

## STATEMENT OF THE CONSORTIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS IN SUPPORT OF NIH-SUPPORTED RESEARCH IN SEXUAL HEALTH AND NIH PEER REVIEW

The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), an advocacy organization supported by more than 100 professional associations, scientific societies, universities, and research institutions, is deeply troubled by the recent congressional inquiry into research with significant public health implications, largely dealing with sexual behavior.

While these areas of research may be “provocative” to some, they have critical social and economic implications and consequences for the American public. Sexual behaviors, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS transmission, and risk-taking behaviors, among others, are all legitimate subjects for scientific inquiry. Moreover, given the global AIDS pandemic, the significant numbers of people with sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs), and the volatile mix of drugs, sex, and disease, this research is absolutely and unequivocally necessary. There is a vital public health interest in these studies and they deserve and merit government support. This support is provided by National Institutes of Health (NIH) through a merit review process that has made the NIH the premier biomedical and behavioral research agency in the world. Opponents of this research choose to ignore the nation’s public health interest when they argue that sexual health research should not be supported by our Federal scientific agencies.

Through the years, numerous scientific panels have called for the very kind of research that is currently being denigrated by certain members of Congress and ideologically-motivated organizations. The most recent example was the 2002 Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior, which noted, “we need to understand that there are undesirable consequences [of sexuality] as well – alarmingly high levels of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and HIV/AIDS infection, unintended pregnancy, abortion, sexual dysfunction, and sexual violence. . . Each of these problems carries with it the potential for lifelong consequences – for individuals, families, communities, and the nation as a whole.”

While COSSA appreciates that the oversight of Federal agencies is within Congress’ purview, the recent attacks on sexual health research appear to be sectarian and ideological in nature and have the potential to cause irrevocable damage to the merit review process that has served the NIH, and our Nation, so well. Accordingly, COSSA strongly opposes any efforts to restrict the ability of our Federal scientific agencies to fund rigorously peer-reviewed research. We cannot afford to compromise, nor sacrifice, the health of the nation because of ideology or because the research topic makes some uncomfortable.

Finally, we cannot afford to send the message to scientists that this research is not worthy of funding, or unnecessary. Doing either endangers the independence and integrity of the federal research enterprise. This is certainly not in the best interest of the American people.

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