THE AD HOC GROUP FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH

January 26, 2009

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As the Senate considers the American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan (ARRP), the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research, which represents nearly 300 patient groups, scientific and medical societies, research institutions, and industry organizations, urges you to include $10 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for the next two years. **Bold and visionary NIH funding in ARRP would create and save jobs now while benefiting our nation's long term health and competitiveness.** It would serve as a critical down payment toward achieving President Obama's goals and will help to restore the world's pre-eminent medical research enterprise in key areas.

Specifically, additional funds invested in NIH through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan will immediately create new jobs and prevent job losses for researchers, technicians, and thousands of others who provide equipment, supplies, and services to laboratories. According to a Families USA study, in FY 2007, every $1 million that the public invested in NIH generated $2.21 million in new business activity across the nation. Within weeks, funding for high-quality peer-reviewed projects could be moving in to communities nationwide. An investment of $10 billion over the next two years as part of the ARRP could:

Fast Track Discovery through Transformative Research: Additional funds could be used to create "Challenge Grants." These two-year awards could task teams of leading scientists to tackle "high-risk, high-reward" projects that could have tremendous pay-off in development of new approaches, new medical treatments, novel pharmaceuticals and devices, and more. Such research has been difficult to support through normal funding mechanisms and under the stagnant budget situation that has confronted NIH over the past six years.

Create Jobs, Save Jobs, & Keep America Competitive by Investing in People: New investigators are the innovators of the future - they bring fresh ideas and technologies to existing biomedical research problems, and they pioneer new areas of investigation. Investing in NIH research means jobs saved and created now – over 70,000 jobs. Meanwhile, investing in people through training, bridge grants, and educational opportunities for young scientists can keep the world's leading researchers here in the U.S., maintaining U.S. leadership in an era of global science and technology. The NIH Pathways to Independence Awards (K99/R00) are one example, and bridge funding could keep leading researchers from losing jobs while they prepare for their next grant.

Unleash Unrealized Potential by Fully Funding Existing Programs: The NIH budget has lost nearly 14 percent of its purchasing power over the past six years. As a result, many existing centers, programs, and grants that come up for renewal are not able to be funded, forcing the grant applications to be re-submitted and re-reviewed, and placing vital research on hold and threatening the investment that has been made in the people and laboratories that are supported by these mechanisms. In addition, as a result of changes to the peer review system, an unfunded application can only be re-submitted once. Many worthy projects will be forced to shut down as NIH cuts the number of allowed resubmissions. Short-term, bridge funding will provide the highly skilled research teams affected by the procedural change the additional time needed to redirect their efforts.

Equip America's Brightest with the Best by Investing in World-Class Research Resources: Science of the 21st century requires state-of-the art facilities, equipment, and other resources, such as biorepositories. Cutting-edge research equipment is essential to accelerate progress in many scientific fields, yet funding shortfalls at NIH and other agencies have severely constrained instrumentation budgets. Additional funding for the Shared Instrumentation Grants, Biomedical Technology Resource Centers, and the High End Instrumentation Program will assure the availability of the most advanced research instrumentation and will broadly stimulate research, employment, and commerce. A National Science Foundation study found in 2005 that 20 percent of the facilities in the biological and medical sciences needed renovation and replacement. Long overdue upgrades to existing research facilities through NIH's Extramural Research Facilities Improvement Program are a vital investment in our nation's infrastructure and will increase productivity for years to come.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan is not only a blueprint for the next two years, it is an articulation of this nation's priorities and the investments for the coming decade that must be made to restore our economy and to maintain our position in an increasingly competitive global economy. President Obama has committed to increase federal support for research, technology and innovation so that America can lead the world in creating new advanced jobs and products. A key element of his strategy is to double federal funding for basic research to "foster home-grown innovation, help ensure the competitiveness of U.S. technology-based businesses, and ensure that 21st century jobs can and will grow in America."

The inclusion of one-time expenditures in the economic recovery package would sustain and reinvigorate the enterprise and emphasize improving and renewing current capacity after years of stagnation, and serve as a foundation for recurring research breakthroughs in the coming years. In addition to spurring economic recovery, this investment will reenergize the medical research enterprise and encourage young people to again consider careers in science. It is absolutely essential that this important capacity building effort be the first step in a long-term national commitment to prioritize and stabilize medical research funding. The experience of the past two decades demonstrates the problems caused by cyclical periods of rapid funding growth followed by periods of stagnation. If we are to achieve the full promise of medical research to transform health and improve the quality of life for all Americans, we need robust budget growth for NIH that is sustainable and predictable.

The partnership between NIH and America's universities, medical schools, teaching hospitals, and research institutions continues to serve as the driving force in this nation's search for ever-greater understanding of the mechanisms of human health and disease, from which arise new diagnostics, treatments, and cures, and better ways to improve the health and quality of life for all Americans. These advances also contribute to the nation's economic strength by creating skilled, high-paying jobs; new products and industries; and improved technologies. We strongly urge Congress to provide $10 billion for NIH in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan.

Sincerely,

David B. Moore
Executive Director