



NAEVR
National Alliance For
Eye And Vision Research

Serving as Friends of the National Eye Institute

12300 Twinbrook Parkway
Suite 250
Rockville MD 20852
240-221-2905; www.eyeresearch.org

NAEVR SUPPORTS A 6.6% FUNDING INCREASE FOR THE NIH/NEI IN FY2009

The National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (NAEVR), on behalf of the eye and vision research community, requests that in Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 Congress fund the National Eye Institute (NEI) at \$711 million and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) at \$31 billion, reflecting a 6.6% increase over FY2008 funding.

The 6.6% increase represents the current biomedical inflation rate of 3.6%, plus a 3% increase to begin to restore the NIH/NEI purchasing power, which has been eroded by almost 18% over the past five funding cycles. This increase is necessary to maintain the momentum of discovery that will prevent the onset of eye disease and restore vision, as well as to preclude “missed opportunities” to build upon the past investment at the NIH.

Vision impairment and eye disease is a major public health problem that is growing and which disproportionately affects the aging and minority populations.

Today, more than 38 million Americans age 40 and older experience significant vision impairment and eye disease. This includes 3.3 million who are blind or experience low vision, and this number is expected to grow to 5.5 million by 2020. About 35 million Americans experience an age-related eye disease, including age-related macular degeneration (AMD, the leading cause of vision loss in older Americans), glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and cataracts, and this number will grow to 50 million by 2020.

Additionally, the Hispanic, African American, and Native American populations experience a disproportionate incidence of glaucoma, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy, the latter being the leading cause of blindness in individuals of all races in the age group of 25-74 years.

The economic and societal costs of vision impairment and eye disease are significant and growing. Adequately funding NEI is a cost-effective investment in our nation’s vision health.

Current annual federal funding for the NEI is less than one percent of the \$68 billion spent annually on visual disorders and disabilities—which does not even fully quantify the impact of lost productivity, reduced independence, and diminished quality of life. Adequately funding the NEI can delay, save, and prevent expenditures, especially those to the Medicare and Medicaid programs. For example:

- NEI-funded researchers have developed treatments for diabetic retinopathy that save \$1.6 billion annually in disability payments.

- NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni heralded as an NIH breakthrough NEI's discovery of an AMD gene. With adequate funding, the NEI can develop appropriate diagnostics for early detection, as well as promising therapeutic strategies for the 10 million Americans that experience AMD and whose healthcare costs are primarily covered by Medicare.

Past NEI-funded basic and translational research is resulting in treatments to slow the progression of vision loss and restore vision.

The past federal investment in the NEI is paying off in terms of new treatments and therapies for visual disorders affecting Americans of all ages and races. For example:

- NEI is conducting additional clinical trials on nutritional supplements that may slow the progression of AMD, following previous research demonstrating that zinc and three antioxidant vitamins (Vitamins C, E and beta-carotene) are effective in reducing vision loss in people at high risk for developing advanced AMD.
- An NEI-sponsored study has found that eye injections of bone-marrow derived stem cells prevented vision loss in two rodent models of Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP), a family of eye diseases that cause vision loss. This study raises the possibility that patients could receive an injection of their own bone marrow stem cells to preserve central vision.
- NEI-funded researchers reported a protective effect from omega-3 fatty acids against retinal disease in mice. This may have a significant impact on research into retinal disease in humans, including AMD, diabetic retinopathy, and Retinopathy of Prematurity in premature infants.
- NEI-supported investigators have begun human clinical trials of a gene therapy to treat neurodegenerative eye diseases, including Leber Congenital Amaurosis (LCA), which is a rapid retinal degeneration that blinds infants in the first year of life. Previous research has restored vision in dogs with LCA, and the results of the human clinical trials are expected later this year.

The eye and vision research community urges you to strongly support FY2009 NEI funding at \$711 million and NIH funding at \$31 billion. NEI-sponsored research, which results in therapies that reduce healthcare expenses and returns individuals to productive roles in society, is a cost-effective investment in maintaining the vision health of all Americans.

**Eye and Vision Breakthroughs:
Keep The Research Drive Alive!**

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