

ARVO Comments Regarding Draft Cures 2.0 Legislation

July 16, 2021

The Honorable Diana DeGette
The Honorable Fred Upton

Dear Congresswoman DeGette and Congressman Upton:

On behalf of the ophthalmology, eye and vision research community, and more specifically, on behalf of our 10,000 members, the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) thanks you both for your commitment to advancing medical research.

In 2016, ARVO joined other NAEVR member organizations in endorsing the *21st Century Cures Act*, noting that eye and vision research have benefited from the funding made available via the BRAIN and Regenerative Medicine Initiatives in addition to funding provided by the National Eye Institute (NEI).

Today, we write in response to the June 22, 2021, release of the *21st Century Cures Act 2.0* discussion draft and accompanying Request for Information (RFI) regarding the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Health (ARPA-H) proposal.

ARVO is encouraged by the inclusion of the Research Investment to Spark the Economy (RISE) Act in the draft Cures 2.0 legislation. As an organization comprised of researchers, we are acutely aware of how the research community was impacted by COVID-19 lab closures. Of note are the consequences the pandemic had on the work of early-career researchers and research using live models, mammalian and otherwise. As noted by NAEVR in their submitted comments, “As recently as the May 26 hearing held by the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee, NIH Director Francis Collins, MD, PhD acknowledged that the NIH’s Intramural labs are currently only at 50 percent operation. He continued by stating that NIH has estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a loss of \$16 billion to the research enterprise—\$6 billion more than the \$10 billion he estimated at the Subcommittee’s July 2, 2020, hearing. The emergency funding for federal research agencies in the RISE Act, including the NIH, is an important step in ensuring that the nation’s biomedical research enterprise rebounds from the pandemic.”

ARVO is also thankful for the bipartisan support for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and NEI funding exhibited throughout the appropriations process thus far, notably the increases first proposed by President Biden and subsequently proposed within the House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (LHHS) bill. However, it should be noted that despite the past six years of above-inflation funding increases for NIH overall, individual Institutes and Centers’ (ICs) funding levels have not kept pace with biomedical inflation. For example, the NEI’s purchasing power in FY2021 was less than in FY2012.



Thus, as you evaluate how to best establish ARPA-H, ARVO encourages you to work with appropriators to ensure that investments in this new initiative bear in mind the robust base-level investment needed for the NIH to support the foundational, investigator-initiated research that is fundamental to the United States' reputation and function as a leader in biomedical innovation. We firmly believe that foundational science and advanced R&D approaches, such as ARPA-H, can and should exist harmoniously without supplanting respective funding. Additionally, we ask that you consider an ARPA-H framework that is inclusive of research across the NIH and not limited to cancer, Alzheimer's, and diabetes as framed in the President's budget request. As Dr. Collins acknowledged in the May 25, 2021, House Appropriations LHHS Subcommittee hearing, "all ICs would be involved in the work of ARPA-H, offering up their best ideas for rapid translation of research that would benefit all Americans."

In conclusion, ARVO is thankful for the continued bipartisan support of advancing biomedical research and recommends that you work with authorizers and appropriators to explore mechanisms that balance the new investment in ARPA-H with robust support for the NIH's base budget, allowing for the funding of science across all ICs.

Thank you for considering ARVO's comments, and we look forward to working with you both as this process advances.

Sincerely,

Iris M. Rush, CAE
Executive Director, ARVO