

President's Message

This spring, the vision research community stands at a pivotal moment—one marked not only by incredible scientific opportunity but by some of the most significant threats to the biomedical research enterprise we've seen.

The challenges are mounting. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is experiencing significant changes that will have impacts across the research landscape. At NIH, we've already seen significant staffing reductions, delayed grant approvals, and the outright cancellation of previously awarded grants. For the National Eye Institute (NEI), these impacts are compounded by long-standing underfunding, even as the burden of eye disease continues to grow in the U.S. and globally.

Just as troubling, the administration has proposed a cap on indirect costs (aka facility and administration costs) at 15%, a move that would immediately devastate the operational foundation of academic research institutions. These costs are essential for maintaining laboratories, supporting compliance and safety infrastructure, and ensuring research integrity. Slashing them would cripple the very institutions that are driving breakthroughs in vision science. This is all in addition to the consolidation of institutes proposed in legislation last year.

On top of this, the Department of Defense's Vision Research Program (VRP) (plus 22 out of 35 research programs) received no funding in the FY25 budget—a critical loss for a program that has historically driven innovation in care for our service members and veterans.

This is not business as usual. The stakes have never been higher, and the moment has never

been more urgent.

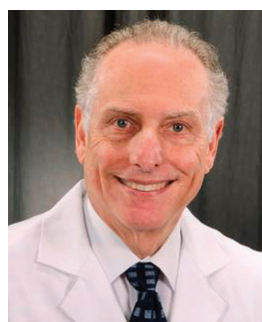
That's why the work of the National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (NAEVR) and the Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (AEVR) is more critical than ever. We are actively engaged with Congress, educating policymakers on the real-world consequences of these proposals and advocating for the resources our community needs to thrive.

But we cannot do this alone.

This spring, we've launched a new way for you to get involved: individuals can now donate and become members of the Alliances. By visiting our website, you can take an active role in supporting our mission and standing with fellow advocates to protect the future of vision research.

If your organization, institution, or department is not currently a member, we urge you to join us today. Your membership demonstrates to policymakers that the vision community is united, vigilant, and ready to defend what we've built.

This is a time for bold, coordinated advocacy. Together, we can ensure that vision research continues to receive the support it needs—and deserves—to transform lives.



Thank you for your continued partnership.

Sincerely,

Steven Feldon, MD, MBA
President, Board of Directors
NAEVR/AEVR



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Legislative Update: Navigating a Challenging Year for Vision Research

	FY22 Final	FY23 Final	FY24 Final	FY25 Final	FY26 NAEVR Request
NIH	\$44.96 B +4.72%	\$47.46 B +5.6%	\$47.08 B -0.8%	\$47.08 B +0%	\$51 B +6.4% Over FY25
NEI	\$863.9 M +3.4%	\$896.55 M +3.8%	\$896.55 M +0%	\$896.55 M +0%	\$1 B +11.5% Over FY25 Maintain NEI as an independent institute
DOD VRP	\$20 M +0%	\$20 M +0%	\$20 M +0%	\$0 -100%	Restore funding to \$30 M** +100%

- The FY23 budget included funding for ARPA-H within NIH at \$1.5 B and was level-funded in FY24. The FY25 Senate Bill includes level funding at \$1.5 B, the House bill reduces ARPA-H to \$500 M
- The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 (Debt Ceiling Agreement) put caps on federal spending for FY24 and FY25. A new debt limit increase is needed in 2025 to avoid default and may result in additional restrictions on spending.
- In FY23, BRAIN Initiative funding was \$680M. Due to the expiration of 21st Century Cures funding, that was reduced to \$402 M in FY24 and was reduced further to \$321M in FY25. The Senate sought to restore the 21st Century Cures funding in FY25 but was unsuccessful in the CR.
- **Seeking supplemental funding to restore FY25 funding before September in addition to FY26 ask

The policy landscape for biomedical research—especially vision science—has been marked by significant developments, both legislative and administrative in the first quarter of the year. As we move further into 2025, the funding environment remains deeply uncertain, with structural shifts already impacting the stability and progress of federally funded research.

One of the most consequential issues emerged in early February, when NIH announced a policy capping indirect cost rates at 15% for all grants, including those previously negotiated at higher levels. This change, justified by the administration as a measure to increase direct support for research, has instead sparked concern across academic institutions. Indirect costs (or Facility and Administration (F&A) costs) cover the essential infrastructure that enables science to happen—from utilities and lab maintenance to compliance and administrative support. Vision research labs, many of which rely heavily on these institutional supports, now face the challenge of maintaining operations on significantly constrained overhead. This policy has received significant bipartisan push back from Congress and is currently being litigated in the courts. The policy has not been implemented, and early indications are it is likely to be struck down by the courts, however it is unknown how the Administration will proceed pending the court’s determination.

