March 16, 2018

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro,

We are writing today to respectfully ask you to provide a strong topline appropriation for the CDC Division of Population Health, and an appropriation of $16 million to the CDC Arthritis Program in the FY 2019 Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations bill, a $5 million increase over the prior fiscal year.

The CDC Arthritis Program is the only federal program dedicated solely to arthritis. More than 1 in 4 adults has doctor-diagnosed arthritis and an estimated 78 million Americans will have the disease by 2040. It has a profound physical, societal, and financial impact in every state and in every Congressional district. The demand and the need for the program are higher than ever.

We now know that the overall economic burden associated with arthritis is $300 billion annually, thanks to the public health research undertaken at the CDC Arthritis Program over the last year. This stunning figure has more than doubled over the last decade. To put this into perspective, the annual economic cost of arthritis surpasses that of tobacco-related health effects, cancer, and diabetes.

The CDC Arthritis Program provides disease management resources to help people with arthritis better manage their symptoms and ultimately improve their health outcomes. As the country’s leading cause of disability, arthritis limits the type or amount of work for 1 out of 3 working age adults (18–65 years) with the disease, or whether they can work at all. It also contributes to more than 750,000 hip and knee replacements every year, some of which could be avoided with proper disease management.

At the national level, the program funds organizations that have a broad impact across the country. The CDC Arthritis Program also funds the only longitudinal study dedicated to arthritis, out of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The program funds data collection that provides us with critical information about the disease, including prevalence, cost, co-morbidity, activity limitations, and uptake of physical activity and self-management programs. The program undertakes the lead work in detailing the prevalence of arthritis for *The Burden of Musculoskeletal Diseases in the United States: Prevalence, Societal and Economic Cost* (BMUS), a critical publication for researchers and health policy analysts.

At the state level, the program helps states implement self-management education and physical activity interventions, which are crucial for overall disease management. At present, the CDC is only able to fund 12 states (CA, KS, KY, MI, MO, MT, NY, OR, PA, RI, SC, and UT) despite the growing demand for these programs. There is a clear need for all 50 states and the District of Columbia to have Arthritis Programs.
With an increase of $5 million in FY 2019, CDC's Arthritis Program would be able to:

- Improve access and availability of proven interventions for people with arthritis by **funding a total of at least 14 state health departments and funding 5 national organizations** at adequate levels to disseminate effective public health approaches through large systems of care, worksites, and national networks with local sites for implementation.
- Improve access to, and infrastructure and support for, evidence-based interventions for people with arthritis by identifying or developing effective new interventions and/or by providing limited support to intervention developers to maintain and scale the growth of proven interventions.
- Provide additional support to the Johnston County Osteoarthritis Project, a one-of-a-kind longitudinal study that documents the prevalence, incidence and risk factors associated with the occurrence and progression of hip and knee osteoarthritis - the most common and disabling types of arthritis.
- Build upon the CDC Public Health Agenda for Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis to advance self-management interventions and implement the next generation of public health research for psoriatic arthritis.
- Advance the cause of the National Public Health Agenda for Osteoarthritis to elevate osteoarthritis as a national health priority by leveraging public and private funding through the Osteoarthritis Action Alliance (OAAA).
- Invest in public health research to further address arthritis and other comorbidities

There is significant demand for these types of programs. In 2015, the Osteoarthritis Action Alliance (OAAA) launched a small grant program focused on increasing access to physical activity levels among people with arthritis. Fifty-one letters of intent were submitted from 21 states; in 2016 there were 89 letters of intent submitted from 39 states, indicating a high level of interest in organizational efforts to help people manage their arthritis. To date, the OAAA has awarded mini-grants to a total of 34 organizations across 23 states. A stronger federal investment in the Arthritis Program can help meet this demand.

In closing, people can manage and reduce the symptoms of arthritis through self-management programs, physical activity, and weight loss. But effective interventions for arthritis are drastically underutilized, and the role of the CDC Arthritis Program is to provide leadership, technical expertise, and cutting-edge research to improve the health and well-being of people with arthritis.

Please give every consideration to a $5 million increase in the Labor-HHS-Education allocation to the CDC Arthritis Program, bringing the total to $16 million in FY 2019.

Sincerely,

American College of Rheumatology
Arthritis Foundation
National Association of Chronic Disease Directors
National Psoriasis Foundation
National Recreation and Park Association
Sjogren’s Syndrome Foundation
Spondylitis Association of America
United States Bone and Joint Initiative
YMCA of the USA