As Americans we should celebrate the fact that a highly respected scientist such as Dr. Holdren has the ear of the President and is truly part of his inner circle of advisors on matters of science and technology."

Holdren's testimony included a history of the federal government's role in supporting science and the establishment of the science advisory structure within the Executive Office of the President. He also was grateful for the increase provided by the House and Senate Appropriations Committee for OSTP's budget in the FY 2013 Commerce, Justice, Science appropriations bill following a significant cut in FY 2012 due to a dispute over the office's contacts with the Chinese government.

The Science Adviser stressed the President's priorities such as advanced manufacturing, clean energy, global change research, space, in which he defended the decisions regarding NASA's human spaceflight program, scientific integrity, STEM education, big data (see Update, [April 12, 2012](#)), public access to federally funded research, and cybersecurity. He also mentioned the Neuroscience Initiative that Congress helped promulgate into a cross-agency activity led by Philip Rubin (see other story). Holdren also reported on the multiple public-private partnerships the Administration has created to advance science, technology, and innovation, as well as science education.

The questions from the Committee members ranged from local issues, e.g. from newly-elected Rep. Suzanne Bonamici's (D-OR) concern about the impact of the Japanese tsunami on the Oregon Coast, Rep. Randy Hultgren's (R-IL) distress about the decline of U.S. world class facilities in particle

physics (Fermilab is in his district), and Rep. Steven Palazzo's (R-MS) worries about the NASA Center in his state, to the hostile, e.g. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) rehashing the OSTP-China problem using an outdated Government Accountability Office report, Rep. Mo Brooks (R-AL) questioning the Administration's "Green Jobs" claims, and Rep. Andy Harris (R-MD) ranting over the EPA regulatory process and the defending the process of fracking to extract natural gas.

The Science Director suggested that OSTP would release the long-awaited strategic plan for STEM education sometime this fall. He also concluded that the current budgetary climate makes it more difficult for the Administration to achieve all its goals in science, technology, and innovation.

For more on the hearing, including Holdren's testimony, go to:

<http://science.house.gov/hearing/full-committee-hearing-examining-priorities-and-effectiveness-nation%E2%80%99s-science-policies>.

Philip Rubin Moves Up at OSTP

Philip Rubin, who came back to Washington earlier this year to serve as the Assistant Director for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), to lead the government-wide neuroscience initiative, and to act as a senior adviser to the Assistant Director for the SBE directorate at the National Science Foundation (NSF), has a new position.



With the departure June 2 of Associate Director for Science Carl Wieman, OSTP director John Holdren has announced that Rubin "will be performing the duties" of Wieman's position. Rubin's new title will be Principal Assistant Director for Science at OSTP. He will continue to lead the Federal neuroscience initiative and will also keep his position as the OSTP Assistant Director for SBE.

As part of his new role, Rubin will take over as Co-chair of the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) Committee on Science. The other Co-chairs of the Committee are Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Subra Suresh, Director of NSF.

From 2005 through 2011 Rubin served as Chair of the National Academies/National Research Council (NRC) Board on Behavioral, Cognitive, and Sensory Sciences, which focuses on the intersection of cognitive science and public policy. From 2000 through 2003 Rubin was the Director of the Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences at the NSF.

Rubin is on leave as the Chief Executive Officer at Haskins Laboratories, as well as from his positions as an adjunct professor in the Department of Surgery, Otolaryngology, at the Yale University School of Medicine, and a research affiliate in the Department of Psychology at Yale University.

A former COSSA Annual Meeting speaker, Rubin is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Acoustical Society of America, the American Psychological Association, the Association for Psychological Science, and an elected member of the Psychonomic Society and Sigma Xi. He is also an Associate Fellow of Yale University's Trumbull College. In 2010 he received the American Psychological Association's Meritorious Research Service Commendation.

Rubin received his B.A. from Brandeis University and his Ph.D. from the University of Connecticut.

