

May 12, 2026

National Institutes of Health
Office of the Director
9000 Rockville Pike,
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Re: Request for Information Inviting Comments and Suggestions on a Framework for the NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2031

Submitted online via <https://rfi.grants.nih.gov/?s=6998c3a23eb404a3e80e8212>

The AAMC appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on its request for information (RFI) inviting comments and suggestions on a framework for the NIH-wide strategic plan for fiscal years 2027-2031.

The AAMC is a nonprofit association dedicated to improving the health of people everywhere through medical education, clinical care, biomedical research, and community collaborations. Its members are all 163 U.S. medical schools accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education; 13 Canadian medical schools accredited by the Committee on Accreditation of Canadian Medical Schools; nearly 500 academic health systems and teaching hospitals, including Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and more than 70 academic societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC leads and serves America's medical schools, academic health systems and teaching hospitals, and the millions of individuals across academic medicine, including more than 210,000 full time faculty members, 99,000 medical students, 162,000 resident physicians, and 60,000 graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the biomedical sciences. Through the Alliance of Academic Health Centers International, AAMC membership reaches more than 60 international academic health centers throughout five regional offices across the globe.

Our comments reflect input from members of the AAMC biomedical research community, including research deans, graduate and postdoctoral research training program leaders, and research faculty.

Priority 1: Research Areas

- Goal 1: Advance Foundational Knowledge of Human Health and Disease
- Goal 2: Prevent Disease and Promote Health Across the Lifespan
- Goal 3: Advance and Optimize Interventions, Treatments, and Cures

Comments:

NIH's investment in medical research ensures that the nation continues to make medical advancements and improve health. Making sure the research community can rely on stable and predictable funding cycles will help the NIH and its partners achieve the goals of the strategic plan. The NIH plays a critical role funding competitive awards across the research spectrum and throughout the fiscal year. The AAMC asks NIH to add to the strategic plan its commitment to

assess and disseminate the impact of recent changes in funding strategy on the breadth of research funded.

The AAMC encourages the NIH to remain committed to funding the full spectrum of research, from basic (fundamental) discovery and translational science to clinical and population health research and fulfill the promise of scientific advancement on health. NIH's broad investments signal to the next generation of researchers and community at large, that multiple types of research play an important role in improving the health of people everywhere. Fundamental research is the basis for many scientific advances, with recent breakthroughs originating from research conducted years or even decades prior. Population health research is an essential component of advancing human health, a multi-method and interdisciplinary approach to building foundational knowledge about the multi-level causes of health and disease and the inequitable distribution of those causes across communities and populations. NIH's Unified Strategy should encompass these poles of the research spectrum, and we support NIH's emphasis on solution-focused health equity and population health science, which includes prevention research.

Advancement in technology and novel research approaches have contributed to scientific developments that would not have been possible in the past. While the AAMC supports NIH investing in the development of new research models, NIH should ensure that it doesn't arbitrarily close doors to future cures by unnecessarily restricting existing models for which there currently is not a full replacement, including animal models and human embryonic stem cells.

Priority 2: Research Capacity

- Goal 1: Develop and Sustain an Interdisciplinary Research Workforce
- Goal 2: Build, Improve, and Sustain Research Resources and Infrastructure

Comments:

The AAMC has long supported NIH's broad efforts to strengthen the biomedical research workforce. The recruitment of talented individuals from all backgrounds into research careers remains vital to sustaining a strong biomedical research workforce. Academic research careers must remain attractive to recruit and retain exceptional scientists. This goal requires NIH to provide ample funding opportunities, including new investigator awards, and partner with institutions to provide an environment and resources that enable current and future investigators to thrive.

NIH has an important role in supporting the training of the future interdisciplinary research workforce through training grants and fellowships for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars. A training environment where scientists from different scientific backgrounds train together and learn from each other is vital for ensuring that we achieve the research advancements of the future. The AAMC recommends that NIH support training grants that include interdisciplinary requirements to facilitate interdisciplinary training. The AAMC also supports the effort of T32 training grants to promote versatility and excellence in multiple careers, understanding that graduate students and postdoctoral scholars may successfully contribute to science and health by working in different sectors and positions. Recognizing the importance of developing mentors and mentoring teams to foster the workforce, the AAMC supports the recommendation from the NIH Advisory

Committee to the Director Working Group on Re-envisioning NIH-Supported Postdoctoral Training to promote and ensure accountability for mentoring responsibilities.

