

FOUR REASONS CONGRESS MUST ACT NOW TO SUPPORT HEALTH RESEARCH

When federal support for research stalls:

March 2007

1. We lose length and quality of life to disease and disability
2. Health care costs continue to skyrocket without better treatments and without more emphasis on prevention
3. Our economy loses productivity when workers become ill or disabled
4. America begins to lose its leadership in science and the global economy

The recent news that U.S. cancer deaths fell for a second straight year is one of the best reasons for legislators to feel good about supporting medical and health research. But if Congress does not reverse the current slide in federal research funds and assure that policies and regulations support both public and private-sector research, we will lose this and other important gains from our past investment in health research.

I. Without strong, sustained federal support for research to improve health, we lose length and quality of life to disease and disability

In the past decade, ramped-up investment in the National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and National Science Foundation—paired with policies that foster private industry development of federally sponsored research into products and diagnostic tools that benefit patients—has sparked unprecedented progress on dozens of fronts. Medical and public health accomplishments during these years include advances against some of the nation’s most serious diseases and disabilities:

- *Of the recent drop in cancer deaths, the largest has occurred in colorectal cancer*, widely attributed to screening efforts by the CDC and others, as well as to better treatments.^{1,2}
- NIH studies showed that adopting intensive lifestyle changes delayed onset of type 2 diabetes by 58%; a new drug therapy *reduced development of diabetes by 31%*.³
- New studies show progesterone therapy can *reduce premature births by 30%* in women at risk.⁴

The price tag for these advances is astonishingly modest. NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni notes for instance that the cost to reduce deaths from heart disease by 30% in 30 years has been *just \$3.70 annually per American*.⁵

Such advances may slow considerably if medical research is not made a higher priority. In FY 2006, the NIH received its first actual cut in 30 years, the budget for the CDC’s core programs was cut, and funding for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality was flat.

When funding for these agencies drops or fails to keep pace with inflation, all research suffers. Federally funded research often tackles fundamental scientific problems, for which solutions are elusive and definitive results can take decades. Because of the extended timeframes and unpredictable outcomes, there is no private-sector “market” for much of this critical basic research. Publicly funded research is a critical to our nation’s research pipeline.

2. Health care costs continue to skyrocket without better treatments and without more emphasis on prevention

Research contributes substantially to managing health care costs. This contribution will become even more important as America's population ages. Discoveries from health-related research have helped reduce costs borne by individuals, private insurers, Medicare and other government programs:

- Research shows that providing appropriate medication and education for patients with persistent asthma ***cuts costs per patient in half*** for hospitalization, emergency room visits and doctor visits.⁶
- CDC recommendations led to an FDA mandate to add folic acid to the food supply, reducing infant spina bifida cases and creating ***health care savings of about \$425 million annually***.^{7,8}
- In an AHRQ study, antiretroviral drug costs for AIDS patients were offset by lower hospital costs, for ***savings of \$500+ million annually*** if all U.S. adults with HIV received the drugs.⁹
- New treatments that delay the onset and progression of Alzheimer's disease by five years can save ***\$50 billion a year*** in health care costs.¹⁰

In Research!America polls, a majority of Americans say they want a greater national commitment to medical research as a way to manage health care costs (see fig. 1).

3. Our economy loses productivity when workers become ill or disabled

The nation's economy loses productivity when Americans cannot work because of conditions we cannot yet treat or prevent. Medical research has made strong gains in keeping Americans healthy and on the job:

- NIH researchers showed over 20 years that using lithium to treat bipolar disorder saved the U.S. ***\$70 billion in medical costs and lost productivity*** due to suicide.¹¹
- A new treatment for uterine fibroids lets women ***return to work two to four times faster*** than after a hysterectomy.¹²
- Health economists estimate that the thousands of lives saved from 1970 to 1998 by preventing and treating heart disease and stroke were worth ***\$1.1 trillion in economic value each year***.¹³

Economists estimate that improvements in health from 1970-2000 were worth \$95 trillion. Even with a conservative estimate that 10% of these health improvements resulted from NIH-funded research, that investment provided a ***50-fold return to the economy***.¹⁴

Research Viewed as Best Cost Reduction Strategy

How important do you think each of the following is in reducing our nation's health care costs?
(% saying "very important")

Research to prevent and cure disease and disability

78%

Earlier diagnosis through diagnostic tests and imaging technologies

73%

Health insurance incentives

69%

Health care coverage for every American

69%

Expanding the use of health savings accounts

42%

SOURCE: National Survey, 2006
Charlton Research Company for Research!America

Figure 1

"We must make it impossible for Americans to say they don't see the link between research and health care, or research and prevention, or how research helps contain health care costs. Research is a health care solution, and we need to do much more in prevention research now."

