ISSUE SUMMARY

As the nation’s lead federal agency for research to improve health care quality, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) supports research and disseminates information on evidence-based practices and procedures that improve health care delivery. Through this work, AHRQ serves to strengthen implementation of medical discoveries into practice and to equip patients, providers, and payers with reliable health services data.

Issue

Implementation and outcomes research provides health care stakeholders the tools and methods to build the evidence base on “what works” in health care and to link this information directly to clinical practice and health systems. This approach allows clinicians and health systems to take full advantage of the research enterprise to develop and deploy cutting edge treatments and models of care. In addition to improving clinical and health systems practice, such work also can help inform patient decision making and can help policymakers better understand the impact of policies on the efficiency and effectiveness of care. Continued and enhanced support for implementation and outcomes research will improve the translation of medical research into care and strengthen the quality and safety of health care in the United States.

Background

Complementing the medical research supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), AHRQ sponsors research on health services, implementation, and outcomes that is designed to improve the quality and safety of health care. As the lead federal agency tasked with improving health care quality, AHRQ’s mission is to produce evidence to make health care safer and higher quality and more accessible, equitable, and affordable.

In support of this mission, AHRQ’s budget includes a number of research initiatives designed to enhance consumer and clinical decision making, provide improved health care services, and promote efficiency in the organization of public and private systems of health care delivery. AHRQ supports researchers conducting research to understand how to make health care safer and improve quality. Additionally, to foster its important research, AHRQ provides an array of intramural and extramural predoctoral and postdoctoral educational and career development grants and opportunities in health services research.

The nation’s medical schools and teaching hospitals conduct and produce much of the research funded by AHRQ and also benefit greatly from the research findings and resources disseminated by AHRQ. As an example, the annual National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report issued by AHRQ is a valuable resource used by institutions to assist with their community health needs assessments and work in advancing health equity. AAMC members also participate in and use the AHRQ Health Care Innovations Exchange, which rapidly disseminates evidence-based tools and strategies for large-scale implementation in the health care system. Research conducted by grantees at AAMC-member institutions has led to significant changes in medical research, practice, and policy, including improving access to care and strengthening quality. For example, this work is enhancing the ability of health systems and health care providers to identify and address clinical care safety issues. Medical education also now integrates instruction on patient safety for students and residents into the curriculum, and AHRQ research on topics such as prevention and chronic care is widely incorporated in continuing medical education (CME) offerings.

In fiscal year (FY) 2016, AHRQ received $334 million in budget authority, sustaining a $30 million (8 percent) cut compared with the previous fiscal year. For FY 2017, the AAMC joined the Friends of AHRQ in recommending restoration of AHRQ’s budget to $364 million—a funding level that would allow AHRQ to continue and enhance its initiatives to improve quality and control the cost of the health care system. The AHRQ appropriation is also supplemented by a transfer each year from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Trust Fund to build capacity for comparative clinical effectiveness research through training grants and to disseminate findings from comparative clinical effectiveness research.
AAMC Policy Recommendations

• The AAMC firmly believes in the value of research in health services, implementation, and outcomes as the nation continues to strive to provide high-quality, efficient, and cost-effective health care to all of its citizens. Continued and robust funding for AHRQ is critical to help achieve these goals.

• Spending bills should recognize the complementary nature of research and research agencies rather than imposing problematic prohibitions that impede research to improve patient care.

Related Issues

• Health Equity

• Other Priority Health and Research Agencies

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Web Resource

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
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