

October 15, 2012

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to thank your Administration for supporting the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the National Institute on Aging (NIA) in particular, and to encourage you to continue supporting the Institute in fiscal year (FY) 2014. To this end, we **strongly urge you to include \$1.4 billion, an increase of approximately \$300 million from the FY 2012 level, in the Administration's proposed FY 2014 budget to support research efforts led by the National Institute on Aging (NIA).** This funding is essential to increase the NIA's baseline to a level consistent with comparable research initiatives conducted under the auspices of the NIH.

The NIA leads the national scientific effort to understand the nature of aging in order to promote the health and well-being of older adults whose numbers are projected to increase dramatically in the coming years due to increased life expectancy and the aging of the baby boom generation. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of people age 65 and older will more than double between 2010 and 2050 to 88.5 million or 20 percent of the population; and those 85 and older will increase three-fold, to 19 million. As the 65+ population increases so will the prevalence of diseases disproportionately affecting older people—most notably, Alzheimer's disease (AD). NIA is the primary federal agency responsible for (AD) research and receives nearly 70 percent of the NIH Alzheimer's disease research funding.

The current NIA budget does not reflect the tremendous responsibility it has to meet the health research needs of a growing U.S. aging population. While the current dollars appropriated to NIA seem to have risen significantly since FY 2003, when adjusted for inflation, they have decreased almost 18 percent in the last nine years. According to the NIH Almanac, out of each dollar appropriated to NIH, only 3.6 cents goes toward supporting the work of the NIA—compared to 16.5 cents to the National Cancer Institute, 14.6 cents to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, 10 cents to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, and 6.3 cents to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

With an infusion of much needed support in FY 2014, NIA can achieve greater parity with its NIH counterparts and expand promising, recent research activities, such as:

- implementing new prevention and treatment clinical trials, research training initiatives, care interventions, and genetic research studies developed as part of your Administration's National Alzheimer's Action Plan;
- launching trans-NIH research initiatives developed by the NIH Geroscience Interest Group to reduce the burden of age-related disease;
- understanding the impact of economic concerns on older adults by examining work and retirement behavior, health and functional ability, and policies that influence individual well-being;

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- supporting family caregivers by enhancing physician-family communication during end-of-life and critical care; and,
- increasing healthy lifespan in humans by testing and applying evidence derived from animal models.

NIA is poised to accelerate the scientific discoveries that we as a nation are counting on. With millions of Americans facing the loss of their functional abilities, their independence, and their lives to chronic diseases of aging, there is a pressing need for robust and sustained investment in the work of the NIA. In every community in America, healthcare providers depend upon NIA-funded discoveries to help their patients and caregivers lead healthier and more independent lives. In these same communities, parents are hoping NIA-funded discoveries will ensure that their children have a brighter future, free from the diseases and conditions of aging that plague our nation today.

Considering what the federal government spends on the health care costs associated with age-related diseases, it makes sound economic sense to increase federal resources for aging research.

Chronic diseases associated with aging afflict 80 percent of the age 65+ population and account for more than 75 percent of Medicare and other federal health expenditures. Unprecedented increases in age-related diseases as the population ages are one reason the Congressional Budget Office projects that total spending on healthcare will rise to 25 percent of the U.S. GDP by 2025—it is 17 percent of GDP today.

Research that can be translated quickly into effective prevention and efficient health care will reduce the burden of a “Silver Tsunami” of age-associated chronic diseases. Breakthroughs from NIA research can lead to treatments and public health interventions that could delay the onset of costly conditions such as arthritis, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, bone fractures, age-related blindness, Alzheimer’s, ALS, and Parkinson’s diseases. Such advances could save trillions of dollars by the middle of the current century.

We do not yet have the knowledge needed to predict, preempt, and prevent the broad spectrum of diseases and conditions associated with aging. We do not yet have sufficient knowledge about disease processes to fully understand how best to prevent, diagnose, and treat diseases and conditions of aging, nor do we have the knowledge needed about the complex relationships among biology, genetics, and behavioral and social factors related to aging. We do not yet have a sufficient pool of new investigators entering the field of aging research. Bold, visionary, and sustainable investments in the NIA will make it possible to achieve substantial and measurable gains in these areas sooner rather than later, and perhaps too late.

We recognize the tremendous fiscal challenges facing our nation. We also know that your Administration has many worthy, pressing priorities to support. The possible threat of sequestration further complicates the outlook for fiscal year 2014 and your ability to increase funding for any federal agencies and programs. However, we believe it is imperative for the Administration to keep its commitment to the nation’s aging population by making bold, wise investments in programs that will benefit them and future generations. We are convinced that providing NIA with additional resources is one of the smartest investments your Administration can make.

As your Administration develops a proposed FY 2014 budget that includes health research for all Americans, we look forward to working with you. Thank you for considering our views, and please do not hesitate to contact Mary Jo Hoeksema, Chair, Friends of the NIA, at 202-341-7283, or email

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paaapc@crosslink.net; Cynthia Bens, Vice President of Public Policy, Alliance for Aging Research, at 202-293-2856 or email cbens@agingresearch.org; if you have questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Aging Research
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Geriatrics Society
American Federation for Aging Research
Alzheimer's Foundation of America
American Health Assistance Foundation
American Psychological Association
American Society on Aging
Arthritis Foundation
Association of Population Centers
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Gerontological Society of America
International Cancer Advocacy Network (ICAN)
National Alliance for Caregiving
National Association of Social Workers
National Hispanic Council on Aging
Pennsylvania Institute on Aging
Population Association of America
The Simon Foundation for Continenence
Society for Women's Health Research
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