JEC Holds Hearing on Impact of Ending the ACS

The Joint Committee on Economics (JEC) held a hearing on June 19 to discuss "The Economic Impact of Ending or Reducing Funding for the American Community Survey [ACS] and other Government Statistics." This hearing came in the wake of the House passage of its FY 2013 Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) Appropriations bill, which included an amendment by Rep. Daniel Webster (R-FL) abolishing the ACS (see Update, [May 14, 2012](#)) . Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) spoke out strongly against the amendment at the time, and presiding over the hearing, had ample opportunity to do so again.

Maloney opened the hearing by condemning the House vote to defund the ACS proclaiming that "I wish we were having a hearing on job creation, instead we're having one on why the House voted to strip job-creators of the tools they need to grow the nation's economy, expand exports, and hold the government accountable for how well the country is doing." Noting that she believed this was not an issue of quality or necessity, but rather one of partisanship, she went on to quote James Madison's vehement call for this sort of data when he said "this kind of information all legislators had wished for, but this kind of information had never been obtained in any country..." Maloney declared that "in our current economic times it makes no sense to stop collecting such invaluable information that guides economic recovery and growth." She also noted that policy makers and federal agencies use Census information to distribute more than "\$450 billion to state and local governments based in whole or in part on ACS data."

Rep. Kevin Brady (R-TX), the JEC's vice-chairman, recognized the importance of census statistics in policy making and for job creators in his opening statement, but announced his displeasure at the narrow focus of the hearing. He declared that Republicans would use the hearing platform to more broadly investigate rectifying "deficiencies in U.S. economic statistics." He also noted that he believed the mandatory nature of the ACS was the sticking-point that swayed the majority of the House against it and most public opposition would disappear if it were to become voluntary.

Kenneth Simonson, Chief Economist for the Associated General Contractors of America, and Vice President of National Association for Business Economics, was the first to testify. He spoke of the ACS delivering timely information utilized by a wide variety of users. Among those users are development agencies, which rely in data when attempting to convince businesses to choose the U.S. locations over other nations. Simonson also attempted to underline the ACS' vital role in outlining information in individual congressional districts.

Andrew Reamer, Research Professor at George Washington University Institute of Public Policy, addressed the Committee next. Reamer attempted to debunk the belief that private organizations would step-up and fill the void left by the ACS if it were to disappear. He noted that non-government groups could not and would not want to create the data that government currently manages to consolidate. Data, according to Reamer, are a classic public good; full data are necessary for markets to function properly.

Keith Hall, Senior Research Fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University and former Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, came next and, having been invited to the hearing by Republicans, went a bit off topic. Hall discussed the need to modernize data collection to take advantage of data already collected. He also discussed ways to increase efficiency and lower costs such as replacing personal interviews with online interactions. Sharing data systems between agencies was another of his proposals.

The final witness, Grant Aldonas, Principal Managing Director at Split Rock International, maintained that the current mindset behind government support for collecting economic data is off. He declared that instead of what the census has been measuring, we should be measuring individual freedom and our progress towards equality of opportunity. The Census should be asking itself hard questions with Congress' guidance and finding alternatives to collecting the data.

During the questions segment of the hearing Maloney, Rep. Michael Burgess (R-TX), and Brady

attempted to drive their own points home and little happened to sway either side. Reamer, in response to a question from Maloney, noted that if the ACS were to become voluntary, response would drop by 20 percent. This would make reliability much more expensive to obtain and demand more non-response follow-up.

COSSA submitted testimony for the hearing record. It is available at www.cossa.org.

House Appropriations Committee Marks Up Agriculture and Rural Development Spending Bill

On June 19, the House Appropriations Committee approved its version of the FY 2013 Agriculture and Rural Development Appropriations bill. The Subcommittee on Agriculture and Rural Development, chaired by Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA), had marked up its version on June 6 (see Update, [June 12, 2012](#)). The legislation includes \$19.4 billion in discretionary funding - a cut of \$365 million below last year's level and \$1.7 billion below the President's budget request. The bill was approved by full committee with a voice vote. Several amendments were also approved, for a comprehensive list of those please look [here](#). The Senate Appropriations Committee passed its Agriculture bill back in April (see Update, [April 30, 2012](#).)