Congress also passed the Fiscal Year 2025 Continuing Resolution (CR), which President

Trump signed into law on March 15. This CR extended government funding through the end of the fiscal year (September 30, 2025) and maintained NIH and NEI funding at FY24 levels. While this preserved base funding for vision research in the short term, it also allowed the expiration of key funding provisions under the 21st Century Cures Act—most notably the targeted funding for the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative. The BRAIN Initiative, launched in 2013 and expanded under the Cures Act in 2016, received approximately \$402 million in FY24 comprising \$172 million from the 21st Century Cures Act and an additional \$230 million in base funding. The FY25 CR allocated \$91 million from the Cures Act for the program, maintaining base funding at FY24 levels bringing the total to \$321 million resulting in a decrease of \$81 million compared to the previous fiscal year.

This has direct implications for the vision research community. A significant number of NEI-supported projects—particularly those focused on retinal circuitry, visual perception, neuro-ophthalmology, and brain-computer interface technologies—have relied on BRAIN Initiative funding. The expiration of these funds threatens to slow momentum in understanding the brain’s role in vision and limits support for interdisciplinary teams working at the cutting edge of visual neuroscience.

Compounding the challenges, the Administration enacted strict travel and spending bans in

January 2025 for federal employees that remain in effect today. This includes those at NIH and NEI. These restrictions suspended both domestic and international travel, halted participation in scientific conferences, and limited public engagement. For vision researchers who rely on collaboration, networking, and data-sharing across institutions and borders, these bans have disrupted normal scientific exchange and slowed momentum in ongoing projects.

These disruptions have been exacerbated by workforce reductions. In early April, HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. oversaw the layoff of approximately 10,000 federal employees across agencies, including a significant number within NIH. Staffing cuts at NEI and across NIH raise concerns that the reduction in experienced staff will slow grant processing, program management, and long-term planning within the institute.

Further strain has come in the form of delayed or suspended grant review cycles. In the wake of new executive orders and guidance restricting agency operations and requiring the review of all DEIA-related policies, some grant review panels were postponed or canceled. While NEI has not yet released a comprehensive update, spring grant review meetings originally scheduled for February were delayed until April 21. This delay has created uncertainty for researchers awaiting funding decisions and may delay the start of new projects well into FY26.

Meanwhile, the Department of Defense’s Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP), which has supported cutting-edge research in vision trauma and ocular injury, was hit particularly hard in the FY25 CR. The program was cut by 57%, reducing funding from \$1.509 billion to \$650 million and eliminating 23 of its 35 research programs—including the Vision Research Program. This loss is a serious blow to the community of vision scientists focused on trauma-related injuries, particularly those serving military and veteran populations. NAEVR is working with our partners and Congress to restore this funding through other pathways for FY25 and, if unsuccessful, are working to secure restored funding in FY26.

While fears of broader structural changes to NIH, including the 2024 proposal to consolidate institutes remain serious threats,

the consolidations were ultimately not included in the final FY25 budget. However, the administration continues to reorganize and streamline federal health agencies through executive authority, without formal congressional input. As such, NAEVR/AEVR is closely monitoring these activities for any indication that NIH may face additional restructuring or mission redefinition that could impact its capacity to serve the diverse needs of the biomedical research community. We also continue to work with Congress to emphasize the importance of maintaining vision research as a national priority with support for a dedicated NEI.

Leadership transitions in federal agencies have also added further complexity. In February, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. was confirmed as Secretary of Health and Human Services, followed in March by the Senate confirmation of Dr. Jay Bhattacharya as NIH Director. Both figures bring unconventional perspectives to their roles. Secretary Kennedy has expressed skepticism about traditional public health structures and NIH, while Dr. Bhattacharya has prioritized transparency and reforms. Although neither has made vision research a public focal point, their leadership will undoubtedly shape NIH priorities moving forward. The research community will be watching closely for any shifts in how resources are allocated and what scientific fields are emphasized.

Throughout this period, NAEVR/AEVR has remained in close communication with partner coalitions, including Research!America, the Coalition for Health Funding, the Defense Health Research Consortium, and the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research. Collectively, these groups have emphasized the need for predictable, sustainable federal investments in science. They have also voiced shared concerns about the chilling effect current policies may have on early-career researchers, institutional partnerships, and the international standing of U.S.-based biomedical research.

