

# CAHT-BSSR

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## Coalition for the Advancement of Health Through Behavioral and Social Science Research

December 1, 2005

Raynard Kington, M.D., Ph.D.  
Deputy Director  
National Institutes of Health  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Kington:

As members of the Coalition for the Advancement of Health Through Behavioral and Social Science Research (CAHT-BSSR), we applaud the efforts currently underway at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to increase opportunities for cross-cutting, trans-NIH research. We recognize the complexity of creating effective and efficient ways to accomplish this goal, and are carefully following the development of the Office of Portfolio Analysis and Strategic Initiatives (OPASI). We value the recent opportunity at the NIH Stakeholders' Meeting to hear more about Dr. Elias Zerhouni's vision for the new office. We anticipate that behavioral and social science research opportunities will be thoughtfully represented in the OPASI initiative process. Having seen a draft of the OPASI Organizational Chart along with hearing discussions of the duties of the new office, we have three specific concerns, which we outline below.

First, it is important that there are one or more strong voices knowledgeable about the behavioral and social sciences on the "Steering Committee OPASI Working Group" that will lay the foundation for institutionalizing the work of OPASI. As you know, currently the small- and medium-sized NIH institutes are represented on this steering committee by one rotating member. However, these same institutes and centers are some of the most important sources of support for behavioral and social sciences. Accordingly, we feel it is very important that a seat on the working group be held by an institute director who understands and supports behavioral and social sciences research.

Second, we expect that the NIH leadership will consider 'disciplinary diversity' when members of the Council of Councils are chosen. While behavioral and social science research is moderately well represented on many NIH advisory committees, there is no assurance that the IC Directors will happen to choose these scientists in their nominations. We respectfully ask that the NIH leadership act affirmatively to ensure this voice.

Third, we encourage the consideration of allowing the director of OBSSR to sit with the IC directors when they *review* research initiatives in the process of funding decisions. Both the perspective and methods of behavioral and social science research can be quite valuable to funding decisions for a wide range of research, including considerations regarding the recruitment and retention of subjects for clinical trials, or ensuring community participation to try to prevent health disparities

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in research - thereby enhancing an NIH investment. Further, we believe that there may be lost opportunities in trans-NIH studies with a behavioral and social science emphasis if there is not one strong scientist with this background in the actual review process.

We appreciate your leadership in this complex and important process. We also appreciate your consideration of these concerns as the OPASI process is further delineated and begins. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you at your convenience to discuss any questions you may have with our concerns. Meanwhile, please do not hesitate to contact Angela Sharpe of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (202/842-3525 or [alsharpe@coffa.org](mailto:alsharpe@coffa.org)) or Pat Kobor of the American Psychological Association (202/336-5933 or [pkobor@apa.org](mailto:pkobor@apa.org)) if we can be of assistance to you in any way.

Sincerely,

The Coalition for the Advancement of Health Through Behavioral and Social Science Research

American Anthropological Association  
American Educational Research Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Sociological Association  
Association of Population Centers  
Center for the Advancement of Health  
Consortium of Social Science Associations  
Federation of Behavioral, Psychological, and Cognitive Sciences  
Gerontological Society of America  
Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Council on Family Relations  
National Mental Health Association  
Population Association of America  
Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues  
Society for Public Health Information  
Society for Research in Child Development  
The Alan Guttmacher Institute

cc: David Abrams, Ph.D.  
Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research