

Dear

I am writing to request that you prioritize the development and funding of a long-term, detailed, multi-year, prospective health study of predominantly African Americans, like the Framingham study, except set in an African American community. I am requesting that you do this based on issues of fairness, science, and health outcomes.

1) Fairness—almost all that is known about health in the last twenty years has been derived from a relatively small number of expensive, long-term, detailed multi-year prospective studies, such as the Doctor's Health study, the Nurses' Health study, and the Framingham study. These studies have, historically, been conducted in predominantly white communities. As a tiny minority within these studies, African-American patients' priorities and diseases are forced to take second place. Many issues affecting the African-American community are left unanswered. Prospective, longitudinal studies of large populations are quite expensive, and, in terms of pure monetary fairness, African Americans have been left out. It's time to invest in finding answers for the African American community.

2) Science—A large, long-term, detailed, predominantly African American study is required to adequately answer health problems that are a priority to the African American community, such as premature births, asthma, early and severe prostate cancer, early and severe breast cancer and a host of other unique illnesses, such as sickle cell and sarcoidosis. Large numbers of people, followed long-term, are required to determine the factors that contribute to both the onset, and the prevention of these problems. Continuing to fund large studies where African Americans are only a small minority means that these issues cannot be adequately addressed in a scientifically valid way—if they are addressed at all.

3) Health outcomes—Diseases that affect the African American community affect the health of all Americans, directly and indirectly. Developing a long-term, prospective study of African-Americans can answer questions about diseases that affect everyone, and may lead to an earlier discovery of interventions that work, due to the higher rates of disease in the African American population. Answers to questions about high rates of breast cancer, prostate cancer, infant mortality, premature birth, and asthma can improve the health of all Americans.

Finally, for any funding of a long-term, prospective trial of African Americans to succeed, leaders in the African American community must be involved in 1) setting research priorities, 2) selection of the community to be recruited and 3) long-term retention and follow-up of study subjects.

I look forward to hearing your response to this pressing topic,