

Fiscal Year 2026 Testimony on behalf of the
Population Association of America/Association of Population Centers
Submitted to Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations
In support of funding the NIH, NCHS, AHRQ, BLS, and IES
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Thank you, Chair Capito and Ranking Member Baldwin, for this opportunity to express support for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). These agencies are important to the members of the Population Association of America (PAA) and Association of Population Centers (APC) because they provide direct and indirect support to population scientists (demographers, sociologists, economists, and epidemiologists) nationwide.

In FY 2026, we urge the Subcommittee to adopt the following funding recommendations for agencies under its authority: \$51.3 billion, NIH; \$220 million, NCHS; \$500 million, AHRQ; \$900 million, IES; \$15 million to restore the Social Security Administration's Retirement and Disability Research Centers (RDRC) and \$770 million, BLS. In addition, we urge the Subcommittee to accept report language, previously submitted, regarding population research programs and surveys supported by the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute on Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the NIH.

Our organizations also urge the Subcommittee to reject proposed agency reorganizations in the Administration's FY 2026 budget request--particularly the drastic recommended changes to the NIH. Changes of the magnitude that the Administration is seeking should be considered by the relevant authorizing committees in the Senate and stakeholders. Further, as you draft the FY 2026 LHHS appropriations bill, we urge the Subcommittee to consider the harm that recent actions taken by the Administration, for example, to terminate peer reviewed awards, eliminate agencies and programs, restrict access to taxpayer funded data and data products, and reduce staffing at federal scientific and statistical agencies are having on the nation's scientific workforce and pipeline.

National Institutes of Health

Population, or demographic, research is the study of populations and how or why they change. The health of our population is fundamentally intertwined with the demography of our population. Recognizing the connection between health and demography, NIH supports population research programs primarily through the NIA and the NICHD. As members of the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research, PAA and APC recommend the Subcommittee continue to prioritize NIH funding by endorsing an appropriation of \$51.3 billion for the NIH in FY 2026. We ask that NIA and NICHD, as components of the NIH, receive commensurate funding increases in FY 2026.

PAA has worked with the Subcommittee staff and numerous offices to submit proposed report language highlighting population research activities funded by the NIA and NICHD. With respect to NICHD, the requested report language is especially important because it urges the

Institute to address recent drastic cuts to large-scale longitudinal, nationally representative surveys and report on its plans regarding large data collection activities. NICHD-funded surveys are invaluable resources whose publicly accessible data support research and training activities nationwide. As an illustration, there are over 45,000 registered users in 49 states who rely on data from the NICHD-funded Panel Study of Income Dynamics Child Development Supplement alone. The report language underscores how essential these data are as public goods for advancing scientific progress.

National Center for Health Statistics

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is the nation's principal health statistics agency. Population scientists rely on large NCHS-supported health surveys, especially the National Health Interview Survey and National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, to study demographic, socioeconomic, and behavioral differences in health and mortality outcomes. They also rely on the vital statistics data that NCHS releases to track trends in fertility, mortality, and disability. NCHS health data are an essential part of the nation's statistical and public health infrastructure. In order for NCHS to continue monitoring the health of the American people while striving for the production of more timely, high-quality, granular data, PAA and APC, as members of the Friends of NCHS, recommend that the agency receives \$220 million in FY 2026. PAA and APC are especially supportive of NCHS using additional funding to improve the quality of vital statistics data to inform research regarding the underlying causes of mortality and health disparities across different populations and geographies as well as to facilitate full implementation of its Virtual Data Enclave initiative to enhance public access to NCHS data.

PAA and APC reject the Administration's proposal to relocate NCHS within the Department's Office of Strategy, pending an opportunity for Congress to hold hearings and stakeholders to comment on the implications of this proposed move for NCHS.

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

As members of the Friends of AHRQ, PAA and APC support providing the agency with \$500 million in FY 2026. AHRQ funds research that focuses on the delivery of effective and efficient medical care, including prevention of dangerous and deadly medical errors. AHRQ is attracting attention as an increasingly important scholarly setting and potential source of grant support for population scientists. In addition, population scientists use data from the agency's health services research surveys and electronic health records to inform their own studies and research training activities.

Social Security Administration's Retirement and Disability Research Consortium

On February 21, the Social Security Administration (SSA) [announced](#) that it was terminating the Retirement and Disability Research Consortium (RDRC) cooperative agreements, halting critically important research nationwide. Established in 2017, during the first Trump Administration, the RDRC has played an important role in improving SSA's efficiency, fiscal oversight, and decision-making by conducting independent, data-driven research. Its work has helped to streamline SSA programs, reduce improper payments, and ensure benefits reach those who need them most, all of which are essential in today's budget-conscious environment. PAA and APC urge the Subcommittee to restore the RDRC program and provide it with \$15 million in FY 2026.

Bureau of Labor Statistics

Population scientists who study and evaluate labor and related economic policies use BLS data extensively. The field also relies on unique BLS-supported surveys, such as the American Time Use Survey and National Longitudinal Surveys, to understand how work, unemployment, and retirement influence health and well-being outcomes across the lifespan. As members of the Friends of Labor Statistics, PAA and APC urge the Subcommittee to provide the agency with \$770 million in FY 2026. In addition, we urge the Subcommittee to, once again, include report language expressing support for continued implementation of the new National Longitudinal Survey of Youth cohort.

Institute of Education Sciences (IES)

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) plays a critical role in supporting research used in developing and examining the effectiveness of education programs and curricula. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the statistical arm of IES, provides objective data, statistics, and reports on the condition of education in the U.S. Population scientists rely on NCES surveys to conduct research on an array of topics, such as linkages between educational access/attainment to health outcomes of specific populations, economic well-being, and incarceration rates. As members of the Friends of IES, we urge the committee to provide the agency with \$900 million in FY 2026, which will also ensure sufficient support for NCES. Further, we urge the Subcommittee to restore staffing levels at both IES and NCES. The demise of NCES, in particular, has adversely affected the ability of students and scientists to access taxpayer funded NCES datasets and jeopardized the future of surveys containing decades of invaluable data about the nation's students, schools, and workforce.

Thank you for considering our support for these agencies as the Subcommittee drafts the FY 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill.