Dear Chair Capito, Ranking Member Baldwin, Chair Aderholt, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

To meet the needs of America's patients, researchers, providers, and health systems, XX organizations call for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) to be fully funded at $500 million in FY27 and that the Agency have sufficient staff to manage its statutory obligations.

The issues that frustrate Americans the most about health care – lack of access, low-value care, excessive wait times, distrust in expertise, burn out amongst medical providers, and more – are answers that health services research (HSR) was designed to answer. Unfortunately, a lack of federal funding for this research has put us as a country at a disadvantage in improving health outcomes.

Federally funded health service research grants are how we identify what care is working best to improve health outcomes for patients. AHRQ is the leading federal agency for funding health services research and primary care research (PCR) that provides the evidence to help providers, patients, and policymakers make informed decisions. It is the bridge between cures and care to ensure that Americans get the best care at the best value.

As our nation faces multiple health crises, it is more critical than ever to improve our health systems. For example, rural communities are facing complex health challenges with the ongoing closures of rural hospitals and clinics leading to worsening health outcomes for residents. In parallel, the opioid crisis, which has disproportionately impacted rural America, has ravaged American life as overdose deaths are the leading cause of injury-related death in the U.S. In response to these challenges, AHRQ has long identified rural populations as a priority population to support and continues to fund research to improve rural health systems. We applaud demonstrated bipartisan interest in seeking to improve rural healthcare, and health services research is the bridge from challenges to solutions. AHRQ-funded projects fill these knowledge gaps.

AHRQ supports research to broaden access to essential services, improve health care quality, reduce costs, advance patient safety, and decrease medical errors. RAND Corporation released a report in 2020, as called for by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018, which identified AHRQ as "the only agency that has statutory authorizations to generate HSR and be the home for federal primary care research, and the unique focus of its research portfolio on systems-based outcomes (e.g., making health care safer, higher quality, more accessible, equitable, and affordable) and approaches to implementing improvement across health care settings and populations in the United States." AHRQ offers valuable insights on every facet of the health care system. For example, the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine 2021 report on *Implementing High Quality Primary Care* highlighted the value of and need for federal investments in AHRQ through the National Center for Excellence in Primary Care Research.

To deliver better outcomes, we need to be able to differentiate which healthcare interventions work, for whom they work, and how to implement them. For example, the effectiveness of telehealth is

diminished if we do not have an evidence-based approach to provide consistent access regardless of who the patient is, and addressing questions like this is where AHRQ has a proven track record. While the vast majority of federally funded research focuses on one specific disease or organ system, AHRQ is the only federal agency that funds research at the point of care. The benefits of funding this type of research can be measured in saved lives, better value care, and improved patient outcomes to ultimately make America healthier. For example, implementing AHRQ-funded studies on reducing hospital acquired conditions prevented an estimated 20,500 hospital deaths and saved $7.7 billion in health care costs from 2014 to 2017.

Unfortunately, insufficient funding coupled with reductions in force (RIFs) and the decision not to replace federal workers who have left the Agency have led to a total collapse in the ability of the Agency to fulfill its statutory requirements to support research that helps make our care safer, more affordable, and of the highest quality.

For these reasons, as you draft the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations legislation for fiscal year 2027, the XX undersigned members of the Friends of AHRQ respectfully **request:**

- **No less than $500 million in funding for the Agency for Healthcare and Research and Quality (AHRQ)**. This request reflects the demonstrated need to expand and accelerate HSR investments to inform decision-making on the health care system.
- **Provisions that the Department of Health and Human Services shall support staffing levels necessary to fulfill its statutory responsibilities including carrying out programs, projects, and activities funded in FY27.** This reflects the need for a sufficient number of trained federal workers to manage all facets of AHRQ's statutory portfolio, including but not limited to extramural, scientific review, and grant management requirements.

AHRQ is the federal vehicle for studying and improving the United States healthcare system, and it needs the resources to meet its mission and this moment. Through this appropriation level, AHRQ will be better able to fund the "last mile" of research from cure to care.

Thank you for your support of AHRQ and health services research. For more information, please contact Josh Caplan at Josh.Caplan@AcademyHealth.org.

Sincerely,