

## Annual Fiscal Year 2020 Report to the Public for Conferences Sponsored by HHS Staff Divisions with Expenses Greater than \$100,000.

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### **About the Department:**

As the principal Department responsible for protecting the public health and providing essential human services to the American people, effective outreach to our partners, grantees and to the general public is central to the mission of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Our success is contingent on our ability to collaborate with the tens of thousands of health care and human services providers, scientific researchers, clinicians, advocates, and other key non-government partners across the country and internationally. Our research catalyzes innovative breakthroughs that are shared across a broad audience who attend HHS conferences and other related meetings to accelerate collaboration that is critical for the work of our researchers to leverage and advance the mission of their respective agencies.

### **About the Report/Summary Background**

This report addresses HHS Staff Divisions (STAFFDIVs) within the Office of the Secretary and is submitted as required by regulatory policy and law to promote efficient spending on Conferences and Meetings in support of Agency Operations ([OMB M-12-12](#); [OMB M-17-08](#); the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 ); and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act. With respect to HHS Operating Divisions (OPDIVs), it is noted they are responsible for preparing and publishing their own individual reports on conference expenses as set forth in the referenced appropriations law and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act. It is noted that due to COVID 19 working environment conferences planned for this time frame were either postponed or held virtually. In as much as

these events did not involve federal employee travel, they do not apply to the government-wide reporting requirements and are not covered in this report.

## **Summary Background**

Since the issuance of Executive Orders to promote more efficient spending in support of agency operations, HHS has continued to take positive steps to gain efficiencies in the use of Appropriated Funds for conferences and meetings while ensuring it remains in full compliance with these directives and all related legal requirements. Building off cross-agency work groups, the Department regularly assesses the enhancement or development of new tools and processes for planning and hosting conferences. The HHS Conference Procurement and Planning Toolkit first developed in 2013 remains a resource of best practices for planning a conference and for securing contractor services, meeting space, and other logistical support aspects of a conference. The Department developed a data tool (Conference Tracking Application) to manage the advanced approval and reporting of conference activities and to aggregate costs across HHS STAFFDIVs supporting the same event. In providing enhanced workflow systems agencies were enabled to process requests to attend conferences more efficiently and accurately. In 2017 Congress granted approval for HHS Operating Divisions to self-manage the approval and reporting of conference activities. This action negated the continued need for a department-wide data collection system. HHS also refreshed its policies in FY 2017 to reflect changes in OMMB 17-08 and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act allowing for greater flexibility in the pre-approval of conference activities. At the same time agencies were reminded of their responsibility to ensure a thorough cost review and comparison in the early stages of the acquisition lifecycle to inform decisions around the best contract method to support conferences and meetings. The Department has periodically worked with OMB and Congress to provide technical assistance in understanding HHS business and administrative practices related to HHS attendance at conferences.

## **Description of the Report:**

Federal Government Agencies are required to report the following information:

- Expenses for HHS hosted conferences in FY 2019 when costs exceed \$100,000, as well as general information about conference activities throughout the year.
- A description of all conferences hosted or sponsored by HHS STAFFDIVs where net expenses associated with the conference were in excess of \$100,000, along with:

- Total conference expenses      \$ 1 3 3 , 0 1 4
- Location of the conference;      Dallas, Texas
- Date of the conference;          March 31/April 3, 2020
- Brief explanation on how the conference advanced the mission of the STAFFDIVs and                      See Below
- Total number of individuals whose travel or other conference expenses were paid by Government                              67

## **Fiscal Year Summary:**

For FY 2020 HHS Staff Divisions hosted one conference with expenses exceeding \$100,000. This event was sponsored by the office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR). The purpose of this event was to bring together ASPR stakeholders with Department staff and industry experts to share perspectives and to engage in dialogue on critical public health preparedness issues. The attendance at this event was 67 individuals whose travel was paid by government.

## **Secretary's Approval of Exceptional Circumstances**

OMB Memorandum M-12-12 established a \$500,000 threshold on conference spending, which allowed for a Waiver by the Department head based on exceptional circumstances. HHS Staff Divisions did not host any conferences in FY 2020 requiring a Waiver.