Ad Hoc Group Weekly COVID-19 Follow Up
February 18, 2021

In this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we will be publishing an additional weekly update focused on COVID-19 to highlight related NIH actions and guidance as well as activities from the Ad Hoc Group community and general updates. As always, please forward any relevant items to Christa Wagner (chwagner@aamc.org) for inclusion in the publication!

Congressional and NIH News

Biden Budget Release Faces Extended Delay
Several factors are contributing to an expected delay in the release of President Biden’s first budget proposal, detailed CQ on February 11 (subscription required). While an initial “skinny” budget is still expected, the Biden administration has not publicly released a timeline for its delivery. Issues likely to delay the budget include Congress’s ongoing work on a new coronavirus rescue package and the unfinished confirmation process for the president’s nominee to be director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Neera Tanden.

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Assignments Announced
Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) will serve as the Chair of the Senate Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee for the 117th Congress, and Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) will serve as Ranking Member. Senate Appropriations Committee leaders announced all subcommittee leadership roles on February 12, and additional details on leadership changes in other subcommittees is detailed in CQ from February 12 (subscription required). Sen. Murray will also serve as chair of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee which also has jurisdiction over the NIH. Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.) will serve as Ranking Member.

House Committees Advance COVID-19 Reconciliation Bill
The House Energy and Commerce Committee marked up and advanced its portion of the next COVID-19 rescue package, the $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan as proposed by President Joe Biden, on Feb. 11 and 12. The bill text did not include specific funding for the NIH, but would provide $5.2 billion to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to support research and other activities related to COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, and medical products and supplies. During the mark up, Rep. Upton (R-Mich.) proposed an amendment to include an additional $10 billion in funding for the NIH to address research disruptions due to COVID-19. In the ensuing debate, committee Chair Frank Pallone (D-N.J.) indicated that the narrow scope of the package focused more on other public health program needs, and the inclusion of the amendment would require removing $10 billion of proposed investments in other programs.
President Biden Visits NIH Vaccine Research Center
President Joe Biden visited the NIH’s Vaccine Research Center on February 11 to speak with NIH researchers working on COVID-19 vaccines and to make comments about the nation's response to the coronavirus. In his remarks, President Biden highlighted researchers’ efforts to pivot their research programs to take on new COVID-19 research. President Biden also addressed the pandemic's detrimental effects on the research community: "The devastation of this pandemic — the loss of life and livelihoods — hasn’t spared the scientific community: labs closed, research delayed, careers disrupted, especially for those in training." NIH Director Francis Collins, MD, PhD, also shared his appreciation for the president’s visit.

NIH Funds Study to Evaluate Remdesivir for COVID-19 In Pregnancy
Three NIH institutes are co-funding a clinical study of the effects of the antiviral drug remdesivir in pregnant woman with COVID-19, reported NIH in a February 17 news release. “Pregnant women with COVID-19 are at high risk for hospitalization, for intensive care admission and for needing ventilator support,” said Diana W. Bianchi, MD, director of NIH’s Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), which is co-funding the study. “There is an urgent need to identify effective treatments for this population and to determine whether drugs prescribed for other adults are appropriate for use in pregnancy.” The study will include patients at 17 sites in the continental United States and Puerto Rico.

Researchers Propose That Humidity from Masks May Lessen COVID-19 Severity
Research results published by National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) researchers suggest that mask wearing helps to spread COVID-19 infection in part because of increased humidity of the air breathed in by the mask-wearer, summarized the NIH in a February 12 news release. The study’s lead author, Adriaan Bax, PhD, NIH Distinguished Investigator, added, "High levels of humidity have been shown to mitigate severity of the flu, and it may be applicable to severity of COVID-19 through a similar mechanism."

Upcoming Events

NEW Listen to Your Heart Virtual Celebration – February 22
On February 22nd at 1 PM EST, the Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day Campaign will celebrate several awardees, including a heart valve patient and visionary, a leading cardiologist and champion of health equity, a dedicated partner, an innovative provider, and all of the partners and advocates that have helped the Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day Campaign reach hundreds of millions of people over the past five years. The registration for the event can be found here.

SOBC Capstone Conference – February 22-23
This capstone research conference will celebrate ten years of the NIH Science of Behavior Change (SOBC) Common Fund Program. The goal of the SOBC program is to advance behavior change research through a focus on mechanisms of change and the integration of basic research with applied/interventional research. The capstone
conference will highlight innovative examples of behavior change research consistent with SOBC principles, from use-inspired basic research to mechanisms-focused intervention science. The capstone conference on February 22-23 will be virtual, open to the public, recorded, archived, and proceedings summarized in a publicly accessible report. The agenda, speaker information, and a link to registration will be available on this website in the coming months.

**NEW** Tracking COVID-19 Variants: The Role of Genomic Surveillance – February 23
As SARS-CoV-2 has spread around the world for the last year, the virus has begun to mutate and new strains are emerging that have raised concerns among scientists, public health experts, policymakers and the public. What can we do and what does this mean for our efforts to bring the pandemic under control? As the COVID-19 pandemic challenges continue to evolve, and as new SARS-CoV-2 variants emerge, we must bolster CDC’s surveillance and sequencing abilities to better identify, track, and mitigate the impact of these new strains.

