



# INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE

OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

HARVEY V. FINEBERG, M.D., Ph.D.  
*President*

18 June 2010

James P. Scanlan  
1529 Wisconsin Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20007

Dear Mr. Scanlan,

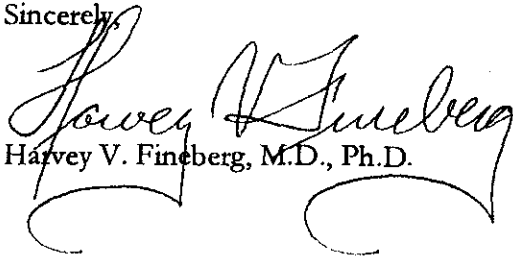
Thank you for your letter concerning the recently released Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, *Future Directions of the National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Reports*. As you know, this report provided independent and objective advice to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). IOM reports reflect consensus reached by expert committees. In this instance, the committee was comprised of experts from the fields of statistics, health care disparities, health care quality metrics, and epidemiology, among others.

During committee deliberations, committee members discussed the measurement of disparities and utilized numerous academic sources, including your personal website. As is evidenced in the report text, the committee evaluated whether AHRQ should present disparities in terms of relative or absolute differences, and concluded that "In concert with one another, absolute and relative differences can provide a more comprehensive picture of a disparity than either method alone." Thus, the committee did not recommend a single approach to measuring disparities and instead suggested that when both absolute and relative differences cannot be presented in the *National Healthcare Disparities Report*, that AHRQ might include absolute rates in graphs and tables and include commentary about whether the relative disparity is changing.

The topics that you raise about the overarching field of disparities measurement and about AHRQ's overall funding mechanisms extend well beyond the committee's task.

Thank you for your interest in the Institute of Medicine and for your work in the health care disparities field.

Sincerely,



Harvey V. Fineberg, M.D., Ph.D.

**THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES**  
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