

April 2, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
United States Senate
SD-136, Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
United States Senate
SD-156, Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
2358B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

The undersigned organizations write to request \$5 million for fiscal year 2020 for the Center for Primary Care Research at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ.) Although the Center has a statutorily-authorized home at AHRQ (since 1999) it does not have dedicated funding.

Americans get the majority of their healthcare in primary care settings. However, federal funding overwhelmingly supports research on single diseases rather than the complex, multifaceted care people need in the real-world. An Institute of Medicine report observed that “most [specialty-oriented research] is not relevant to primary care because of its focus on singly developed diseases [and] carefully selected patients.”

As a nation, we need to invest in primary care research if we want to have a more efficient, equitable, higher quality health system. The evidence clearly shows that having more primary care clinicians in proportion to other specialists in a community increases the health of the community and reduces costs. Primary care improves population health and reduces health disparities, with a critical role in addressing the social determinants of health. The lack of funding for primary care research has real and devastating consequences. Little is known about how to best organize and prioritize primary care, how to ensure a strong primary care workforce, how to introduce and successfully disseminate new discoveries, including integration of mental health in primary care, how patients can best decide when and where to seek care, and how to best approach patients with undifferentiated symptoms.

AHRQ supports primary care research, but, reduced funding levels have led to a decrease in this research. AHRQ has cut significant programs such as the multiple chronic disease project and has reduced the Center for Primary Care Research to a virtual clearinghouse under the auspices of the Center for Evidence and Practice Improvement. As such, it provides access to information and resources but has no dedicated funding.

AHRQ has critical clinical research role, that cannot be replaced by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Basic science and disease-specific research is the focus of NIH, and primary care research in contrast has been underfunded within this framework when compared to all other health disciplines. For example, less than 0.5% of NIH funding goes to family medicine researchers, and it is concentrated among a limited number of departments with little funding for new investigators.

With the appropriate funding, the Center for Primary Care Research would improve coordination and emphasize the need for expanded primary care research – both in the clinical and health services spheres. Visible and strong support for AHRQ’s unique role in primary care research is needed. We hope you can provide that leadership by requesting \$5 million in FY2020 for AHRQ’s Center for Primary Care Research.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Family Physicians
American Association of Nurse Practitioners
American Board of Family Medicine
American College of Clinical Pharmacy
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Physicians
American Psychological Association Services, Inc.
Association of Departments of Family Medicine
Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors
Council of Academic Family Medicine
Harvard Medical School Center for Primary Care
Mental Health America
Milbank Memorial Fund
National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions
National Association of ACOs
National Center for Primary Care at the Morehouse School of Medicine
National Committee for Quality Assurance
North American Primary Care Research Group
Patient-Centered Primary Care Collaborative
Primary Care Development Corporation
Society of General Internal Medicine
Society of Teachers of Family Medicine
URAC