

**Statement by the Association of American Medical Colleges on
FY 2021 Appropriations for the Department of Health and Human Services
Submitted for the Record to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education and Related Agencies – May 22, 2020**

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) is a not-for-profit association dedicated to transforming health care through innovative medical education, cutting-edge patient care, and groundbreaking medical research. Its members comprise all 155 accredited U.S. and 17 accredited Canadian medical schools; nearly 400 major teaching hospitals and health systems, including 51 Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and more than 80 academic societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC serves the leaders of America's medical schools and teaching hospitals and their 173,000 full-time faculty members, 89,000 medical students, 129,000 resident physicians, and more than 60,000 graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the biomedical sciences.

The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated how sustained support for the research, education, and patient care missions of medical schools and teaching hospitals is essential to ensure a resilient health care infrastructure that is prepared to respond to both novel and existing threats. The AAMC is grateful to Congress for investments made through supplemental emergency funding packages to date, which take important steps to provide relief for health care providers and critical safety net providers, including major teaching hospitals and faculty physicians, for both increased clinical spending and losses associated with COVID-19; for expansion of testing capacity and contact tracing; for additional student loan relief and funding for higher education., and for additional COVID-19-related medical research. We look forward to continuing to work with lawmakers as discussions around additional emergency funding needs progress.

To continue to fulfill these important missions over the long-term, the AAMC requests continued support through the regular appropriations process as well for the following federal priorities essential in assisting medical schools and teaching hospitals to fulfill their missions of education, research, and patient care in FY 2021: \$44.7 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), including funds provided through the 21st Century Cures Act for targeted initiatives; \$460 million in budget authority for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ); \$790 million for the Title VII health professions and Title VIII nursing workforce development programs, and \$465 million for the Children's Hospitals Graduate Medical Education (CHGME) program, at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)'s Bureau of Health Workforce; and continued support for student aid through the Department of Education. The AAMC appreciates the Subcommittee's longstanding, bipartisan efforts to strengthen these programs.

We recognize the constraints the committee faces as a result of the FY 2021 discretionary spending cap. To enable the necessary support for the broad range of critical federal priorities, the AAMC urges Congress to exempt key programs that support the nation's COVID-19 response from the FY 2021 caps, and also to approve a funding allocation for the Labor-HHS subcommittee that enables full investment in the priorities outlined below.

National Institutes of Health. Congress's longstanding bipartisan support for medical research has contributed greatly to improving the health and well-being of all Americans. The foundation of scientific knowledge built through NIH-funded research drives medical innovation that improves health through new and better diagnostics, improved prevention strategies, and more

effective treatments. Over half of the life-saving research supported by the NIH takes place at medical schools and teaching hospitals, where scientists, clinicians, fellows, residents, medical students, and trainees work side-by-side to improve the lives of Americans through research. This partnership is a unique and highly productive relationship, one that lays the foundation for improved health and quality of life and strengthens the nation's long-term economy.

The AAMC thanks Congress for the bipartisan support that resulted in the inclusion of \$41.7 billion in the FY 2020 omnibus spending bill for medical research conducted and supported by the NIH, which builds off meaningful increases for NIH since FY 2016. Additionally, the AAMC thanks the Subcommittee for recognizing the importance of retaining the salary cap at Executive Level II of the federal pay scale. The AAMC is concerned that proposals to undermine salary support would limit the number of grantees with sufficient funds to conduct research and ultimately weaken research nationwide. This consequence would directly counter the Subcommittee's efforts over the years to strengthen the nation's research enterprise.

In FY 2021, the AAMC supports the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research recommendation that Congress provide \$44.7 billion for NIH, including funds provided through the 21st Century Cures Act for targeted initiatives. This funding level would continue the momentum of recent years by enabling meaningful base budget growth over biomedical inflation to help ensure stability in the nation's research capacity over the long term. Securing a reliable, robust budget trajectory for NIH is key in positioning the agency – and the patients who rely on it – to capitalize on the full range of research in the biomedical, behavioral, social, and population-based sciences.

