

Presidential Candidates' Survey Aims to Spotlight Health Research

By Nellie Bristol, CQ Associate Editor

Research!America is asking the 2012 presidential candidates to answer a questionnaire in an effort to generate a national conversation on the future of federal health research funding, the group announced Friday.

"We've been struck by how little attention has been paid" in the presidential debates to the role of research, Research!America President Mary Woolley said. Research and development should be included in discussions around economic growth since they bolster job creation and international competitiveness, Woolley added.

In addition to those two issues, survey questions focus on the importance of research related to obesity, food-related illness and pharmaceutical safety. For example, one asks: "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) plays a lead role in protecting the everyday health of Americans by supporting state and local health departments, conducting epidemiological and other health research, and addressing foodborne illnesses, potential pandemics and other health threats. The CDC budget received a deep cut in fiscal year 2011. Do you support or oppose making funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention a higher national priority?" Responses are due Dec. 1 and will be posted on the group's website.

In addition to CDC, the survey highlights the work of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health.

The survey is part of a voter education campaign called "Your Candidates — Your Health," sponsored by Research!America and its partners, including universities, disease-focused advocacy groups and pharmaceutical companies. Research!America's top contributor is drug giant Pfizer. Other major funders include the Geoffrey Beene Foundation, Johns Hopkins University, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America and technology applications company SAIC.

President Obama responded to a similar survey when he was running for president in 2008, as did Republican then-candidate John McCain, although more questions then focused on plans for the health system than the current questionnaire. Given the fiscal constraints he has faced, Woolley said Research!America has been pleased with Obama's support for research. The 2009 stimulus (PL 111-5), for example, included about \$10 billion for the National Institutes of Health. Nonetheless, Woolley said, federal spending on health research has been fairly stagnant for the past five years and could fare even worse under efforts to reduce the federal deficit.

If, for example, the Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction fails to adopt a plan, research agencies could be hit with cuts of 7 percent to 8 percent, she said.

"That kind of setback is not something we're going to feel good about in a year or two" as other countries continue to ramp up investments in technological innovation, Woolley added.

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