Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the structure and focus of a workgroup or alternative mechanism to provide guidance as the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) works to improve the public health and wellbeing of Americans by increasing innovation and investment in the healthcare sector.

As an alliance of organizations working to advance biomedical and health research, Research!America is fully committed to the goals underlying this initiative, and it would be a privilege to assist your efforts. America and Americans simply cannot afford inefficiencies that squander finite health resources and compromise the value of medical and public health progress.

We appreciate your efforts to solicit input and your interest in engaging with a diversity of stakeholders who share your commitment to maximizing the return on every healthcare dollar. We firmly believe that it will take just this kind of cross-sector dialogue and collaboration to simultaneously fuel fast-paced medical progress and promote healthcare access, quality and affordability.

Structure and Process

Patient Perspective

To improve healthcare in smart, sustainable ways, the first step should be to consult with patients. Attempting to direct healthcare resources to their best use without consulting the end user is a recipe for misallocated dollars and sub-optimal outcomes. In this context, we hope you will not only engage patients directly, but solicit input from the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI), which has broken crucial new ground in incorporating the patient perspective into healthcare decision-making.

“In-house” expertise
We would be remiss in not acknowledging the extraordinarily rich resources within HHS itself, including the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI), the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Agencies under HHS have been, and continue to be, on the front lines of efforts to optimize U.S. healthcare financing and delivery. We believe HSS will be well positioned to achieve a positive impact if these agencies feature prominently in your efforts.

Engagement across the Ecosystem

We fully support your decision to engage health insurers, health IT professionals, the healthcare investment community and other industry stakeholders as HHS mines for new thinking on how to improve health and healthcare. We also encourage HHS to consult with teaching hospitals, research universities, thinktanks and other entities in the nonprofit sector that are innovating to higher quality, lower cost, healthcare. Informatics, robotics, and telemedicine professionals in the hospital sector are breaking dramatic new ground in healthcare delivery, while researchers at universities and university-based and independent thinktanks across the nation are leveraging health services, health economics, behavioral and other research disciplines to refine US healthcare financing and delivery. We hope you will capitalize on these assets as you advance this initiative.

Public Perspective

As Abraham Lincoln said, “Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can succeed.” To assure your efforts to improve healthcare are embraced and enduring, we recommend that you engage the public throughout the process to raise awareness, reduce misunderstanding and build support. Ultimately, any strategy to improve the healthcare process will require buy-in from the public at large. It is critical that any concerns be addressed clearly and transparently. Building public support for the process from the outset sets the stage for lasting change.

Focus of Initiative

As we noted earlier, it is crucial to give weight not only to improving the process or “supply” of healthcare, but to assuring continued progress against the deadly and debilitating diseases that create the demand for it. Research!America has commissioned public opinion surveys for more than 25 years, and Americans consistently assign a high priority to fueling faster medical progress; in fact, a majority of individuals on both sides of the aisle would pay higher taxes if they knew the extra dollars were going toward medical research.

Fundamentally, the goal of our healthcare system should be to put itself out of business. Public health and biomedical advances have already enabled remarkable progress toward that goal,
and fueling continued, fast-paced progress should be an explicit goal as HHS seeks to refine healthcare financing and delivery going forward. We request that HHS modify the scope of this initiative accordingly.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. Please call upon our alliance to participate in the innovation initiative and assist other efforts at HHS aimed at improving individual and community health.