In this challenging environment, the vision research community must remain engaged, vigilant, and unified. NAEVR and AEVR will continue to advocate fiercely for the resources and policy conditions that allow vision science to thrive—and we urge all stakeholders to raise their voices and participate in the collective effort to protect and advance sight-saving research.

Partnering for Progress: Our Collaborative Impact Across the Vision Research Community



ARVO
ADVOCACY
DAY

Early-Career Scientists Raise Their Voices for Vision Research on Capitol Hill

On February 6, the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) brought the energy and passion of vision researchers to Capitol Hill for its annual Advocacy Day—an event we proudly supported and participated in.

Together, advocates conducted nearly 100 Congressional office visits. The meetings included key lawmakers responsible for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding and oversight, ensuring that the voices of the vision science community were heard at the highest levels and members of Congress and their staff to advocate for robust funding for the National Eye Institute (NEI) and broader NIH investment in biomedical research. These emerging leaders in vision science shared their personal research stories and conveyed how federal funding makes their groundbreaking work, and future careers, possible.

Our Executive Director, Dan Ignaszewski, trained advocates. “These scientists are not only the face of vision research, they are its voice right now,” said Dan. “By learning how to communicate the value of their work to policymakers, they’re ensuring that our field remains strong, supported, and focused on delivering real solutions to patients.”

Throughout the day, participants conveyed the urgent need to preserve NEI’s status as a standalone institute, and shared the impact of vision loss across the lifespan, from early childhood to aging populations.

ARVO’s Advocacy Day reflects the growing strength of the vision research community’s engagement with public policy. We applaud ARVO for its leadership in empowering early-career voices and thanks every participant for making the case that sight-saving science is a national priority.

Vision Research at a Crossroads: NEI Funding in Focus



We presented at the American Glaucoma Society’s Congressional Advocacy Day to champion increased NEI funding and advance federal support for glaucoma research.



We joined military, academic, and clinical leaders at the 9th Military Vision Symposium to advance discussions on combat-related eye injuries, federal research funding, and collaborative solutions to restore sight.



We shared the state of NEI funding to the BrightFocus Foundation Board of Directors, highlighting the urgent need for sustained investment in vision research while thanking BrightFocus for its leadership and advocacy.



We joined ophthalmology leaders at AAO’s 2025 Mid-Year Forum to advance advocacy for vision research and patient care



Vision Research Funding Partnership 2025 Sight Across the Lifespan: The Critical Role for Vision Science

Partnering for Progress

The day’s agenda showcased the strength of our collective efforts and the importance of collaboration in advancing vision research.

Hosted by Research to Prevent Blindness

Gathering Stakeholders to Champion Lifespan Vision Science

We were honored to participate in the Vision Research Funding Partnership 2025 convening, hosted by Research to Prevent Blindness (RPB) on March 25 at the Westin DC Downtown. This dynamic gathering brought together leaders across the vision research ecosystem—from patient advocates and non-profit funders to academic researchers and industry

partners—to explore the evolving landscape of vision science and its impact across the lifespan.

As we look ahead to FY2026 and beyond, this gathering reaffirmed a shared commitment to protecting and restoring sight across the lifespan and to making sure that vision research is treated as a national priority.

We are proud to stand with RPB and our many partners in this work. Together, we continue to make the case for why investing in vision science is essential to public health, innovation, and quality of life.

DRCR Retina Network Conference

At this year’s Diabetic Retinopathy Clinical Research (DRCR) Retina Network Conference, Executive Director Dan Ignaszewski delivered a compelling presentation underscoring the vital connection between advocacy and scientific discovery in the fight against retinal diseases. Dan emphasized the foundational role of federal funding, particularly through the National Eye Institute (NEI), in enabling clinical trials that have transformed patient outcomes. The DRCR Retina Network, supported by NEI, has been at the forefront of this progress, conducting collaborative studies that directly impact patient care. One standout success has been the validation and adoption of anti-VEGF therapies, which have revolutionized treatment for diabetic retinopathy and other retinal conditions.

But this progress is not guaranteed. Dan urged the vision community to remain vigilant in protecting NEI’s status as a standalone institute and to advocate for increased, sustained federal investment in vision science. By bringing together researchers, clinicians, and advocates, forums like the DRCR Network Conference serve as a powerful reminder: collaboration drives progress. Together, we are working to ensure that sight-saving research continues to thrive—delivering hope to millions living with vision-threatening diseases.