Physician scientists are a critical segment of the research workforce. A 2024 AAMC report on *Exploring the Landscape for Physician Scientist Training and Career Development* provides institutions with models and potential strategies to support their physician-scientist learners and early-career faculty in navigating barriers to success. Their success also requires NIH partnership and commitment, especially in supporting vulnerable transition points throughout the career of a physician scientist.

The AAMC endorses professional development programs that help early-career researchers from different disciplines and training backgrounds navigate career paths. The NIH-funded Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training awards helped many institutions launch career and professional development programs that serve as a model for other institutions. In addition, there are tremendous potential benefits in bringing together cohorts of individuals, especially during career transition points, for peer mentorship, intra- and cross-discipline mentorship, and other support. The AAMC encourages NIH to continue investing in career development and cohort-based resources and programs.

AAMC agrees with NIH that the nature of biomedical research is interdisciplinary and collaborative and urges NIH to facilitate team science and the sharing of resources across institutions and programs to maximize scientific impact. The agency could structure award programs to draw on shared resources and broaden the geographic and institutional distribution of research without requiring that all institutions build the same infrastructure. Research is also inherently global. NIH policies and resources should allow for and facilitate productive international collaboration on scientific issues and recognize the essential contributions of our international partners and collaborators.

Priority 3: Research Operations

- Goal 1: Enhance Scientific Stewardship and Decision-Making
- Goal 2: Foster Transparency and Accountability to Improve Public Trust in Science

Comments:

The AAMC commends the NIH for emphasizing the importance of scientific stewardship and decision-making. As responsible stewards for federal funds, the research community is already committed to building new scientific collaborations and shared resources, increasing access to research findings, and building trust and confidence in research with the public. We recognize that the NIH continues to build its leadership structure. Understanding the essential role of institute and center directors in directing agency activities and in grant award determinations, the AAMC reaffirms its commitment to partner with NIH leaders to advance our shared missions.

The NIH has expressed interest in decreasing regulatory burden, a goal with which the research community agrees. In partnership with the community of NIH-funded institutions, NIH should expand current efforts to identify regulatory and other requirements that increase institutional or

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investigator burden without a meaningful impact on human subject safety or research integrity. Effective burden-reducing initiatives, along with similar efforts to harmonize policies across federal agencies, foster sound stewardship of resources and optimize the time dedicated to research.

Merit-based peer review remains the bedrock of the NIH's process to ensure the agency is funding the highest-quality and most impactful scientific research. Experienced reviewers who are content experts in the relevant field of study are needed to ensure that the most meritorious research projects are funded. NIH should ensure that expert individuals are identified and appointed to serve on study sections and other advisory bodies and that the organization of the review process ensures a smooth review process that facilitates the identification of research projects that will advance discoveries.

Meaningful engagement with the communities and patients who will benefit from NIH-funded science is fundamental to fostering transparency and accountability. The AAMC supports NIH's consideration of "research engagement" and "return of research results" in its recent Topic Description, "Strengthening Biomedical Research, Promoting Trust, and Improving Health through Bioethics Research" and encourages NIH to incorporate community engagement into the development of draft policies and in NOFOs. We encourage NIH to adopt resources such as the CDC's Principles of Community Engagement and the AAMC Center for Health Justice's Principles of Trustworthiness when developing its strategy to improve the public's trust in science.

To further foster transparency and mutual trust between NIH and the scientific community, the NIH should include evaluation metrics into the strategic plan to provide confidence that NIH is achieving its goals. In addition, draft policies should incorporate ample opportunities for community feedback through requests for information, town halls, and other engagement and outreach. The ability of researchers to serve on and engage with NIH advisory councils also fosters transparency and accountability. These engagement mechanisms accelerate the adoption of policy changes and may limit disruptions to research progress.

The AAMC would be pleased to provide any additional information or clarification on these comments. For questions about these comments, please contact Jodi Yellin, PhD, Biomedical Research Workforce Leader ([jyellin@aamc.org](mailto: jyellin@aamc.org)) and Heather Pierce, JD, MPH, Senior Director for Science Policy and Regulatory Counsel ([hpierce@aamc.org](mailto: hpierce@aamc.org)).

Sincerely,



Elena Fuentes-Afflick, MD, MPH
Chief Scientific Officer

cc: David J. Skorton, MD, AAMC President and Chief Executive Officer