



Re: Request for Information (RFI): Optimizing Funding Policies and Other Strategies to Improve the Impact and Sustainability of Biomedical Research

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Comment 1: *Key issues that currently limit the impact of NIH’s funding for biomedical research and challenge the sustainability of the biomedical research enterprise. We welcome responses that explain why these issues are of high importance.*

AcademyHealth appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on possible new policies and strategies that will improve the impact and sustainability of the NIH-funded biomedical research enterprise. We are the professional home of more than 5,000 health services researchers and practitioners, whose work helps us understand and improve care for individuals and the performance of our complex health system, and thus enable better health outcomes for more people, at greater value.

We, too, recognize that the present fiscal environment is challenging, not only for the biomedical research enterprise, but for all federal research investments. For this reason, we were encouraged to see NIH ask the community about strategies that can best “maximize the productivity and creativity of the biomedical research workforce it funds.”

In today’s environment, one of the key challenges to the sustainability of our scientific enterprise is our collective failure to capitalize on the breakthrough discoveries and advances that have been made thus far and dramatically improve human health. It isn’t enough to develop cures; for patients to actually benefit from these cures, we must also understand how to most effectively and efficiently deliver them to patients. Health services and implementation research diagnose problems in health care and public health delivery and identify solutions. Innovations from this field of research can be used right now by patients, providers, public health professionals, hospitals, employers, and public and private payers to improve care today.

Therefore, as NIH evaluates its funding policies and how to optimize them—and therein make the most of taxpayers’ investments in biomedical research—AcademyHealth urges it to prioritize health services research as a crucial component of the continuum of health research, addressing the key translational blocks from T2 to T4, and to increasingly look to it for answers. NIH is the federal government’s largest funder of health services research, with a self-reported budget of

more than \$1 billion annually across its Institutes and Centers. NIH has already made significant contributions to the field of health services research, and we hope this commitment will continue.

Comment 2: Ideas about adjusting current funding policies to ensure both continued impact and sustainability of the NIH-supported research enterprise. We welcome responses that point to specific strengths or weaknesses in current policies and suggest how we can build on or improve them.

AcademyHealth shares NIH's goal of laying a more stable foundation for future generations of scientists, and would encourage NIH to support policies that expand training opportunities for all phases of research, including health services and implementation research. Again, we would emphasize that any one type of research on its own cannot effectively or appreciably improve health; the various research disciplines work in concert, and each plays an essential role. The health services research field faces similar challenges as basic and clinical research fields in developing young scientists—a paucity of training opportunities, poorly supported training centers and mentors, delayed success in securing the coveted first R01, challenges in recruiting and retaining underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities into research careers, and a loss of talent to other fields of inquiry. At a time when the rapidly changing health care landscape requires a cadre of professionals skilled in the use of alternative methods and large data sets, NIH should prioritize investments in training health services and implementation researchers.

AcademyHealth particularly appreciates NIH explicitly noting its interest in ensuring funding for a broad and diverse group of investigators studying a wide range of important questions. There is a lack of diversity in current research workforce, and this must be addressed. We believe the inclusion of investigators from diverse backgrounds—including, but not limited to, discipline, race/ethnicity, career stage, and gender—is critical to providing the fullest possible picture for the research enterprise, including helping to identify the right research questions, build relationships and improve engagement with diverse communities, and better disseminate and translate research for a wide variety of stakeholders. It is important that future iterations of NIH policies promote diversity across the NIH-supported research enterprise.

Comment 3: Ideas for new policies, strategies, and other approaches that would increase the impact and sustainability of NIH-funded biomedical research.

To build a robust environment in which to produce research and ensure that researchers can adequately answer the relevant questions related to the service and delivery of care, there need to be policies in place that enhance the quality, availability, timeliness, and affordability of research results, data, and the tools used to produce research. AcademyHealth fully supports existing policies on open access and encourages NIH to push further on this front to create a more open community of science. In addition, AcademyHealth encourages NIH to take steps to continue to advance the use of new data streams, innovative data analytics, and team science into its work.

Comment 4: Any other issues that respondents feel are relevant.