

July 8, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health & Human Services
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health & Human Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health & Human Services
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health & Human Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair DeLauro, Chair Murray, Ranking Member Cole, and Ranking Member Blunt:

As the President of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), the world's first and largest cancer research organization dedicated to accelerating the conquest of cancer, I am writing today on behalf of the AACR Board of Directors and the organization's 48,000 laboratory researchers, physician-scientists, other health care professionals, and patient advocates who constitute our national and international membership, to express our profound thanks for your extraordinary support for medical research and for your steadfast commitment to making funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) a national priority.

As you meet along with your colleagues on Capitol Hill over the next few months to finalize the NIH and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) funding levels for Fiscal Year (FY2022), we respectfully request that you provide the NCI with a funding level that is sufficient for the Institute to increase its payline and its success rate for investigator-initiated research project grants (RPGs), which are currently at alarmingly low levels of 11th percentile and 12.8 percent, respectively. Unfortunately, President Biden's FY2022 budget proposal, which includes an increase of 2.7 percent for the NCI, would result in further declines in the NCI's payline and success rate.

Since FY2016, your extraordinary dedication to the NIH has resulted in its overall budget being increased by 42 percent, and we deeply appreciate your continued expressions of support for a robust funding increase in FY2022. Your exceptional leadership has provided the resources needed for our nation's researchers and physician-scientists to significantly accelerate the pace of progress against cancer as well as the hundreds of other diseases that afflict millions of Americans.

This generous support has catapulted the NIH into an era of unprecedented progress in medical research, as is evidenced by the rapid development of mRNA vaccines to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and the exciting advances in immunotherapies and targeted anti-cancer therapies that are leading to significant declines in cancer mortality. Because of your amazing efforts to speed the prevention and cure of the 200 different cancers, there is a record level of approximately 17 million cancer survivors in the United States today.

Despite your enormous accomplishments in supporting medical research, we are now facing significant funding challenges at the NCI. Most notably, there is an extremely low payline at the NCI, and the success rate for investigator-initiated RPGs at the NCI is also very concerning. This is primarily attributable to the remarkable advances in cancer research that have stimulated an unprecedented 50 percent increase in the number of RPG applications to the NCI since FY2013. As a result, the NCI is now only able to fund approximately one out of every eight highly promising proposals; this means that a significant amount of potentially life-saving cancer science and medicine is being left unexplored. The 12.8 percent success rate at the NCI is also occurring while the NIH-wide success rate for RPGs is nearly 21 percent, thus allowing the other NIH Institutes and Centers to fund approximately one out of five promising proposals.

This discrepancy in funding will have real consequences for the cancer research community and our ability to recruit, train, and retain the next generation of cancer scientists. The United States will not be in a position to lead the world in cancer research if the success rate for RPGs at the NCI continues at this low level. The result will be that talented, young scientists will be discouraged from choosing careers in cancer research and will likely seek opportunities in other fields. In addition, fewer women and underrepresented minorities will choose careers in cancer research because of this low success rate.

There are so many breakthroughs within our grasp, but to achieve them, we need significant federal investments that fund vital discovery research at the NCI. As you know, the National Cancer Act requires the NCI Director to submit his or her professional judgment budget each year. Dr. Sharpless has requested \$7.6 billion for the NCI in FY2022, which would allow the NCI to raise its payline for RPGs to the 12th percentile and would get the Institute closer to the goal of achieving a payline at the 15th percentile by FY2025. Therefore, we respectfully request that the FY2022 appropriations bills meet or exceed the \$7.6 billion that is specified in the NCI Annual Plan & Budget Proposal for FY2022 so the United States can support more innovative proposals that will accelerate advances in the field and improve treatments for patients with cancer.

Thank you again for your dedication to medical research and, in particular, to cancer research. If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact Jon Retzlaff, Chief Policy Officer and Vice President, Science Policy and Government Affairs (jon.retzlaff@aacr.org/301-825-2963) and/or Dana Acton, Director, Science Policy and Legislative Affairs (dana.acton@aacr.org/610-656-4122).

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'TUVESON', with a stylized flourish above it.

David A. Tuveson, MD, PhD
AACR President, 2021-2022, and Fellow of the AACR Academy
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Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Cancer Center
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