The American Society for Microbiology invites you to join us on Tuesday, Feb. 23 from 12:00 – 1:00 pm Eastern for a briefing, “Tracking COVID-19 Variants: The Role of Advanced Molecular Detection and Genomic Surveillance.” [Register here](#). Questions? Contact Mary Lee Watts at mwatts@asmusa.org.

**NEW** Care Interventions for Persons Living with Dementia and Their Caregivers Report Webinar – February 23
On February 23, 2021 from 2:00pm to 3:00pm ET, join the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine for a webinar releasing a new report on care interventions for persons living with dementia and their care partners and caregivers.

The report assesses the state of evidence on care interventions to support persons living with dementia and their care partners and caregivers, and informs decision making about which interventions are ready to be broadly disseminated and implemented. It also offers a blueprint to guide future research. For more information, please visit the NASEM study page, and you can [register for the webinar here](#).

**NEW** Coalition to Advance Maternal Therapeutics Briefing - February 24
You are invited to a virtual Capitol Hill Briefing, “COVID-19 and the Imperative to Include Pregnant and Lactating People in Clinical Trials.” The event will focus on the need to increase inclusion of pregnant and lactating people in clinical trials using the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as a case study. NICHD Director Diana Bianchi will be featured in the event, which will take place Wednesday, February 24, 3:30 – 4:30 PM EST. Click here for more information. [Register here](#).

**NEW** COVID-19 Research in States with Rural and Underserved Populations – February 26
The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) is hosting an upcoming webinar, COVID-19 Research in States with Rural and Underserved Populations: Highlights from the IDeA Program. The Institutional Development Award (IDeA) Program strengthens research capacity in states that receive less NIH funding. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program’s grantees have been conducting invaluable research and this
webinar will feature three examples of the important work. The webinar will take place on Friday, February 26, from 2:00 – 3:00 pm EST. Please register here.

**NEW** NIH ACD Special Meeting on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - February 26
The NIH Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD) will hold a special meeting with updates on NIH Workforce Plans to Promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Biomedical Research. The meeting will be webcast on February 26 from 3:00 - 5:30 pm EST.

Apply for the Sarcoidosis Research Fellowship Grant – February 26
Applications for 2021-2023 Foundation for Sarcoidosis Research's Fellowship Grant in the amount of $75,000 per year per fellow are due February 26. Additional details and a link to apply are on the Foundation for Sarcoidosis Research website.

**NEW** Virtual Briefing: Understanding Sex and Gender in Research – March 2
The Society for Women's Health Research and the Endocrine Society are hosting a virtual Congressional briefing to highlight the importance of sex and gender in biomedical research. Please see here for more information, and register via Zoom to attend the briefing on March 2 at 2pm EST.

World Glaucoma Day Virtual Briefing – March 11
The Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (AEVR) is co-hosting a virtual Congressional briefing in recognition of World Glaucoma Day on March 11 at 12:00pm EST titled, “Glaucoma: Clinical Practice and Research to Optimize Patient Outcomes.” Please see attached for additional information, and RSVP to Dina Beaumont @ 202-407-8325 or dinabeau@aol.com.

21st Century Cures Act: Update on Implementation - March 11
The NIH Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) is co-hosting a webinar with the United States Department of Agriculture and Food and Drug Administration to provide updates on the agencies’ progress in implementing measures of the 21st Century Cures Act related to laboratory animals. The webinar will be posted here on March 11.

NIH COVID-19 Resources

- **NIH COVID-19 resource for applicants and grantees** including guidance for various aspects of research and grant application processes, as well as FAQs and COVID-19 funding opportunities.

- **COVID-19 “Updates History” webpage** that details relevant updates for applicants and grantees by date.

- **FAQ document on COVID-19 flexibilities** related to policies and programs affecting the grants process.
**Funding opportunities specific to COVID-19** lists active and expired funding opportunities across NIH related to SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 research.

**HHS COVID-19 awards tracking website** including data on awards made by all HHS awarding agencies with supplemental appropriations.

**Combat COVID website** including information for those who have never had COVID-19, have been infected, have recovered, and for health care providers.

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**Job Postings**

**NHLBI Seeks Science Policy Analyst**
NIH’s National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) seeks a Science Policy Analyst to assist in the institute’s engagement with Congress. The analyst's role will include reviewing proposed legislation, responding to Congressional inquiries, preparing public outreach materials, and more. Additional information and instructions for applying can be found here.

**AAI Seeks Science Policy Analyst**
The American Association of Immunologists (AAI) seeks a Science Policy Analyst to research, analyze, and respond to relevant issues involving biomedical research, NIH, and other federal agencies, and to assist with AAI science policy programs and advocacy activities. For further information or to apply, click here.

**AACR Seeks Associate Director, Science and Health Policy**
The American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) seeks an Associate Director, Science and Health Policy. The Associate Director, Science and Health Policy, will work to strengthen the dialogue between policymakers, scientists, and advocates, as well as support policies to advance cancer research and improve patient care and public health. This individual will provide specialized expertise on science and health policy issues that are important to AACR leadership, with a primary focus on tobacco control policy and a secondary science or health policy focus to be determined, depending on the candidate’s experience. More information on the opening can be found here.

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**Please Note:** If you have information of interest to the NIH advocacy community that you would like to share with the Ad Hoc Group, please forward it to Christa Wagner at chwagner@aamc.org or Tannaz Rasouli at trasouli@aamc.org.