Scientific discoveries rely on support from Congress. We must continue the current trajectory if we are to strengthen our nation's research capacity and solidify our global leadership in medical research, ensure a biomedical research workforce that reflects the racial and gender diversity of our citizenry, and inspire a passion for science in current and future generations of researchers.

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Complementing the medical research supported by NIH, AHRQ sponsors health services research designed to improve the quality of health care, decrease health care costs, and provide access to essential health care services by translating research into measurable improvements in the health care system. As the only federal agency with the sole purpose of generating evidence to make health care safer; higher quality; and more accessible, equitable, and affordable, AHRQ also works to ensure such evidence is available across the continuum of health care stakeholders, from patients to payers to providers. The AAMC joins the Friends of AHRQ in recommending \$471 million in budget authority for AHRQ in FY 2021.

Health Professions Funding. HRSA's Title VII health professions and Title VIII nursing workforce development programs allow grantees to test educational innovations, respond to changing delivery systems and models of care, and are instrumental to increasing the supply, distribution, and diversity of the health care workforce. These programs improve access to and quality of care for vulnerable populations — including elderly, children and families living on low incomes and in rural and underserved communities. Additionally, as we face ever-changing public health threats impacting patients across the country, such as COVID-19, continued investment in Titles VII and VIII programs is essential to addressing the health challenges of today and the future.

Through loans and scholarships to students, and grants and contracts to academic institutions and non-profit organizations, these programs fill the gaps in the supply of health professionals not met by traditional market forces. The full spectrum of Title VII programs, from workforce diversity

programs to geriatric programs, is essential in preparing medical professionals to adapt to the changing needs of the nation's aging and diverse population. Studies demonstrate that the programs graduate more minority and disadvantaged students and prepare providers that are more likely to practice in rural and underserved areas.

The Title VII and Title VIII programs also support faculty development, curriculum development, and continuing education opportunities. These are all essential components to ensure faculty and providers are equipped to meet the nation's changing needs and train the next generation of health professionals. The AAMC joins the Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition (HPNEC) in recommending \$790 million for these critical workforce programs in FY 2021.

In addition to funding for Title VII and Title VIII, HRSA's Bureau of Health Workforce also supports the CHGME program, which provides critical federal graduate medical education support for children's hospitals to prepare the future primary care and specialty care workforce for our nation's children. We support \$465 million for the CHGME program in FY 2021. We also encourage Congress to provide robust funding to the Rural Residency Program, providing funding to rural residency tracks, encouraging future physicians to practice in those communities.

The AAMC encourages Congress to provide long-term sustained funding for the National Health Service Corps, through its mandatory and discretionary mechanisms. We support \$490 million in total funding for the program in FY 2021. This \$60 million (14%) increase is the first stage of a 5-year systematic doubling of the NHSC to meet the needs of all federally designated health professions shortage areas. As the nation faces multiple health professional shortages, sustained investments in workforce programs are necessary to help care for our nation's most vulnerable populations.

Additional Programs. The AAMC supports robust, sustained funding for public health infrastructure to begin to reverse years of chronic underfunding. In addition to increased funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the AAMC recommends at least \$474 million for the Hospital Preparedness Program, as well as \$40 million to continue the regional preparedness program created to address Ebola and other special pathogens, including funding for regional treatment centers, frontline providers, and the National Ebola Training and Education Center (NETEC). The AAMC appreciates that the president's FY 2021 budget proposal requests \$4 million to support grants to medical schools and teaching hospitals to develop curricular resources on medication-assisted treatment. The AAMC supports the programs authorized under Sections 3202 and 7101 of the SUPPORT Act (P.L. 115-271) to enhance medical education, and we encourage their full funding.

The AAMC urges the Subcommittee to sustain student loan and forgiveness programs for health professions students at the Department of Education, including GradPLUS loans and Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF). With doctors, residents, fellows, and medical students on the front lines of COVID-19, it is imperative that these health professions are rewarded for their public service, and make sure there are affordable loans to fund a student's medical education. The average graduating debt of medical students is currently \$200,000, and total repayment can range from \$365,000 to \$440,000.

Once again, the AAMC appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record and looks forward to working with the Subcommittee as it prepares its FY 2021 spending bill.