

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 5, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Cochran:

We are writing to express our strong support for an increase of \$2 million in funding for the Centers for Disease Control for the addition of a question to the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) regarding sexual orientation and gender identity.

Federal health surveys serve not only as the nation's method for gathering data about its population, but also as the method by which health disparities and differences are recognized and addressed in subpopulations. Currently, these surveys collect data on a range of demographic information, including age, sex, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. This information is used in conjunction with behavioral data to determine funding and program priorities for federal, state, and local government. Unfortunately, sexual orientation and gender identity metrics are omitted from the surveys, leaving lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities with a lack of tools to assess and take measures to improve their health. One of the most glaring omissions is the fact that the NHIS, the federal government's most comprehensive and influential survey, does not currently include a sexual orientation/gender identity question.

Inclusion of such a question would allow health researchers, LGBT community organizations, and government agencies to better assess the health and wellness issues impacting the LGBT community and individuals. In addition, it would allow both private and public funds to better target evidence-driven LGBT health programs. Further, it would serve as a benchmark for key federal health policy documents that currently identify some LGBT health disparities but rely on unconventional data sources for support, including Healthy People 2010 and the developing Healthy People 2020. The Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary's Advisory Committee on Healthy People 2020 has already highlighted the need for improved data collection in the LGBT community.

A survey question that asks about LGBT identity has already been developed and tested according to National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) standards. Therefore, adding this question would require only \$2 million in new money for NHIS in the NCHS budget. This

includes funding for question testing, updating surveys, training interviewers, and compiling and analyzing data.

Considering the positive impact this inclusion could have on the health of the LGBT community, the undersigned ask that the Committee provide \$2 million to the National Health Interview Survey to collect data regarding the sexual orientation and gender identity of survey respondents using tested methods for doing so with the greatest possible accuracy.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Edward M. Kennedy

Shirley

Chris Dodd

John Reed

John F. Kerry

Stephen A. Merkley

Robert Menendez

Bob Casey, Jr.