PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE
The Importance of NAEVR/AEVR

NAEVR/AEVR and its Executive Director James Jorkasky are key contributors to our efforts to fund vision research. Participating in two recent events in Washington DC made it clear how critical our community’s involvement in educating our country’s leaders about the importance and exciting advances in vision research are for our ability to continue to do groundbreaking research. At both the September 5 National Institutes of Health (NIH) campus farewell event held for retiring National Eye Institute (NEI) Director Paul Sieving, MD, PhD, and the September 18-19 Fifth Annual Emerging Vision Scientists (EVS) Day, which is described in detail within this Report, the achievements and future potential of colleagues across our field were highlighted.

At the NIH event, on behalf of NAEVR/AEVR, we were delighted to have the opportunity to present to Dr. Sieving an Alliances’ plaque that read, “In appreciation for his leadership of the NEI and his commitment to the vision health of all Americans.” Several leaders in both vision research and the NIH highlighted the many ways in which vision researchers have pioneered advances in medical research. As you know, although Paul retired from the NIH, he is still fully committed to vision research through his leadership of a new Center for Ocular Regenerative Therapy at the University of California at Davis.

Acting NEI Director Santa Tumminia, PhD has met with Jim and ARVO Executive Director Iris Rush—who also serves as a NAEVR/AEVR Director—regarding ways to partner in communicating about the importance of good vision next year, a very apt 2020. At the October 4 National Advisory Eye Council (NAEC) meeting, Dr. Tumminia continued that spirit of partnership by announcing numerous staff changes and new initiatives that are driving the Institute forward, especially encouraging vision community input on the latter when they are announced. Among the staff changes announced was that Mary Frances Cotch, PhD had been named NEI’s Acting Deputy Director. An epidemiologist by training, Dr. Cotch will be critical to NEI’s announced expanded activities in vision public health issues.

As part of NAEVR/AEVR’s expanded commitment to engaging broadly with our community, Jim organized a dinner meeting of nearly a dozen Alliances member organizations with a Washington presence to share insights and experiences on advocating for vision research. As the new Board President, I was pleased to see the easy rapport among the attendees, which is a reminder about how important face-to-face interactions are as we all work together on advocacy and education for vision research (more about that later). The EVS program is one of the most significant activities for our vision research community, and this year was a particularly strong showing. Starting with the outstanding presentation by NEI intramural researcher Kapil Bharti, PhD, about NEI’s first-in-human clinical trials for an induced pluripotent stem cell therapy for dry Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) at the International AMD Awareness Week Congressional Briefing, the entire program was impactful in both science and engagement of our government leaders. The AEVR Congressional Poster Reception and AEVR Advocacy Day provided our scientists with a tremendous opportunity to interact with Members of Congress and their staffs. Having heard directly from past Kellogg participants about the value of prior EVS events, the experiences gave all of us an invaluable opportunity to showcase the importance of continued robust funding for the NIH and NEI, especially to support the next generation of vision scientists.

Our Alliances Boards and Jim are fully committed to maximizing opportunities for active member participation.

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Shortly, the Alliances will be issuing the 2020 renewal campaign, and I urge you to support NAEVR and AEVR during this next year of challenges for both the unfinished Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 and upcoming FY2021 appropriations processes. As always, if you have any comments, please feel free to email or call me!

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