Outside Witness Testimony in Support of FY 2026 Funding for the National Institutes of Health

April 9, 2025

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Submitted to:
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of fiscal year (FY) 2026 appropriations for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). We encourage Congress to provide NIH with **at least $51.3 billion** in FY 2026.

AIBS is a scientific association dedicated to promoting informed decision-making that advances biological research and education for the benefit of science and society. AIBS works to ensure that the public, legislators, funders, and the community of biologists have access to information that can guide informed decision-making.

Biological research, including biomedical research, is in our national interest. It advances our understanding of the living world and provides solutions to important problems. Increasing our knowledge of how genes, cells, tissues, organisms, and ecosystems function is vitally important to efforts to improve the human condition. Food security, medicine and public health, national security, economic growth, and sound environmental management are all informed by the biological sciences. Notably, biological research helps to sustain biodiversity and healthy ecosystems that underpin the livelihoods of communities.

Federal investment in scientific research and development (R&D) fuels innovation and creates jobs. Biological research funded by NIH and other federal agencies helps solve national challenges, such as the need to track and combat emerging diseases, improve human health and well-being, enhance food security, and advance the bioeconomy. The translation of biological knowledge into formal and informal education programs fosters the development of the scientifically and technically skilled workforce needed by employers. Data show that employers continue to seek workers with scientific and technical skills. The U.S. science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce grew both in number and in the percentage of the total U.S. workforce – from 22% to 24% between 2011 and 2021. In fact, in 2021, the U.S.

STEM workforce comprised 36.8 million people in diverse occupations that require STEM knowledge and expertise, making up 24% of the total U.S. workforce.

The loss of biological diversity and the concomitant negative implications for human health and well-being are of significant concern. As the human population grows and people increasingly come into contact with new environments and species migrating into new habitats, the risk of disease exposure increases. Human health is inextricably linked to the health of other species in our shared environment. One Health (https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/index.html), an approach that recognizes that the health of people is closely connected to the health of animals and our shared environment, is increasingly being recognized as an effective approach to address health issues at the human-animal-environment interface, including zoonotic diseases, antimicrobial resistance, vector-borne diseases, and environmental contamination. Increased research investments are needed to improve our understanding of the linkage between biodiversity and human health as well as the impacts of climate change on human health and well-being.

NIH is the largest public funder of biomedical research in the world. Research supported by NIH has improved public health, increased average life expectancy by 6 years between 1970 and 2020, and resulted in effective treatments for illness and disability. NIH awards more than 60,000 competitive grants each year that support the work of over 300,000 scientists at more than 2,500 U.S. institutions, including universities, medical centers, independent research institutions, and companies. Every state and almost every congressional district received a share of NIH funding.

NIH helps drive economic growth. In FY 2023, NIH extramural funding generated an estimated $92.9 billion in economic output—or $2.46 of economic activity for every $1 of research funding—and supported more than 412,000 jobs nationwide. NIH investments in research also stimulate increased private investment. A $1 increase in taxpayer-funded basic research stimulates an estimated additional $8.38 of industry R&D investment in a particular research area after 8 years. NIH-funded basic research drives the entry of new drugs into the market and provides a positive return on public investment of an estimated 43%. Furthermore, for every $100 million NIH spends on research, it generates 76 patents, which create opportunities for $598 million in further research and development. NIH's investments in the Human Genome Project and subsequent molecular technologies have resulted in the field of human genomics now supporting over 850,000 jobs, having over $265 billion in total economic impact per year, and yielding a return of investment of $4.75 for every $1 spent.

In addition to supporting critical biomedical research advancements, NIH supports recruitment and training of our next generation of researchers. NIH grants directly support the training of thousands of pre-doctoral students and post-doctoral fellows every year through training grants and fellowships. Support for undergraduate and graduate students is critically important to our research enterprise. Students learn science by doing science, and NIH programs engage students in the research process.

Despite bipartisan support for science, federal research funding has not kept pace with scientific opportunities, threatening the United States' global leadership in science and innovation. For the past few decades, federal research and development investments have been shrinking as a share of the U.S. economy. The U.S. is still the largest performer of research and development

globally, but our share of worldwide scientific activity has declined over the past two decades, while countries in East and Southeast Asia, particularly China, have significantly increased their investments in science and technology. According to data from the National Science Board, between 2011 to 2021, U.S. research and development spending increased by 89%, while China's grew by 171%.

In recent years, NIH has been in a stronger position than it was a decade ago, but its funding has not kept pace with the demand for research grants. Despite the large number of highly competitive and potentially transformative grant proposals submitted to NIH, 79% of applications were rejected in FY 2023. To remain at the global forefront of innovation and to fully realize the benefits of NIH-supported research, the U.S. government must make bold and sustained investments in NIH. Unpredictability in funding disrupts research programs, creates uncertainty in the research community, and stalls the development of the evidence-based science that could lead to new treatments or cures. Predictable and sustained growth in funding will allow NIH to keep pace with higher research costs, while also enabling NIH to address existing and emerging health challenges like chronic diseases, intractable cancers, Alzheimer's disease, obesity, and novel life threating viruses.

Funding NIH at $51.3 billion, an increase of 9 percent over the FY 2024 enacted level, will enable the agency to support research in a number of important priority areas, including fighting cancer, advancing nutrition science, improving neurological health, tackling the opioid epidemic, eradicating HIV, expanding mental health research, addressing health disparities and inequities, and investigating the human health impacts of climate change. Enacting robust funding increases will allow NIH to ramp up efforts to bolster the nation's pandemic preparedness so that we are in a stronger position to respond to future outbreaks. The requested funding will also allow the agency to continue supporting the Next Generation Researchers Initiative, which enables researchers to initiate and sustain independent research careers and also helps to grow and diversify the biomedical research workforce.

Conclusion

Previous investments in NIH have advanced the potential of medical research, supported current and new scientists, and enabled the discoveries of critical diagnostics and therapies, including the unprecedented pace of development of COVID-19 vaccines. Even Ozempic can trace part of its origins to NIH research on animal venom. Scientists discovered that the toxin from Gila monster lizards had unique physiological effects, which eventually contributed to the development of one of the world's most promising and profitable drugs.

Providing the NIH with a base budget of at least $51.3 billion in FY 2026 is necessary to undo the harmful effects of recent stagnant funding that slowed American scientific discovery. The requested funding will grow and sustain the U.S. bioeconomy and enable NIH to accelerate work on important initiatives at the frontiers of science and medicine. Importantly, these increases will advance research on infectious disease emergence and transmission, prevent future pandemics, and fill gaps in our knowledge about the spread and evolution of biological threats.

We also ask that any additional funding to support the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) should supplement, not supplant, our $51.3 billion recommendation for NIH's base budget. The new agency charged with supporting transformative high-risk, high-reward research must complement, and not interfere with NIH's commitment to funding basic research.

Please continue supporting increased investments in our nation's scientific and medical research capacity. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request and for your prior efforts on behalf of the National Institutes of Health.