

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
*Submitted for the Record to the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
April 9, 2025*

The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) appreciates the opportunity to highlight priorities for the osteopathic medical education (OME) community in the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHSE) fiscal year (FY) 2026 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) budget. AACOM supports FY26 funding levels for the following priority programs:

- \$51.303 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- \$11.581 billion for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- \$10.5 billion in discretionary funding for the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
- \$1.51 billion for the *Public Health Service Act* Title VII and Title VIII Health Professions Workforce Programs
- \$500 million for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
- \$385 million for the Children's Hospital Graduate Medical Education Program
- A multi-year reauthorization with at least \$300 million per year for the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education Program
- \$915.6 million for National Health Service Corps Scholarship and Loan Programs
- \$50.5 million for the Medical Student Education Program
- \$59 million for the Primary Care Training and Enhancement Program
- \$47 million for the Area Health Education Center Program
- \$10 million for the Health Care Workforce Innovation Program
- Permanent funding for the Rural Residency Planning and Development Program

The AACOM leads and advocates for osteopathic medical education to improve the health of the public. Founded in 1898 by the nation's osteopathic medical schools, AACOM represents all 42 colleges of osteopathic medicine (COMs) — educating more than 38,000 future physicians, close to 30 percent of all US medical students — at 67 medical school campuses, as well as osteopathic graduate medical education professionals and trainees at US medical centers, hospitals, clinics and health systems.

NIH Funding and Representation for Osteopathic Medicine

AACOM urges the LHHSE Subcommittee to direct the NIH to increase engagement with osteopathic medical education leaders and to prepare a detailed report identifying specific steps the NIH is taking to increase research at colleges of osteopathic medicine and representation.

AACOM is concerned that scientists at osteopathic medical schools continue to be underutilized in NIH research and underrepresented on NIH Advisory Councils and study sections. These concerns have been repeatedly highlighted in report language in the FY22, FY23, and FY24 omnibus appropriations bills (PLs 117-103, 117-328 and 118-47), the FY25 House and Senate LHHSE appropriations bills, and through two bipartisan, bicameral congressional letters to the NIH Director from July 2022 and September 2024 urging NIH to implement a plan to expand funding opportunities for research in osteopathic medicine.

AACOM appreciates the LHHSE Subcommittee's recognition of the underutilization of osteopathic medicine and its inclusion in past report language. However, the NIH has yet to take meaningful action in response to congressional concerns about the chronic underfunding and underrepresentation of colleges of osteopathic medicine (COMs). Despite training nearly one-third of all U.S. medical students, COMs receive just 0.1% (\$55.6 million) of NIH funding, compared to 42% (\$23.8 billion) for MD-granting institutions. Representation is similarly lacking: only 19 DOs serve among 3,233 NIH study section reviewers (versus 493 MDs), and just 3 DOs sit on the 462-member National Advisory Councils (compared to 213 MDs). Notably, NIH continues to associate osteopathic medicine primarily with the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH)—including in the FY24 Congressional Justification and responses to congressional letters—despite repeated clarifications that osteopathic research spans the full range of NIH Institutes and Centers.

NIH has repeatedly ignored congressional requests for progress on this issue, although AACOM is hopeful that new leadership will be more responsive. By neglecting osteopathic research, the NIH is missing opportunities to bolster its capacity to address some of the Nation's most pressing healthcare needs, particularly in primary care and rural health. **To emphasize the importance of this issue and encourage more direct engagement, AACOM requests that the LHHSE Subcommittee include stronger report language in its FY26 report urging the NIH to establish and execute a plan to increase research at colleges of osteopathic medicine and representation.**

AACOM appreciates the opportunity to share our LHHSE FY26 funding priorities and looks forward to continuing to work with the Subcommittee on these important matters. For questions or further information, please contact David Bergman, JD, Senior Vice President of Government Relations and Health Affairs, at dbergman@aacom.org.