

NEI's Trans-Institute Research Praised, Vision Community Represented in Initial Meeting of Council to Guide NIH Common Fund

On November 8, the NIH hosted an initial planning meeting of the newly established Council of Councils, a body created by the *NIH Reform Act of 2006* to guide NIH on trans-Institute initiatives funded within a "common fund" that was also mandated in the legislation. The Council of Councils is composed of representatives from the existing advisory councils to the 27 NIH Institutes and Centers (ICs), including the NEI's National Eye Advisory Council (NAEC) representative Lenworth Johnson, M.D., a neuro-ophthalmologist at the Mason Eye Institute (University of Missouri) involved in several research projects on disorders affecting the visual pathway and processing.

In introductory comments, NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni stated that the Congressional intent in establishing the common fund and guiding Council was to ensure synergy in NIH's scientific goals. "Congress wanted to build upon the initial *NIH Roadmap* initiative, which demonstrated NIH's strategic vision for research," said Dr. Zerhouni, noting such examples as: commonalities in biological systems; the movement from acute to

chronic disease management, involving multiple diseases and NIH Institutes; and the tools that can predict, preempt, and prevent disease, such as the *Human Genome Project*. "The common fund is the glue for the ICs," he stated, prior to

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challenging the Council to be bold and experimental in its guidance on research and creative in developing metrics used to evaluate scientific success.

In citing examples of trans-Institute research, Dr. Zerhouni noted the collaborative effort of the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), and the NEI in identifying factors that inhibit angiogenesis (new blood vessel growth) that has resulted in the first generation of Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved drugs to treat the "wet" form of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and are in clinical trials to treat diabetic retinopathy. In its September 22, 2006, letter to then-Chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee

Cong. Joe Barton (R-TX) supporting the *NIH Reform Act of 2006*, NAEVR acknowledged the opportunities for the NEI that the common fund presented. "NEI's trans-Institute research efforts have resulted in numerous breakthroughs cited

by Dr. Zerhouni, including the recent discovery of gene variants associated with AMD," stated NAEVR President Dr. Stephen Ryan.

For the first time in the appropriations process, the common fund had a direct budget line in the FY 2007 Joint Funding Resolution, which funded it at \$486 million. The FY 2008 LHHS appropriations conference report would fund it at \$531 million, or 1.77 percent of the NIH budget (see inside story on status of the FY 2008 LHHS conference report.)



Dr. Lenworth Johnson with Alan Krensky, M.D., Director of NIH's Office of Portfolio Analysis and Strategic Initiatives (OPASI), which is currently managing the Council of Councils as NIH organizes the legislatively mandated Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives (DPCPSI) that will have ultimate responsibility for the common fund



Left to right foreground: NIH Principal Deputy Director Raynard Kington, M.D., Ph.D., and NIH Director Dr. Zerhouni listen as Dr. Johnson provides comments



NAEVR's James Jorkasky and Harold Shapiro, Ph.D., (Princeton University). Dr. Shapiro chaired the Institute of Medicine Committee which released a report in 2003 entitled *Enhancing the Vitality of the National Institutes of Health* that recommended a dedicated budget for trans-Institute research. NAEVR Board President Dr. Stephen Ryan served on that IOM Committee.