The People Speak: Why it’s Imperative to #SaveAHRQ

In 2015, the Friends of AHRQ, under the leadership of AcademyHealth, sprang to action to save the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) after the House and Senate Appropriations Committees’ fiscal year 2016 spending bills called for the elimination and 35 percent reduction, respectively, in agency funding. Through the passage of the final FY16 spending bill on December 18, 2015, members of the health community expressed—through letters, op-eds, articles, and more—why this would cause more harm than good.

From the Thought Leaders:

“As an elected official, I’m all too aware that politics can get in the way of progress. But putting health services research in the crosshairs is misguided and unconscionable. Tens of thousands of lives have been saved by this research; how many more lives could be saved by continuing to fund AHRQ?”

“I had run on a platform of fiscal discipline, so why should I be concerned with the elimination of a little-known health agency? And yet it made no sense to get rid of the very agency...whose mission was to find ways to improve health care quality and outcomes and reduce costs.”
— Bill Frist, “Don’t Eliminate the One Health Agency Aimed at Fixing Our Broken System,” Forbes

“Finding innovative and affordable new ways to deliver health care is one of the most important investments we can make as a nation. AHRQ is the only federal agency whose sole focus is to generate reliable and credible information on how to deliver the best possible care, at the greatest value, with the best outcomes...AHRQ is an investment in the economic security of our nation’s health.”
— Sen. Richard Blumenthal “Dear Colleague” Letter Re: AHRQ Funding in FY16

“The agency sponsors a broad range of health services research on how health care is delivered and paid for in this country...We may not be enthralled by a study of how to prevent hospital-based infections, but such studies can change the way health care is delivered on the ground—which can improve patient experience and reduce cost.”

“AHRQ’s priority is making the work done in healthcare benefit the patient. They assemble all the treatments, medicines, expertise, technology and medical advances, and figure out the best strategies for delivering them safely and effectively...What works for patients often defies conventional wisdom, which AHRQ has observed time and again.”
— Leah Binder, “Patients’ Most Effective Voice in Washington is on Life Support,” Forbes

“One striking aspect of the data generated by AHRQ is the breadth of topics it helps us understand. In the past two years, Health Affairs readers have been informed about topics such as hospital admissions and use of emergency departments, medical homes, insurance premiums and networks, and medical costs as a result of analyses of AHRQ’s data. Looking over the years, AHRQ data have helped inform policymakers on an amazing range of topics.”
— Alan Weil, “We’d Be in the Dark Without AHRQ,” Health Affairs Blog

Eliminating or gutting the agency that focuses on these issues and on ways to reduce health care spending and improve quality could hardly come at a less opportune time. Everyone in Congress, including Republicans who want to improve or replace the ACA, should be interested in gaining a better understanding of the ACA’s effects and the likely effects of any proposed alternatives to the law.”
From Partner Organizations:

“AHRQ’s mission is to generate the evidence necessary to build a high-quality, high-value health care system. As such, it plays a central, irreplaceable role in making the care we and our loved ones receive safer and more effective. In fact, AHRQ-funded research is being used in hospitals, private practices, health departments, and communities across the nation to make our health care system less complex and costly.”

— AcademyHealth, Letter to Senate Appropriators Re: FY16 Funding

“[AHRQ’s] research aims to explore which systematic interventions are likely to have the greatest impact on the safety and quality of care, the coordination of care to best meet the needs of patients, and the efficiency of the care delivery system. Over the past few years, our hospitals have seen improvements in patient care as a result of AHRQ’s research. AHRQ focuses not only on how to help patients with a specific condition, but also on understanding how to make the entire health care system work more safely and effectively.”

— American Hospital Association, Letter to Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey Re: FY16 Funding

“Since 1999, AHRQ has funded and conducted research that has resulted in the improvement of quality of care and efficiency of America’s hospitals and health care delivery generally. The loss of AHRQ would be particularly detrimental to the nation’s current efforts to reform care delivery and ensure payment for value.”

— Federation of American Hospitals, Letter to House Appropriations Committee Leadership Re: FY16 LHHS Funding

“After biomedical discoveries are translated into medical innovations, AHRQ-funded research is deployed to assure these innovations are delivered at the right time, to the right patients, in the right settings. This research is not only used to extract as much value as possible from new medical advances, it is used to stop deadly medical errors and weed out waste and duplication from healthcare delivery, saving American lives and taxpayer dollars.”

— Research!America, Letter to Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski Re: FY16 LHHS Funding

“Discontinuing AHRQ funding...will leave us blind at a time when policy-makers are finally putting an emphasis on quality over quantity in health care payment.”

— The Society of Thoracic Surgeons, Letter to House of Representatives Leadership Re: FY16 LHHS Funding

“To terminate AHRQ in the current fiscal environment is pennywise and pound foolish... Without AHRQ and the health services research that can determine what treatments work best, for whom, and in what settings, the cures and treatments developed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will fall short on their promise to patients, and effective prevention strategies developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will fail to reach Americans where they live, learn, and work.”

— Friends of AHRQ, Letter to Senate Appropriations Leadership Re: FY16 Funding

“The ‘Silver Tsunami’ of age-associated chronic diseases is fast approaching. Right now, AHRQ is an ark that can help us ride the wave of increasing health care costs. Supporting AHRQ will ensure that we have the information needed to solve the problems facing our health care system. In the end AHRQ may transform health care before the tsunami hits us with full force.”

— Alliance for Aging Research, “America’s Ark for the Silver Tsunami: The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)”

“Terminating AHRQ is contrary to the effort to reduce costs in our nation’s health care system. AHRQ supports important research to improve clinical decision-making, advance patient safety, decrease medical errors and enhance health care quality and access. In addition, AHRQ is uniquely positioned to support best practice research and to help advance its dissemination to improve primary care nationwide.”

— American Academy of Family Physicians, Letter to Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro Re: FY16 Funding

“We must work together to expand dental health services research to better understand access, services utilization and the quality of care received by the populations our members serve. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is a vital link in this continuum.”

— American Association for Dental Research, Letter to Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro Re: FY16 Funding

“We strongly believe that AHRQ’s activities and related outcomes research provides incomparable and invaluable data and that neither can be replicated nor replaced elsewhere in the federal government or the private sector.”

— American College of Physicians, Letter to House LHHS Leadership Re: FY16 Funding