AUPO 2025 Annual Meeting



In January, Dan Ignaszewski, Executive Director, presented at the AUPO conference. Dan provided an update on the status of federal vision research funding and detailed the policy and funding landscape impacting the National Eye Institute (NEI). AUPO plays a vital role in amplifying the need to protect NEI as a standalone institute—by coordinating with faculty, educating trainees, and engaging with current policy initiatives.

Spotlight on Macular Degeneration: Congressional Briefing Underscores Urgent Need for Vision Research Funding



Pictured L to R: Dan Ignaszewski, Jill Adelman, Dr. Cynthia Owsley and Matthew Levine

We extend our sincere gratitude to all who participated in our recent Congressional Briefing on Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD). This important event brought together leading voices in research, patient advocacy, and policymaking to spotlight the latest advancements in AMD research and emphasize the critical importance of sustained federal investment in vision science.

We were honored to feature Dr. Cynthia Owsley, Professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Marnix E. Heersink School of Medicine, who provided an insightful overview of emerging trends in macular degeneration research and the promise of scientific innovation to improve outcomes for patients. We also deeply appreciate Jill Adelman, who shared her personal journey as a patient advocate, putting a human face on the urgency of this work.

Following the briefing, we met with staff from



the office of Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-AL) to discuss the value of continued NIH and NEI funding. These conversations are vital, especially given that one in three Americans over the age of 75 is at risk for macular degeneration, a number expected to grow as our population ages.

Special thanks to Matthew Levine and the leadership of the American Macular Degeneration Foundation (AMDF) for their partnership and presence at the event. Their dedication to advancing AMD research and supporting patients continues to be a driving force in the vision research community.

As always, we remain committed to ensuring that vision research remains a national priority. Events like this one are powerful reminders that when researchers, advocates, and policymakers come together, we can accelerate progress and protect sight for millions of Americans.

Advancing Glaucoma Research: Congressional Briefing Highlights Power of Patient and Researcher Voices



Pictured: Dr. Thomas V. Johnson and Hillary A. Golden

In March, we hosted a Congressional Briefing focused on glaucoma, one of the leading causes of irreversible blindness worldwide. The event spotlighted the powerful intersection of patient experience and scientific innovation in the fight to preserve sight.

We were honored to feature Dr. Thomas V. Johnson from the Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins Medicine, whose pioneering work is reshaping the future of glaucoma care. Dr. Johnson, head of the Johnson Lab, presented on cutting-edge research into regenerating retinal ganglion cells—the critical neurons damaged in glaucoma. His lab combines neuroscience, regenerative medicine, and gene therapy to explore promising approaches for neuroprotection and vision restoration.

Joining Dr. Johnson was Hillary A. Golden, who offered an impactful patient perspective. As both a passionate advocate and a patient-first



"The briefing spotlighted the powerful intersection of patient experience and scientific innovation in the fight to preserve sight, especially in the context of glaucoma, a complex disease that demands both cutting-edge research and a deep understanding of the human impact. By bringing together lived experiences and laboratory breakthroughs, we move closer to real-world solutions that not only slow vision loss but also improve quality of life for those affected."
Dan Ignaszewski

innovator, Hillary emphasized the importance of keeping the lived experience at the center of policy discussions and research priorities.

Following the briefing, NAEVR and the speakers met with several Congressional offices to advocate for continued and robust federal funding of vision research. The conversations reinforced that scientific progress is driven not only by groundbreaking lab work but also by powerful patient voices that inspire change.

As Hillary eloquently put it: "Separately we make a difference—together we create change."

We thank all who participated in this important event and remains committed to advancing glaucoma research through advocacy, collaboration, and the unwavering belief that no one should face a future without sight.

NAEVR/AEVR

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ARVO
The Association for Research
in Vision and Ophthalmology



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Gratitude to Our Dedicated Partners

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our esteemed partners whose unwavering support has been instrumental in driving forward our educational, support, and advocacy initiatives. It is through your commitment and collaboration that we have been able to make significant strides in advancing vision research and promoting awareness of its critical importance.

Your ongoing contributions empower us to continue our vital work in fostering innovation, providing support to those in need, and advocating for policies that prioritize vision health. We are immensely grateful for your dedication and partnership. If you are not yet a partner of our alliances, we invite you to join us in our mission. Contact us today at info@eyerresearch.org to learn more about how you can become a valued member of our community and contribute to our shared vision for a brighter future in eye and vision research.

Partners



**Support Vision Research.
Change lives. Donate today.**

We're now accepting donations—join us in advancing sight-saving science and advocacy by supporting our mission to protect vision and accelerate cures.



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