Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Pathways to Prevention Workshop: Total Worker Health®: What’s Work Got to Do With It?

It is a pleasure for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to co-sponsor this workshop with the NIH Office of Disease Prevention (ODP) and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI).

The health risks and challenges facing today’s workers are significant. Work risk factors can contribute to health conditions previously considered unrelated to work, including cardiovascular disease, sleep disorders, and depression. Chronic health conditions can be influenced or exacerbated by characteristics of jobs such as employment patterns, the physical and psychosocial work environment, and the way that work is structured. The Total Worker Health (TWH) approach seeks to include factors exclusive to work with attention to health conditions, the cause of which work may be a contributor.

To most effectively enhance health, lengthen productive life, reduce illness and disability, and return people to the workforce, it is important to expand beyond the traditional prevention strategies. A program that uses the workplace just as a platform (as opposed to being a risk factor itself) to improve population health can only be successful if it makes the health of the worker, as a worker, the centerpiece of its efforts.

Besides heart, lung, and blood diseases, other issues related to work include chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, musculoskeletal disease, mental health, cancer, child and family health, and aging. Reconsidering the distinction between “occupational” disease and chronic health conditions can lead to a more holistic understanding of the factors that impact health.

This workshop will look at the many ways that work itself can impact health. I commend NHLBI and ODP for sponsoring this workshop to enhance our understanding of integrated efforts to improve the overall health of American workers. I also appreciate the participants of the NIH Pathways to Prevention Organizational Meeting and Workshop Planning Content Area Expert Meeting, as well as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Evidence-based Practice Center for conducting the systematic review.

Again, thank you for your interest in Total Worker Health and your participation in this workshop. We look forward to continuing the collaboration with NIH to achieve the shared goals of research, training, and education to improve the well-being of workers and the health of the Nation.

Sincerely,

John Howard, MD
Director, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)