

Coalition to Promote Research Letter to Congress

Dear Member of Congress:

The undersigned organizations of the Coalition to Promote Research (CPR) write to express our continued and strong support for the competitive peer review process used by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The NIH is the premier biomedical and behavioral research institution in the world with a mission to support science to improve health and well-being within the United States and globally. More than 83 percent of NIH funding is awarded through the peer review process to more than 300,000 researchers and 3,000 universities, medical schools, and research institutions in all 50 states. We stand united in our support for the NIH, its mission, and its peer review process.

We are extremely concerned about the recent deluge of criticism of the NIH's funding decisions and the accompanying mischaracterization of NIH-supported research in the media and by some in Congress. The ongoing targeting of specific grants produces a chilling effect across the entire scientific community. These attacks inhibit the very scientific progress, the attackers claim to support. Much of this research has been concerned with social and behavioral factors, but lately NIH-supported biological research has been singled out as well. Our organizations strongly oppose these mischaracterizations and the attacks on the NIH peer review process.

The NIH's peer review process, which is rigorous and highly competitive, rates applications to determine which are most likely to advance science. Even then, highly rated projects are only chosen for funding by the institutes if they clearly reflect program priorities. After those two criteria are met, there is still a final review conducted by the national advisory councils of the institutes and centers.

These national advisory councils include scientists from the research community along with public representatives who advise the institutes about program priorities. The councils must sign off before any grants are funded. These processes, developed and honed over many years, have made NIH the premier health research agency in the world. The research that emerges from these competitive processes is scientifically meritorious and relevant to public health.

NIH's research priorities are driven primarily by the science and by researchers in laboratories, hospitals, and academic medical centers. However, Institute directors, staff, and advisory council members also consider the burden of diseases, the public health needs of society, existing scientific opportunities, experience of the applicant, and the ability of the investigator to sustain research through adequate staffing and infrastructure.

We agree Congress has an oversight role in ensuring that the funding provided to federal agencies is used in accordance with an agency's mission. This oversight is essential. But we strongly oppose allowing politics to interfere with the scientific process. We encourage Congress to resist efforts to undermine the NIH and its peer review process. It is not in the best interest of the American public.

CPR is a coalition of national organizations committed to promoting public health, innovation, and fundamental knowledge through scientific research. Our organizations represent hundreds of thousands of scientists, physicians, health care providers, and patients who support federal investments in basic and applied biomedical and behavioral research. We thank you for your time and look forward to working with Congress in the future.

Sincerely,

American Psychological Association
Consortium of Social Science Association
Coalition for the Advancement of Health Through Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (CAHT-BSSR)