



August 15, 2024

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Chair  
Committee on Energy & Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair McMorris Rodgers:

Thank you for your leadership and long-standing record of support for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on [“Reforming the National Institutes of Health Framework for Discussion”](#) (the Framework).

Decades of bipartisan commitment and support are evident in today’s NIH, the most influential, impactful, and prolific research catalyst in the world.

By supporting research across the nation, NIH establishes the foundation for preventive measures, diagnostics, treatments, and cures, and in so doing creates local jobs and businesses and spurs exports that enhance our global economic competitiveness and leadership. The NIH’s most vital contribution is to empower tangible progress against diseases that deprive Americans and people worldwide of their abilities, independence, longevity, and loved ones. The fact that you and other congressional leaders from both sides of the aisle are resolute in demanding faster medical progress is extraordinarily important.

Given the societal significance of the objective, the process used to optimize NIH’s structure and operations becomes critically important in its own right. We firmly believe that before legislating such consequential changes as the Framework’s restructuring proposals, it is essential for Congress, on a bipartisan, bicameral basis, to have the benefit of findings grounded in a deliberative, highly interactive, and transparent optimization process. Such a process can be leveraged to identify practicable, beneficial changes and avoid missteps that could set medical progress back.

The fact that optimization will take time and bears risks by no means weakens the case for it or diminishes the value of the Framework, which has spurred fruitful discussion, debate, and idea generation.

One potential approach to optimization: Congress could challenge a cross-sector team to develop a funding and operational plan delineating strategies for strengthening the NIH and significantly growing the U.S. role in speeding medical progress. The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) – with its long history of facilitating consensus processes at the request of Congress – could serve as a convener. Former NIH leaders and other members from across the research community, patients, private-sector stakeholders, policymakers, and others from within and outside the R&D ecosystem who can lend real world experience, content



expertise, fresh eyes, and new thinking to this effort could participate. The insights of current NIH leaders and staff would be crucial to this effort.

With an objective as important as preventing suffering and stopping lives from being cut short, a cross-sector team can rise to the challenge of dispassionately identifying a path forward in support of dramatically faster medical progress.

The team would certainly not need to start from ground zero: they could leverage the Framework, the NIH-focused [policy paper](#) Senate HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA) issued in May, and the NIH-relevant comments Reps. Larry Bucshon (R-IN) and Diana DeGette (D-CO) received in response to their request for information on “Cures 2.1.” They could also draw from a rich array of previous analyses and proposals that continue to be relevant today, including such NASEM reports as [Enhancing the Vitality of the National Institutes of Health](#) and [The Next Generation of Biomedical and Behavioral Sciences Researchers: Breaking Through](#), and the Coalition for Life Sciences’ [“Beyond 2020: A Vision and Pathway for NIH”](#) report.

Again, Chair McMorris Rodgers, we fully support the objective of bolstering the NIH’s capacity to seed medical progress, which would reverberate across our nation’s public-private sector R&D ecosystem. Public sentiment strongly aligns with a major escalation in our nation’s contributions to medical progress. For more than 30 years, Research!America has commissioned public opinion surveys gauging the perspectives of the American people on an array of health and research-related topics. Year after year, Americans from across the political spectrum reaffirm their strong support for faster medical progress. A majority of Americans, regardless of political affiliation:

- would be willing to [pay a dollar more in taxes each week](#) if they knew those dollars were going to medical and health research;
- agree it is important for the federal government [to fund basic research](#);
- believe our nation [should devote more tax dollars](#) to research & development.

We hope our comments prove helpful. Thank you again for your efforts and those of staff members Grace Graham, Molly (Brimmer) Lolli, and John Strom. We welcome the opportunity for further engagement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eleanor Dehoney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E".

Eleanor Dehoney  
Senior Vice President of Policy & Advocacy, Research!America