

NIH Research Focuses on the Health Threats That Americans Worry About the Most

The [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#) is the world's leading funder of medical research, improving health outcomes, advancing innovation, and strengthening America's global leadership.



Heart Disease

Heart disease is the [No. 1](#) cause of death in the U.S.

NIH-funded research helped reduce deaths due to heart disease by [50%](#) since 1924; [nearly 100,000 fewer](#) Americans died from heart disease in 2019 than in 1980.



Cancer

Cancer is the No. 2 cause of death. In 2025, it is estimated that more than [600,000 people](#) will die from cancer.

Since 1991, cancer deaths have dropped [33%](#), partly thanks to NIH-funded breakthroughs in prevention, detection, and treatment.



Alzheimer's and Other Dementias

Nearly [7 million](#) Americans over 65 live with Alzheimer's and care for patients with dementia will cost the U.S. an estimated \$384 billion in 2025 alone.

NIH-funded research developed [the first non-invasive biomarkers](#) to diagnose Alzheimer's disease and laid the foundation for [two](#) drugs that may slow the progression of disease.



Opioid Use and Overdose

*In 2022, **more than [81,000](#) Americans** died from opioid overdoses.*

In 2023, drug overdose deaths dropped [24%](#), partly thanks to NIH-funded research that led to the development of naloxone—the first-ever nasal spray that can reverse opioid overdoses.



Rare Disease

1 in 10 Americans live with a rare disease, but fewer than 5% have an approved treatment.

Thanks partly to NIH-funded research, the life expectancy for individuals with [sickle cell disease](#) and [cystic fibrosis](#) has expanded beyond childhood into middle age and beyond.