Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you and your colleagues begin work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you provide the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) $454 million in budget authority, commensurate with the agency’s FY 2010 appropriation adjusted for inflation. AHRQ is an essential element of the nation’s health care ecosystem, charged with improving the quality and delivery of health care, and this level of funding will allow the agency to rebuild portfolios terminated after the last seven years of cuts.

Discovering cures is critical to patients, providers, and our communities, but understanding how to most effectively and affordably deliver those cures to patients through health services research is equally critical. AHRQ is the only federal agency singularly focused on generating reliable research on how to deliver the highest quality care, at the greatest value, with the best outcomes to all patients. It is the only agency that funds research on the “real-world” patient—the one who doesn’t have diabetes alone, for example, but also has cardiovascular disease and renal disease; or the patient who has cancer, as well as heart disease. AHRQ-funded research, datasets, and tools allow us to understand where waste, inefficiencies, and gaps exist within the health care system. Most importantly, AHRQ allows patients, payers, providers, and others to harness American innovation and make the health care system safer, more efficient, and more effective for everyone.

For example, AHRQ has a unique and critical role to play in the opioid epidemic, particularly in primary care practices. Researchers have already begun working to define the best practices for managing pain and for the use of medication-assisted therapy for those struggling with addiction. Meanwhile, additional AHRQ research continues to make great strides in preventing health care acquired infections in ambulatory and nursing home settings and the agency’s EvidenceNOW effort, currently being funded through the PCOR Trust Fund, is making strides in how we treat heart disease.
Restoring AHRQ’s budget to the FY 2010, inflation-adjusted level of $454 million will allow for reinvestment in critical initiatives that have been terminated or curtailed as a result of budget cuts. Among the programs terminated was the agency’s research portfolio to optimize care for America’s nearly 60 million patients living with multiple chronic conditions. By 2020, an estimated eighty-one million people will have multiple chronic conditions and the costs of their care will consume 80 percent of publicly funded health insurance programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. Investing in AHRQ now is essential to helping defray those costs and provide patients with the most quality care possible.

Health services research shows that as much as one-third of the more than $3 trillion our nation spends on health care each year is waste—care that is inappropriate, ineffective, or harmful. Every dollar we invest in generating evidence to eliminate that waste is a sound fiscal investment. Funding AHRQ ensures that our health care system becomes the most efficient one in the world. We urge you to make AHRQ, and its critical research, a priority in FY 2019.

Sincerely,

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United States Senate

SHERROD BROWN
United States Senate

CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
United States Senate

SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
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