Reforming the National Institutes of Health Framework for Discussion

The American people’s trust in the National Institute of Health (NIH) has been broken. Over the past several years, we have witnessed countless missteps throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, along with numerous investigations that have turned up everything from systematic sexual harassment to serious lapses in oversight related to risky research. These matters were made worse by a culture resistant to transparency and accountability to Congress and the public.

Republicans have long been champions of the NIH. The agency is the largest public funder of biomedical research in the world, and its role is critical to life-saving medical research and innovation. However, it has been nearly two decades since Congress critically evaluated the NIH and advanced structural legislative reforms. Congress has a responsibility to the American people to ensure that the NIH is held accountable and that its mission serves all of our interests. The U.S. became a world leader in biomedical innovation because Americans are resourceful, resilient, and entrepreneurial. Let us continue to build on that legacy and work to ensure the NIH continues to deliver on the promises of hope for those in need.

**STRUCTURAL REFORM**
- Streamline Institutes & Centers
- Eliminate Silos
- Consider Whole Individual

**POLICY REFORM**
- Mission & Leadership Reform
- Funding Reform
- Grant Reform

= **STRONGER NIH FOR THE FUTURE**
NIH Mission and Leadership Must Be Accountable, Integrated, and Agile:

- Establish a congressionally mandated commission to lead a comprehensive, wholesale review of the NIH’s performance, mission, objectives, and programs.
- Ensure the NIH is committed to and focused on promoting and bolstering innovation of new treatments and cures, including by encouraging public-private partnerships and collaboration.
- Introduce term limits for IC leadership.
- Eliminate silos by requiring every IC to regularly report how they are utilizing a life stage approach throughout its activities, grant funding decisions, and research priorities.
- Ensure NIH officials abide by financial transparency requirements and standards.
- Ensure the NIH is implementing policies and procedures that enable full and robust oversight of investigations into allegations of misconduct, including sexual harassment, in both intramural and extramural research programs, as well as ensuring NIH whistleblower protections.
- Consider additional disclosure reporting and transparency requirements for donors, partners, and activities supported by the FNIH.

NIH Funding Mechanisms Must Be Clear, Responsible, and Reflective of Congressional Intent:

- Restore Congress’s role in directing funding by repealing the authorization for the Public Health Service (PHS) Evaluation Set-Aside to ensure transparency and accountability in funding decisions.
- Consider alternative mechanisms to limit indirect, or facilities and administrative, costs.
- Require any entity receiving grants or awards to report publicly and make searchable their indirect facilities and administrative costs, including fixed capital costs, administrative overhead, and labor costs.
- Ensure the NIH is properly accounting for and recovering misused taxpayer dollars.

NIH Grant Research Must Protect Against National Security Risks and Threats, and be Independent, Innovative, Responsive, and Transparent:

- Focus on providing grants and awards only to primary investigators that do not have more than three ongoing concurrent NIH engagements.
- Consider opportunities to continue to bolster and support early-stage investigators, encourage systematic replication studies across research portfolios and fields, and prevent research and data waste, fraud, and misconduct.
- Continue prohibition of risky gain-of-function research, including in countries that have been designated as foreign adversaries.
- Establish an independent review entity for the proposed National Institute on Infectious Diseases.
• Demand accountability from grantees by ensuring they are complying with all requirements to provide access to all relevant documentation related to research being conducted by any foreign subgrantee.
• Require grant recipients conducting research involving potentially dangerous agents to establish community oversight boards.
• Require each IC to report and publicly post on the IC’s website any grant or subgrant occurring in any foreign country.
• Incorporate a national security review into the grant and award process for grants that involve research occurring by, or on behalf of, foreign adversaries.
• Ensure the NIH is appropriately updating, communicating, and implementing conflict of interest policies.
• Provide the HHS Secretary, in consultation with ODNI, permanent authority to immediately suspend, pending investigation, a grant determined to be a threat to national security.
• Require ethical and judicious standards of care, including appropriate transparency measures, for research involving animals both domestically and abroad.

The time is NOW to build a stronger NIH for the FUTURE

Please submit any feedback or additional thoughts, ideas, and suggestions for reform to NIHReform@mail.house.gov by August 16, 2024.