

April 21, 2021

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

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

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As you work to develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, the undersigned organizations request that you include \$10 billion for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and \$54 million within that for the CDC Arthritis Program in the Division of Population Health.

This pandemic has demonstrated the importance of and need to strengthen public health infrastructure and programs, from vaccine distribution to access to evidence-based exercise programs people can do from home to help prevent worsening of disease. People with arthritis rely on evidence-based self-management programs, including those disseminated by the CDC Arthritis Program, in addition to many other functions within CDC to maintain and improve their overall health and well-being. A strong CDC topline will shore up a public health infrastructure in desperate need of increased funding, and \$54 million would provide full funding for the Arthritis Program which has consistently been underfunded, allowing it to provide grants to all 50 states compared to the 13 states currently receive state grants.

The Arthritis Program is the only federal program solely dedicated to arthritis and is vital to the nation's understanding of this serious, chronic disease. Arthritis has a profound physical, societal, and financial impact in every state and in every Congressional district. 1 in 4 adults has doctor-diagnosed arthritis, and an estimated 78 million Americans will have the disease in the next two decades. Thanks to research conducted at the Arthritis Program, we now know that the overall economic burden associated with arthritis is \$300 billion annually. In addition, comorbidities are common among adults with rheumatic diseases like arthritis: people with arthritis also live with obesity (31 percent), diabetes (47 percent), or heart disease (49 percent).

The CDC's Arthritis Program provides disease management resources to help people with arthritis better manage symptoms and ultimately improve their health outcomes. At the national level, the program funds organizations that have a broad impact across the country. For instance, the Arthritis Program funds the only longitudinal study dedicated to arthritis, located at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The program also funds data collection that provides critical information about the disease, including prevalence, cost, comorbidities, 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*, a critical publication for researchers and health policy analysts.

At the state level, the program helps states to implement self-management education and physical activity interventions, which are crucial for overall disease management. At present, the CDC is only able to fund 13 states (AR, NC, KS, MA, OR, RI, MN, MO, NH, NY, UT, VA, and WA) 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 \$54 million in funding, the program would be able to:

- Provide funding to states to fully operationalize a National Arthritis Program;
- Expand national partnerships that are critical to promoting awareness, increasing primary provider referrals for non-pharmacologic management of chronic pain, and provide access to arthritis self-management and physical activity programs; and
- Invest heavily in data, intervention, and prevention research to better understand arthritis.

From a historical perspective, funding for the Arthritis Program continues to lag behind other chronic disease programs within the Division of Population Health. It is time to address critical gaps in public health and ensure the federal investment in arthritis matches the disease burden. Effective interventions for arthritis are drastically underutilized and the role of the Arthritis Program is to provide leadership, technical expertise, and cutting-edge research to improve the health and well-being of people with arthritis.

We ask that you protect this critical program and support the health of millions of Americans with arthritis by giving every consideration to a robust increase in the allocation to the CDC Arthritis Program in FY 2022.

Sincerely,

American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons  
American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association  
American Chronic Pain Association  
American College of Rheumatology  
American Physical Therapy Association  
Arthritis Foundation  
Association of Women in Rheumatology  
International Foundation for Autoimmune & Autoinflammatory Arthritis (AiArthritis)  
National Alliance for Hispanic Health  
National Association of Chronic Disease Directors  
National Spine Health Foundation  
Sjogren's Foundation  
Spondylitis Association of America  
US Bone and Joint Initiative  
YMCA of the USA