The Committee provided the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) \$691 million for FY 2013 for its research and education activities. This number includes \$231.6 million for the Hatch Act, the major formula funding mechanism which funds research conducted by the State Agricultural Experiment Stations. This number is roughly \$3.5 million below the President's requested \$235 million. The Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), USDA's primary competitive research grants program supporting investigator-initiated research, received \$276.5 million in the bill. This falls far short of the President's proposed \$325 million, but is above the \$264.5 million enacted in FY 2012. It is also less generous than the Senate's recommended \$298 million.

The Economic Research Service (ERS) received \$75 million in the House bill, \$2 million below the President's request and \$2.7 million below last year. The panel provided the National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) with \$175 million, of which \$61.3 million is for the Census of Agriculture. This is an increase of roughly \$16.6 million above the 2012 funding level.

The Committee has included a major cut for the Regional Rural Development Centers, allocating them a mere \$568 thousand, down from the Centers' usual \$1 million budget. President Obama proposed consistent funding for the Centers, as did the Senate, so this represents a stark contrast from the Republican-controlled House.

The bill is expected to reach the House floor for a vote during the week of June 25. President Obama has threatened to veto the bill at its current levels, taking specific issue with funding levels for a financial regulatory agency, a domestic nutrition program and international food aid. The Administration also objects that the overall House discretionary spending level is below the number set by last year's debt agreement. The full text of the Agriculture and Rural Development legislation is available [here](#). The Committee Report can be found [here](#).

Senate Passes Reauthorization of the Farm Bill

The Senate, after a seemingly never-ending series of amendment considerations, passed the five-year Farm Bill on June 21-a feat many thought impossible. The measure passed 64-35. Under an agreement worked out to bring the bill up for consideration, 60 votes were needed for passage of the legislation and for adoption of any of the extraneous amendments.

The underlying five-year bill would authorize agricultural and food assistance programs, which the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects would cost roughly \$969 billion if implemented over the

next ten years - \$23.6 billion less than the CBO projects would be spent if those programs were continued under current law. The legislation would provide direct spending authority for most of the programs from crop year 2013 through crop year 2017. The bill would terminate \$5 billion in annual direct payments to grain and cotton growers and replace it with a revenue- protection plan that would offer "shallow loss" coverage for farmers who experience price and crop losses. The bill also authorizes appropriations for agricultural and food policy research centers and reauthorizes agricultural research activities at 1862, 1890 and 1994 land-grant institutions. The bill does not offer policy changes to The Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.

Included in the amended bill are directions to Secretary Tom Vilsack to establish a Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, a non-profit, non-governmental entity to foster public private partnerships within the research community including the Department of Agriculture, other agencies, non-governmental organizations, academia, corporations, private foundations, and wealthy donors. The directed purpose of the Foundation will be to advance the research mission of the Department by supporting agriculture research activities focused on addressing key problems of national and international significance. In the months leading up to this bill, COSSA joined with other concerned groups to fight for the inclusion of agriculture economics and rural communities in this new Foundation-these vital areas of research made it through in the Senate's passed version of the bill.

The House Agriculture Committee is expected to mark up its version of the bill July 11.

Making Prison Reform Work Subject of Keynote Address at NIJ Conference

Joan Petersilia, Professor of Law at the Stanford Law School and co-director of the Stanford Criminal Justice Center, who has been in the middle of the prison reform battle as a researcher and practitioner for over twenty-five years, gave the keynote address at the NIJ Conference in Arlington, VA on June 19. The annual conference brought together over 1,400 criminologists and criminal justice practitioners to examine research and evaluations and their impact on police, prosecutors, and the justice system.



Petersilia, who has worked as an adviser to California's former governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and its current governor, Jerry Brown, applauded the current downsizing trends in state prison populations after they had reached record levels in the past twenty years. She warned, however, that "we have been here before" and that programs once touted as community-based alternatives to incarceration didn't work.

A "perfect storm," has gathered, she declared, including rising costs, overcrowding because of mandatory sentencing and sanctions such as three strikes and you're out, and most importantly, court decisions that have forced California to depopulate its state prisons and change its parole system. In California, the prison population has declined in five years from 172,000 to 135,000 and the parole population from 132,000 to 60,000 today.

