

## POSITION STATEMENT:

# Increase Funding for the NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research

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The Society of Behavioral Medicine recommends increased funding for the National Institutes of Health Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research to promote timely and effective behavioral health research that can reduce chronic disease in the United States.

Sustained, robust funding support for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is critical for promoting health and preventing chronic diseases for all Americans. Now more than ever, it is necessary for members of Congress to fully support, sustain, and increase NIH funding. Behavioral risk factors such as tobacco and alcohol use, poor diet, and physical inactivity account for a large proportion of the chronic disease burden in the United States.<sup>1,2</sup> Funding to support more research for chronic disease prevention and intervention strategies can greatly reduce the associated morbidity, mortality, and costs. The Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) encourages members of Congress to support an increase in funding to the NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) to promote much needed behavioral health research working toward broad chronic disease prevention strategies, based on the OBSSR's 2016 strategic plan.

## IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and arthritis are increasingly common in the United States.<sup>3</sup> They cost the United States billions of dollars, and accounted for approximately 86% of all healthcare spending in 2010.<sup>4</sup> The risk factors for chronic diseases are behaviors that, if modified, can largely prevent or reduce this disease burden.<sup>1,2</sup> However, many Americans fall short on these critical health behaviors. For example, only about 21% of U.S. adults are physically active enough to meet national recommendations and prevent associated diseases.<sup>5</sup>

NIH-supported research has shown there are strategies that can improve health behaviors and reduce disease incidence and prevalence. Additional study is required given that:

- \* Chronic disease prevalence remains high.
- \* Greater technical resources are increasingly available to study and measure relevant behaviors.



- \* OBSSR has released a 2017-21 Strategic Plan<sup>6</sup> outlining priorities and approaches to make significant progress in this area.

## ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT POLICIES

The NIH OBSSR supports behavioral and social science research, which is integral to achieving NIH's mission. Mandated by Congress, OBSSR has an essential role of assisting the NIH in coordinating and supporting behavioral and social science research initiatives throughout the NIH. These research initiatives are aimed at promoting public health and reducing the burden of chronic disease.

OBSSR's budget has not increased substantially for the past five years, and was \$26.7 million in fiscal year 2016.<sup>7</sup> This sum is equivalent to \$18.1 million in 1995 dollars, based on the NIH Biomedical Research and Development Price Index.

Primary prevention approaches (e.g., physical activity promotion, early nutrition interventions) are currently underfunded, which will create gaps in the uptake and implementation of these important programs. Increased support for OBSSR will provide it the additional leverage it needs to coordinate trans-NIH initiatives at its 27 institutes and centers.

OBSSR's 2017-21 Strategic Plan outlines three priority areas for which SBM encourages additional support. These priority areas can contribute to reduced disease burden, but require an appropriate budget for maximum effectiveness.

<p><b>OBSSR Strategic Plan Priority Area 1: Improve the Quality and Integration of Behavioral and Social Science Research</b></p>
<p>Action: Speed up the funding process for critical health conditions and treatments to improve public health.</p>
<p>Text: "The NIH has the capacity to accelerate the grant application and funding process and has done so previously for rapid research on policy changes and naturalistic experiments. [...] The OBSSR will continue to support the expansion of these rapid funding efforts for time-sensitive natural experiments and to enhance the scientific rigor of these natural experiments."<sup>8</sup></p>
<p><b>OBSSR Strategic Plan Priority Area 2: Use and Improve New Technology to Create New Methods and Infrastructures to Capture/Analyze Multiple Behavioral Data Points</b></p>
<p>Action: Increase infrastructure, evaluation, and scaling of technology-based behavior change interventions.</p>
<p>Text: "Leveraging technologies for delivering behavioral and social interventions has been effective in addressing some of these dissemination and implementation challenges. Treatment fidelity is maintained by the automated delivery of intervention algorithms. [...] Although more resources are initially required to develop technology-based interventions, subsequent costs of delivery are reduced and intervention reach is extended, particularly to individuals with limited access to in-person intervention options."<sup>8</sup></p>
<p><b>OBSSR Strategic Plan Priority Area 3: Support Translational Research Between Scientific Data and Real-World Practice</b></p>
<p>Action: Greatly increase the capacity to study timely translational interventions.</p>
<p>Text: "Research methods that facilitate the adoption of behavioral and social interventions are a crucial component of any effort to advance dissemination and implementation. [...] Critical to this effort is that behavioral and social interventions should be evaluated in the context in which the interventions are anticipated to be delivered. These contexts, however, add challenges and complexities to the research design that need to be addressed through innovations in research methodology that retain as much internal validity as possible while strengthening external validity. [...] Broader consideration of the evidence produced from alternative, pragmatic, and adaptive designs will improve the basis for determining effectiveness of behavioral and social interventions evaluated in the context in which they are intended to be delivered."<sup>8</sup></p>

**Table 1.** Highlights from the 2017-21 OBSSR Strategic Plan.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

SBM encourages members of Congress to support an increased OBSSR budget that most effectively promotes the research that is critically needed to help Americans improve their health, improve their quality of life, and reduce the ever-growing cost of healthcare.

An increase in OBSSR's budget would allow it to accelerate the progress of the three key initiatives outlined in its 2017-21 Strategic Plan. These initiatives hold great promise for improving tangible health and healthcare cost outcomes. Increased funding would allow for support of greatly needed research that can lead to alleviating or preventing the burden of modifiable chronic diseases.

## CO-SPONSORSHIPS



## ENDORSEMENTS



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