

**Testimony of Robert A. Cain, DO, FACOI, FAODME
President and Chief Executive Officer
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
Concerning the Department of Health and Human Services
Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2022**

*Submitted for the Record to the Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies*

June 22, 2021

The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) strongly supports fiscal year (FY) 2022 funding for the following programs important to the osteopathic medical education (OME) community:

- **\$46.1 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH)**
- **\$6.1 billion for the Teaching Health Centers Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) Program**
- **\$9.2 billion for discretionary Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)**
- **\$980 million for the Title VII health professions workforce development programs under the *Public Health Service Act***
- **Permanent funding for the Rural Residency Planning and Development (RRPD) Program**
- **\$130 million for discretionary National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Scholarship and Loan Repayment programs**
- **\$67 million for the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program**
- **\$125 million for the Primary Care Training and Enhancement (PCTE) Program**
- **\$500 million for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)**
- **\$10 billion for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

AACOM leads and advocates for the full continuum of OME to improve the health of the public. Founded in 1898 to support and assist the nation's osteopathic medical schools, AACOM represents all 37 accredited colleges of osteopathic medicine—educating nearly 31,000 future physicians, 25 percent of all U.S. medical students—at 58 teaching locations in 33 U.S. states, as well as osteopathic graduate medical education professionals and trainees at U.S. medical centers, hospitals, clinics, and health systems.

Osteopathic medicine plays an essential role in our nation's healthcare delivery system and is a growing field. According to recent data, AACOM received more than 28,000 applicants to osteopathic medical school for the 2020-2021 application cycle, representing a 19.26 percent increase over the previous year. Osteopathic physicians focus on treating the whole person, and over half practice in the primary care specialties of family medicine, internal medicine, and pediatrics. Importantly, osteopathic medical students receive 200 hours of additional training in

osteopathic manipulative treatment, a hands-on treatment used to diagnose and treat illness and injury, giving us a unique voice and perspective in the medical community. However, the clinician workforce and scientists at osteopathic medical schools are underutilized in NIH funding opportunities and underrepresented on NIH Advisory Councils and standing study sections.

AACOM urges Congress to overcome the historic bias against osteopathic medical research by expanding representation on NIH Councils and study sections and increasing NIH funding. Expanding engagement by osteopathic medical schools and professionals will result in innovative healthcare delivery solutions, expanded evidence-based research, and broader community-focused treatment models. OME investment will advance research in primary care, prevention, and treatment and employ an already diverse physician population that is enriched in socioeconomically disadvantaged rural communities. AACOM's request of \$46.1 billion for NIH will support scientific advancements that incorporate the osteopathic philosophy and strengthen the United States position as the world's research and development leader.

OME has a proven history of establishing educational programs for medical students and residents that target the healthcare needs of rural and underserved populations. With health disparities on the rise, and worsening because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are proud to help make healthcare access more equitable for all our country's patients and communities. In fact, recent AACOM data show that 40 percent of graduating 2019-2020 osteopathic medical students plan to practice in a medically underserved or health shortage area; of those, 45 percent plan to practice in a rural community.

AACOM expresses its strong support for \$6.1 billion for the THCGME Program and our desire for permanent, mandatory funding for this critical program. According to HRSA, physicians who train in Teaching Health Centers (THCs) are three times more likely to work in such centers and more than twice as likely to work in underserved areas. The continuation of this program is critical to addressing primary care physician workforce shortages and delivering health care services to underserved communities. AACOM is pleased that Congress supported this highly successful bipartisan program through the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021* and *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*, which extended the THCGME Program through fiscal year 2023 and provided additional funding. However, new funding is needed to extend the THCGME Program to meet economic challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and support additional expansion to underserved areas that face existing shortages of primary care physicians.

AACOM appreciates the opportunity to submit its views and looks forward to continuing to work with the Subcommittee on these important matters.