Dear Colleague:

Please join me in supporting funding for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) in the Fiscal Year 2020 House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee.

The United States spends more than $3.5 trillion annually on health care. With the federal government the largest purchaser of this care, spending more than $1.5 trillion per year and rising, it has a responsibility to fund research that determines how to make care as effective, efficient, affordable, equitable, and safe as possible. AHRQ is the only federal agency with the sole purpose of generating and disseminating evidence to better understand how to eliminate the roughly 30 percent of health care spending that is identified as inappropriate, ineffective, or harmful.

Research to discover cures is critical. But it is equally important to fund research on how to optimally deliver new cures—and those we already have—to the right patients at the right time in the right setting. The health services research, quality improvement protocols, datasets, and tools supported by AHRQ are used in hospitals, medical centers, primary care practices, and public health departments in communities across the nation to improve the quality, access, and value of health care delivery for patients.

The full text of the letter is below. If you would like to sign-on, please fill out the google form. If you have any questions, please contact Kate Schisler at kate.schisler@mail.house.gov or 5-4376.

Sincerely,

Don Beyer
Member of Congress

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March 28, 2019
Dear Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As you and your colleagues begin work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you fund the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) at the level of $460 million, commensurate with the agency’s FY 2010 appropriation.

AHRQ is an essential element of the nation’s health care ecosystem, charged with improving the quality and delivery of health care. This funding level would allow AHRQ to rebuild portfolios terminated as a result of years of past cuts and expand its research and training portfolio to address our nation’s pressing and evolving health care challenges. Additionally, with a quarter of the agency’s program level budget supported by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Trust Fund, a strong investment in the AHRQ appropriation will be essential to sustain the agency’s core activities as the Trust Fund undergoes reauthorization this year.

To be sure, discovering cures is critical to patients, providers, and our communities. But understanding how to most effectively deliver those cures to patients through health services research is equally critical. AHRQ is the only federal agency whose sole focus is to generate reliable research on how to deliver the highest quality care, at the greatest value, with the best outcomes to all patients. It is the only agency that funds research on the “real-world” patient—the one who doesn’t have diabetes alone, for example, but also has cardiovascular disease and renal disease; or the patient who has cancer, as well as heart disease. AHRQ-funded research and databases allow us to understand where waste, inefficiencies, and gaps exist within the health care system, and allows patients, payers, providers, and others to harness American innovation and make the health care system safer, more efficient, and more effective.

An example of AHRQ’s successful work includes efforts to reduce hospital acquired conditions. New, preliminary data from AHRQ finds that by implementing transformational, AHRQ-funded research, hospitals, health systems and other providers have prevented an estimated 20,500 hospital deaths and saved $7.7 billion in health care costs from 2014 to 2017. In another example, AHRQ funded research grants are finding ways to ensure rural primary care practices are equipped to respond to the opioid crisis. An explosion in the incidence of opioid addiction and overdoses, particularly in rural areas of the country, has elevated this issue to crisis-level in the United States. Primary care practices are often the first line of defense against this and other substance use disorders.

Restoring AHRQ’s budget to the FY 2010 level of $460 million will allow for reinvestment in critical initiatives that were terminated or have eroded since. Among those terminated was the agency’s research portfolio to optimize care for America’s nearly 60 million patients living with multiple chronic conditions.
By 2020, an estimated eighty-one million people will have multiple chronic conditions and the costs of their care will consume 80 percent of publicly funded health insurance programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. Investing in AHRQ now may help defray those costs.

Health services research shows that as much as one-third of the more than $3 trillion our nation spends on health care each year is waste—care that is inappropriate, ineffective, or harmful. Every dollar we invest in generating evidence to eliminate that waste is a sound fiscal investment. Just as we fund national war colleges to ensure that our military is the most effective fighting force in the world, funding AHRQ ensures that our health care system becomes the most efficient one in the world. We urge you to make AHRQ, and its critical research, a priority in FY 2020.

Sincerely,