

November 2, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Mikulski,

We are writing today to respectfully ask you to restore the CDC Arthritis Program in the FY2016 Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations bill to the FY2014 funding level of \$13 million. The CDC Arthritis Program was cut by \$3.5 million (27%) in FY15, the only CDC disease program to receive cuts in the final FY15 appropriations bill. More than 1 in 5 U.S. adults has a doctor-diagnosed form of arthritis and the **CDC Arthritis Program is the only federal program dedicated solely to arthritis**, so it is imperative to public health and prevention efforts that these funds be restored. Last week's passage of the Bipartisan Budget Act offers a great opportunity to restore these funds. As you are determining the 302(b) allocations, we urge you to prioritize agencies and programs such as CDC and the Arthritis Program that have received severe cuts in the past fiscal year.

According to the CDC, an **estimated 52.5 million U.S. adults report having arthritis** and that number is expected to grow to 67 million by 2030. The most recent analysis estimates that osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis alone cost the US economy \$156 billion annually. **Arthritis is the nation's most common cause of disability.** It limits the activities of 22.7 million Americans, and for 1 out of 3 adults of working age (18–65 years) with arthritis, it can limit the type or amount of work they do or whether they can work at all. One out of four veterans has doctor-diagnosed arthritis and it is the second leading reason that soldiers are discharged from the U.S. Army. Arthritis is also more common among adults who are obese than among those who are normal weight or underweight.

At FY14 funding levels, CDC was able to fund 12 states (CA, KS, KY, MI, MO, MT, NY, OR, PA, RI, SC, and UT) to monitor the burden of arthritis, coordinate partnerships across the public health and health delivery system and provide evidence-based programs at the community level. **With a 25% cut in FY15, the CDC Arthritis Program has had to make program and grant cuts ranging from 10%-50%, with some program eliminations. If these cuts are sustained in FY16, cuts will be even deeper, the program will have less reach, there will be less translation and dissemination of evidence-based programs, and less funding for partnerships.** The central aims of state arthritis programs are to: improve the quality of life among persons affected by arthritis; increase awareness that something can be done to address the burden and impact of arthritis; and implement self-management education and physical activity interventions. According to CDC, every state has greater than 20% of their population with doctor-diagnosed arthritis. All 50 states need Arthritis programs.

The CDC Arthritis Program currently works with national partners to disseminate recommended evidence-based programs that are proven to improve the quality of life of people with arthritis. Examples include:

- YMCA of the USA is deploying the Enhance®Fitness program in partnership with the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD), to help older adults become more active and empowered for independent living. Proven results from the program include a 35% improvement in physical functioning and a 53% improvement in depression. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) reported to Congress that EnhanceFitness resulted in less hospitalizations and \$945 less in health care costs per participant per year than non-participants.
- The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is partnering with the Arthritis Foundation and NACDD to implement the Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program (AFEP) and expanding the Walk with Ease (WWE) interventions. Participants reported both physiological improvements, such as decreased pain and increased energy levels, as well as psychological improvements, such as decreased anxiety and improved mood.
- The University of North Carolina supports the Johnston County Osteoarthritis Project, a unique, community-based, longitudinal study of approximately 3,200 rural white and black residents aged 45 and older. It is designed to determine the prevalence, incidence, and risk factors associated with the occurrence and progression of hip and knee osteoarthritis (OA)—the most common and disabling type of arthritis. Results of this study will allow a better understanding of how and why these conditions occur and what modifiable risk factors can be targeted to reduce their impact.
- The CDC Arthritis Program contributes prevalence, societal and economic cost data to the US Bone and Joint Initiative publication *The Burden of Musculoskeletal Diseases in the US* used to justify research on arthritis. USBJI's Chronic Osteoarthritis Management Initiative aims to improve quality care and lower healthcare costs through earlier diagnosis of risk and prevention – a need justified by healthcare reform, prevalence data and research advances. With CDC Arthritis Program input the USBJI sponsors an education program on arthritis at which in 2015 Americans in 28 States will have participated.

In closing, there is much we can do to manage and control arthritis, one of the most prevalent chronic diseases, including reducing hospitalizations and human and economic costs associated with the disease. It is essential that we continue to deploy and disseminate evidence-based, cost-effective strategies to control the nation's leading cause of disability. Please give every consideration to a strong allocation for the Labor-HHS-Education 302(b), and fully funding the CDC's Arthritis Program at the FY2014 level of \$13 million.

Sincerely,

American College of Rheumatology
 Arthritis Foundation
 National Association of Chronic Disease Directors
 National Psoriasis Foundation
 National Recreation and Park Association
 Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation
 United States Bone and Joint Initiative
 University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
 YMCA