Calling it the "biggest criminal justice experiment in American history," Petersilia noted Governor Brown and the state legislature have agreed that: 1) punishment for low level felonies would no longer include incarceration; 2) parole would now be county-based and only last six months; and 3) those who committed technical violations of parole and probation would no longer go back to prison; only new crime convictions would end in that result.

She then asked, "if not prison, what?" Reviewing the alternatives to incarceration and intermediate sanctions' activities in the 1980s and 1990s, Petersilia suggested that they did not live up to many criminologists' and criminal justice practitioners' hopes. One alternative, increased supervisory

probation, never had a chance because budget constraints led to enormous casework loads and the inability to implement treatment programs. Relying on surveillance techniques did not work either. With these experiments deemed failures and with rising crime rates, the new alternative was to simply build more prisons and lock more people up for longer periods of time.

Petersilia is much more hopeful this time around since "sciences' role is now front and center" and the science is getting better. We have better risk assessment tools and the rigor of evidence-based policies. She warned, however, about "overselling and under-delivering" these new solutions. The new Office of Justice Programs' clearinghouse of programs that work, www.crimesolutions.gov, has found only one of twenty-three prisoner re-entry programs effective.

At the same time, there are many obstacles to making this prison reform work, she noted. There are many vested interests in keeping the current system in place, including opposition from communities where prisons provide their economic lifeline. The current state budgetary difficulties make providing social services, particularly in poor neighborhoods, where many of those released from prison return, even more difficult.

Petersilia concluded that the debate over incarceration has now shifted to a point where cost-benefit calculations are the key input to decisions. We still need, she asserted, a much broader discussion of the "higher order moral questions" that pervade the nation's criminal justice and incarceration policies.

NCES Releases NAEP Assessment Results

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has released its report on the 8th grade science assessment, as well as a report on its new hands-on and computer interactive science assessment given to 4th, 8th, and 12th graders.

The 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) science assessment was designed to measure students' knowledge and abilities in the areas of physical science, life science, and Earth and space sciences. The average score for the 2011 Science NAEP assessment for the 8th grade was 2 points higher in 2011 than in 2009 increasing from 150 to 152. Sixty-five percent of 8th graders performed at or above the Basic level in 2011, 32 percent performed at or above Proficient level, and two percent at the Advanced level. The percentages of students at or above Basic and at or above Proficient were higher in 2011 than in 2009.

The score gaps between White and Black students and between White and Hispanic students narrowed from 2009 to 2011. In comparison to 2009, average science scores in 2011 were one point higher for White students, three points higher for Black students, and five points higher for Hispanic students. There was no significant change on the gender gap as male students scored five points higher on average than female students in 2011, which was not significantly different from the four point gap in 2009.

In 2009, NAEP introduced hands-on tasks and interactive computer task assessments for the science assessments. Different samples of students were administered hands-on tasks (HOTs) and interactive computer tasks (ICTs). The interactive computer and hands-on tasks were designed to assess how well students can perform scientific investigations, draw valid conclusions, and explain their results. For both the hands-on tasks and interactive computer tasks NAEP assessed approximately 2,000 4th, 8th, and 12th, graders at each grade.

The HOTs were 40-minute activities where students used materials and laboratory equipment to perform actual science experiments. These tasks provided students an opportunity to demonstrate how well they can plan and conduct scientific investigations, reason through complex problems, and apply their scientific knowledge in real world contexts.

The ICTs were either 20 or 40 minutes in length and required students to solve scientific problems in a computer-based environment. Like the HOTs these tasks provided students an opportunity to demonstrate a broad range of skills, but without the logistical constraints associated with the HOTs.

There were two key discoveries from the HOTs and ICTs assessments. Although students performed successfully on parts of investigations that involved limited sets of data and making straightforward observations of that data, they were challenged by parts of investigations that contained more variables to manipulate or involved strategic decision making to collect appropriate data.

White and Asian/Pacific Islander students in all three grades scored higher than their Black and Hispanic peers on both the hands-on tasks and interactive computer tasks. At grades 4 and 12, Hispanic students scored higher than Black students on both assessments. And although they performed slightly behind males on the traditional NAEP Science assessment, female students in all three grades scored higher than males on the hands-on tasks, and there was no gender gap on interactive computer tasks.