**—Mary Woolley,
Research!America president**

4. America begins to lose its leadership in science and the global economy

When research funding stalls, we risk losing scientists to other careers or other countries, depleting our talent pool and delaying or sending overseas any advances from their work. In Research!America polls, 97% of Americans say it is important that the U.S. be a global leader in scientific research (see fig. 2) and that science is important to our competitiveness (96%), our standard of living (94%) and our economy (94%) (see fig. 3).

The National Academies report, *Rising above the Gathering Storm*, and Tom Friedman’s best-selling book, *The World is Flat*, were long overdue wake-up calls that we are losing our lead in science and technology. At stake is our standing in the world and our future standard of living.

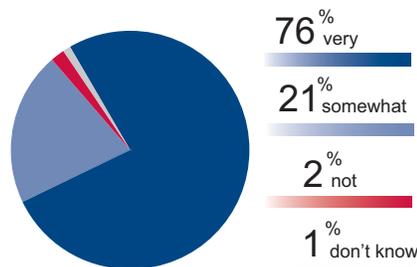
In a knowledge-based economy, research offers better health and high-paying jobs for a better future for us and our children. Three-fourths of Americans say it is important to create more opportunities for careers in science and research for our young people, in Research!America polls (see fig. 4). America’s economic destiny is, without question, tied to our investment in scientific research. Congress must understand and support this connection—with funding, policies and leadership to keep our investment consistent.

“Science promises—and delivers—better products, better jobs, better health and better quality of life. The combination of societal aspiration and the record of return makes investment in science almost irresistible.”

—The Honorable John Edward Porter, Research!America chair

U.S. Should Be Global Leader in Scientific Research

How important do you think it is that the U.S. is a global leader in scientific research?

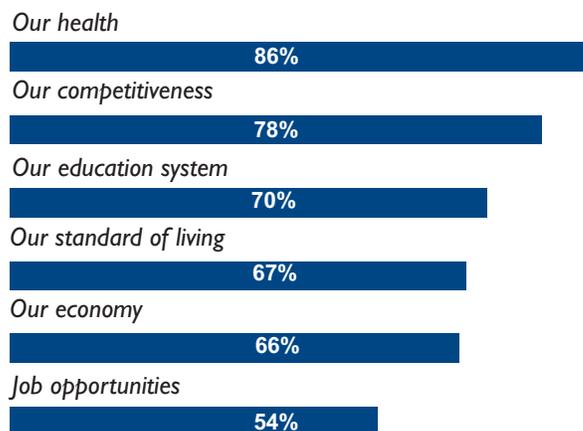


SOURCE: Bridging the Sciences Survey, 2006
Charlton Research Company for Research!America

Figure 2

Science Important to U.S. Health and Competitiveness

How important is the role science plays in ...? :
(% saying “very important”)

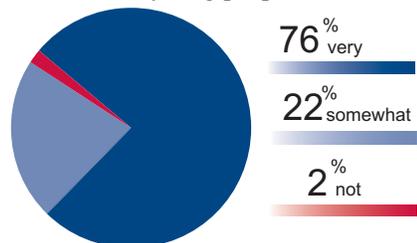


SOURCE: Bridging the Sciences Survey, 2006
Charlton Research Company for Research!America

Figure 3

Expanding Research Career Opportunities Important for Young Americans

How important is it for the U.S. to create more opportunities for careers in science and research for its young people?



SOURCE: Bridging the Sciences Survey, 2006
Charlton Research Company for Research!America

Figure 4

Research Must Be a Higher Priority

We must think not only about how far we have come with medical advances but how far we can go.

An August 2006 Research!America poll finds that nearly six in 10 Americans say that even given other national priorities, *more funding for health and medical research now is essential to the country's future health and economic prosperity* (see fig. 5).

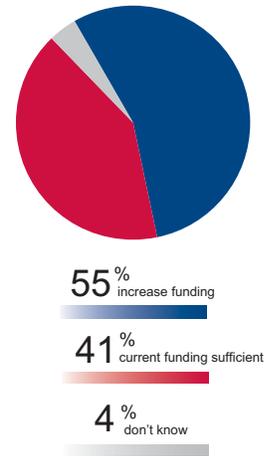
Visit www.researchamerica.org to learn more.

Americans Want Increased Funding

Which of the following statements comes closer to your opinion about U.S. investment in medical and health research at the National Institutes of Health?

Some people say: Current U.S. funding for medical and health research is sufficient and other budget items are higher priorities now.

Other people say: Increasing U.S. funding for medical and health research now is essential to our future health and economic prosperity.



SOURCE: Your Candidates—Your Health Survey, 2006
Charlton Research Company for Research!America

Figure 5

References:

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ABOUT RESEARCH!AMERICA

Research!America is the nation's largest not-for-profit public education and advocacy alliance working to make research to improve health a higher national priority. Founded in 1989, Research!America is supported by more than 500 member organizations that represent the voices of 125 million Americans. Research!America has been gauging public opinion on attitudes toward health-related research since 1992. For more information, see www.researchamerica.org.



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