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NICHD Strategic Planning Group
Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

February 14, 2019

Re: Request for Information: NICHD Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2020-2024, NOT-HD-18-031

Dear Strategic Planning Group,

We are writing to provide feedback on the proposed research themes, goals and opportunities under consideration for the new Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) strategic plan for the fiscal years 2020-2024.

As an organization dedicated to the prevention of unintentional injury involving children 19 and under, Safe Kids Worldwide is very concerned that the research themes, as outlined in Notice NOT-HD-18-031, do not make injury a priority, a major departure from the past.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), injury is the leading cause of death in the United States for children ages 1-19, and, in fact, for people ages 1-44. In the age group within NICHD's mission, injuries lead to more deaths than all other causes of death combined. The preventable tragedies that befall children result from a diverse set of causes. Suffocation is the leading cause of injury-related death for infants under the age of 1 and a major contributor to SUID. For older children causes include road traffic crashes, drowning, poisoning and fires, and when non-fatal injuries are included, the magnitude increases and additional issues such as falls, sports injuries and traumatic brain injuries become relevant. Serious injuries can have profound effects on a child's development and well-being; for example, a traumatic brain injury from a road traffic crash could impact a child's ability to learn during a critical window of neurologic development.

While proposed Research Theme #4 does include "change brought on by normal development or by injury or disease", the focus appears to be on tertiary prevention – mitigating the effects after the injury has already occurred. It is short sighted that the research that is most likely to identify effective approaches to reducing the burden of child injury is not prioritized. **Research and research training addressing primary prevention (prevention of the events that lead to injury) and secondary prevention (reducing the severity of injuries that occur during incidents that cannot be primarily prevented) appear to be absent from the six new scientific themes proposed.**

Historically, NICHD has supported research to address child injury through the Child Development and Behavior Branch and the Pediatric Trauma and Critical Illness Branch. Safe Kids has employed NICHD's research to enrich our education and awareness efforts. As the primary funder of federal child health



safekids.org

research and one of the few research funding sources for child injury prevention, it is vital that NICHHD continue to prioritize research on child injury prevention. The federal investment in injury research must be effective compared to the burden on the U.S. health care system and society as a whole. It is fundamentally wrong not to prioritize research on the leading cause of death and acquired disability for children within NICHHD's research themes. **We strongly believe that the proposed research priorities need to be expanded in order to ensure that they align with child/adolescent mortality/morbidity statistics and address all aspects of NICHHD's mission.**

We agree with the call to action from the U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop who served in the Reagan Administration: "If a disease were killing our children at the rate unintentional injuries are, the public would be outraged and demand that this killer be stopped." This was true when Dr. Koop said it more than 20 years ago, and it remains a tragic truth today. Child injury research must continue at NICHHD as an essential priority. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Torine Creppy
President



Rennie Ferguson
Chief Research and Programs Officer



Morag MacKay
Director of Research