The complete report for the 2011 science assessment can be found at:

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/science/>.

The report for the 2009 hands on task and interactive computer task assessments can be found at:

http://nationsreportcard.gov/science_2009/.

NCHS Releases Reports on Health Indicators and Health Insurance Coverage

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) has released two early release reports this month. One from the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) reports on key health indicators. This report provides and updates preliminary estimates for 15 selected health measures based on new data from the 2011 NHIS, with comparisons to estimates from the NHIS back to 1997. The 15 measures included are lack of health insurance coverage and type of coverage, usual place to go for medical care, obtaining needed medical care, receipt of an influenza vaccination, receipt of a pneumococcal vaccination, obesity, leisure-time physical activity, current smoking, alcohol consumption, HIV testing, general health status, personal care needs, serious psychological distress, diagnosed diabetes, and asthma episodes and current asthma.

The report can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/released201206.htm>. Any questions about the report should be directed to Jeannine Schiller at 301-458-4470.

The latest special report on Health Insurance from the Early Release Program, titled "Health Insurance Coverage: Early Release of Estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, 2011" is also now available. This report has a special focus on the uninsured. Three types of measures indicating a lack of health insurance coverage are provided: point-in-time, anytime in the past year, and for more than a year. Different time frames are used to measure lack of insurance coverage in order to reflect different policy-relevant perspectives. The point-in-time measure of lack of coverage provides an estimate of persons who at any given time may experience barriers to obtain needed health care. The estimate of persons uninsured at any time in the past year provides an annual caseload of persons who may experience these barriers. Finally, the measure of lack of coverage for more than a year provides an estimate of those with a persistent lack of coverage who may be at high risk of not obtaining preventative services as well as care for illness and injury. Uninsured estimates are presented by poverty status. Estimates of persons with private and public coverage by poverty status are also presented. In this release are estimates for enrollment in high deductible health plans (HDHPs) and consumer-directed health plans (CDHPs) that combine an HDHP with a health savings account, as well as estimates of participation in flexible spending account (FSA) arrangements for medical expenses from 2007 to 2011.

Once a year, the June quarterly report presents health insurance coverage rates for selected states. This year state-level estimates are presented for 32 states for persons of all ages, persons

under age 65 and adults aged 18-64 years. State-level estimates are presented for 25 states for children aged 0-17 years.

Estimates based on data for 2011 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) are presented along with comparable estimates from the 1997-2010 NHIS. Estimates for 2011 are stratified by age group, sex, race/ethnicity, marital status, employment status, region and educational attainment.

This report is available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/insur201206.pdf>. Any questions about this report should be directed to Cohen at 301-458-4152.

NAS Committee on Law and Justice Seeks New Director

With the coming retirement of Jane Ross, the National Academies (NAS) seeks a Director for its Committee on Law and Justice (CLAJ). This panel is a standing committee in the Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. CLAJ was established by the National Research Council in 1975 to enable increased scientific understanding of crime and justice issues. The Committee's mission is to help improve research methods and information to inform and support the development of national and state-level criminal justice policy, and to advance criminological and criminal justice research. Its current Chairman is Jeremy Travis, President of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

The Director helps identify current and emerging issues in criminal justice; develops workshops, conferences, and studies by separate panels of experts; and seeks funds for these activities from Federal Government agencies and public and private foundations. The Director also supervises the Committee's staff and represents the Committee with heads of government agencies, the media, and the public.

The Director should have a keen interest in and broad deep knowledge of criminal justice policy and research issues, and substantial experience working at the intersection of research, policy, and practice. Demonstrated impact on the advancement of science or policy is desired. This highly visible position requires a Ph.D. and ten years of directly related professional experience.

For more information go to: <http://national-academies.org> and search under Careers, Current Opportunities by Department - Div of Behavior & Social Sciences & Education - requisition number 120086-3.

COSSA's Newest Member

The University of California, Irvine, after a year's hiatus, has resumed its membership in COSSA. We are delighted to have them back.

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