

MEDICAL RESEARCH & THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (NIH): WHY FINDING CURES FOR DISEASE SHOULD REMAIN AN AMERICAN PRIORITY

NIH Has Led the Way To Improved Health

As the world's premiere sponsor of medical research, NIH-funded discoveries have been responsible for extraordinary progress in medicine. Thanks to NIH-funded scientists, at universities around the nation, we now have preventions, treatments, and cures that have transformed once deadly, terrifying diseases into vestiges of the past:

- More than one million lives per year are saved due to new therapies to prevent deaths from heart attack and stroke.
- Since 2002, deaths from cancer have been steadily reduced, dropping an average of more than 2 percent per year.
- Thirty years ago, the survival rate for childhood cancer was less than 50%. Today, the survival rate for childhood cancers is nearly 80% .
- HIV/AIDS, once a terminal illness, has been transformed into a chronic disease, with AIDS drugs estimated to have saved 3 million years of life in the U.S.
- Release of HPV vaccine to protect against cervical cancer has the potential to prevent 70% or more of cervical cancers, which cause 300,000 deaths per year

Investment in NIH Brings Hope, Treatments on the Horizon

Despite our amazing advances in medicine, there remain many battles to be fought in the war against disease. Fortunately, the life sciences revolution that has taken place over the past two decades has led us to the brink of developing new treatments and strategies for confronting our greatest health challenges. Investment in NIH has unlocked the secrets of the human genome and allowed scientists to gain new understanding of how disease operates at the most basic levels within our bodies. Researchers are arming themselves with this knowledge to identify targets for new drugs, therapies, and vaccines:

- Recent breakthrough discoveries about how genetic control of a chemical messenger in the brain during development may cause schizophrenia provides major clues for drug targets to prevent and treat this dreaded disease.
- Efforts to map genetic variations are providing a windfall of information to develop diagnostics and therapies for complex conditions like multiple sclerosis, type 2 diabetes, prostate cancer and bipolar disorder.
- New imaging technologies and blood tests will allow physicians to predict the onset of Alzheimer's and provide the most effective therapy strategies, while studies of interventions are moving us towards the ability to preempt onset of the disease.

The American Public Supports Medical Research

Nothing is more important to the American people than their health. The specters of disease and injury haunt us all, from the expectant parents who pray for a healthy child to the runner who feels an unexpected rush of chest pain to the senior citizen who wonders whether a moment of forgetfulness is the harbinger of worse to come. Nothing is more frightening than being diagnosed with a disease or condition for which there exists no treatment or cure. For the millions of Americans who experience this nightmare, only NIH shines with the light of hope for a better future, with the promise of relief from suffering and pain. This is why the people of the United States overwhelmingly support medical research:

- Surveys have found that 83% of Americans would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports increased funding for research to fund cures for and prevent disease.
- A majority of Americans (78%) choose medical research as the best strategy for reducing health care costs.

New Challenges Emerge as Funding Lags Behind

Emerging diseases and new health threats dominate our headlines – from drug resistant staph infections to SARS, West Nile Virus, and avian influenza – while our aging population lends a new sense of urgency to meeting the challenges of Alzheimer's disease, osteoporosis, and macular degeneration. Yet even as the need to vanquish the scourge of disease becomes greater and the opportunities to succeed become more numerous, our nation has begun to neglect our commitment to medical research:

- Flat funding of NIH, combined with the effects of inflation, has eroded the purchasing power of the agency nearly 13%.
- We are in danger of squandering our scientific talent and delaying critical breakthroughs, as an entire generation of scientists may be lost due to reduced funding and global competition.
- Money available for new projects by individual scientists, the most successful pathway through which breakthrough discoveries are made, is rapidly declining, leaving little funding to address exciting scientific opportunities or to counter the threat of emerging diseases.

We Must Fulfill the Promise

It is time to take pride in fighting and winning the war in which we have always proven victorious, the war against disease. We all know someone who has been, or will be, impacted by some horrible illness. Granting these people - ourselves, our families, our neighbors - hope for a better tomorrow should always be a national priority.

MAKE MEDICAL RESEARCH AN AMERICAN PRIORITY. SUPPORT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH.