



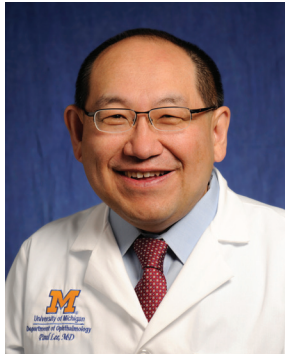
SPRING/SUMMER 2021

CONTRIBUTOR REPORT

National Alliance For Eye And Vision Research | Alliance For Eye and Vision Research

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

ARPA-H Takes Center Stage in Proposed FY2022 NIH Funding



We are pleased to share with you in this Report the active work of the Alliances in service to our vision research community. Through mid-July, NAEVR advocacy and AEVR education continue to seek enhanced support and funding for research to better treat, cure, and prevent the causes of vision loss.

Second quarter 2021 has been especially busy, with President Biden issuing in early April an initial Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 top-line discretionary budget that was followed up on May 28 with the full budget request, including mandatory spending. In addition to proposing increases for both the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Eye Institute (NEI), the budget proposes

creation of the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Health (ARPA-H), which is based on the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA), to accelerate translation of research with an initial focus on cancer, Alzheimer's, and diabetes.

In May and June hearings of the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittees of both the House and Senate with Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Secretary

Xavier Becerra, JD and NIH Director Francis Collins, MD, PhD, ARPA-H was a focus, especially with respect to its mission and structure and how its funding would relate to

NIH's "base" funding—that which supports the Institutes and Centers (I/Cs), 21st Century Cures Act special initiatives, and early-stage investigators. At the hearings, House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) expressed the need to strike an appropriate balance between supporting NIH's basic research and this new approach. Her Subcommittee's FY2022 LHHS spending bill approved July 15 has done just that by reducing the \$6.5 billion in ARPA-H funding proposed by the President to \$3 billion while increasing NIH's base funding by \$3.5 billion or 8.2 percent to \$46.2 billion—about \$1 billion greater than that proposed by the President. The bill provides at least a 5 percent increase for each I/C, which means at least 2.6 percent growth above the current biomedical inflation rate of 2.4 percent. That is critical for Institutes such as the NEI, the purchasing power for which is less in FY2021 than that in FY2012. Of course, we will need to see what the Senate proposes as this year's funding cycle proceeds.

NAEVR has been engaged in all aspects of the FY2022 appropriations process. The Alliance was one of 23 organizations that was chosen out of nearly 200 to testify at the May 19 virtual Public Citizen Witness hearing held by the House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee. NAEVR witness Michael Crair, PhD (Yale University) urged funding increases reflecting biomedical inflation plus 5 percent growth for each the NIH and NEI, as well as one-time emergency research recovery funding due to the COVID-19 pandemic,

citing the challenges identified in AEVR's September 2020 30-minute video conversation of *Emerging Vision Scientists*—a written article of which was published on July 1 in *JAMA Ophthalmology* (see box bottom).

Although NAEVR has not formally endorsed the ARPA-H concept pending more information, Dr. Crair did comment at the May 19 hearing that ARPA-H funding should supplement, not supplant, NIH base funding. On July 13, NAEVR submitted comments to House Energy & Commerce Committee members Diana DeGette (D-CO) and Fred Upton (R-MI) who had issued draft 21st Century Cures 2.0 legislation that would authorize ARPA-H, as well as include the *Research Investment to Spark the Economy (RISE) Act* with \$25 billion in federal agency research recovery funding, including \$10 billion for NIH. NAEVR stated that the appropriators and authorizers should examine mechanisms that can balance new investment in ARPA-H with continued robust support for the NIH base budget, and that the ARPA-H framework should consider a variety of life-saving and quality-of-life enhancing research from across the I/Cs. NAEVR also supported inclusion of the *RISE Act*.

AEVR has continued its education about the value of federally funded vision research that supports NAEVR efforts through its *Research Saving Sight, Restoring Vision Initiative*. This Report summarizes the vision community's recognition of July 2021 as *Dry Eye Awareness Month* through AEVR's July 13 virtual global Congressional Briefing entitled *A Lifestyle Epidemic: Ocular Surface Disease*. Reflecting AEVR's role as "Friends of the NEI," Executive Director James Jorkasky emphasized in his introduction that NEI is supporting hundreds of grants studying ocular inflammation, ocular pain, and Dry Eye Disease (DED) and has established its Anterior Segment Initiative (ASI) to study the neural pathways in these conditions to better understand and mitigate disease.

The appropriators and authorizers should examine mechanisms that can balance new investment in ARPA-H with continued robust support for the NIH base budget.

Finally, the NAEVR and AEVR Boards met virtually on May 27 and each conducted an election of 2021-2023 Officers and new 2021-2024 Directors, which is detailed in the Report. Our community is truly fortunate to have such outstanding colleagues who have served the Alliances so well. I want to offer our special appreciation to Dr. Linda Hazlett, Dr. Bartly Mondino and Dr. Earl Smith for their dedication and contributions to the Alliances, and we are delighted that Dr. T. Rowan Candy, Ms. Marissa Goldberg, and Dr. Stephen McLeod have been elected as Directors. On behalf of the Boards, I wish to renew my personal commitment—and that of the Boards—in working to maximize impact while broadening opportunities for member engagement. Please reach out to me or Jim if you have any suggestions or ideas. Thanks to all for your support.

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JAMA Ophthalmology Publishes AEVR COVID Article

On July 1, *JAMA Ophthalmology* published a written article based on AEVR's September 23, 2020, 30-minute video conversation with 22 *Emerging Vision Scientists (EVSs)* about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic-related laboratory closures on the next generation of vision scientists. This article joins the growing literature about the pandemic's impact. On September 21 (see box right), AEVR will premiere a new 30-minute video entitled *Moving Beyond COVID in My Career Pathway* with the 28 EVSs participating in this year's program.

Visit the Web site to link to the journal article and the September 2020 video conversation.

AEVR Announces September 2021 Virtual Events

September 21
AEVR Congressional Briefing Recognizing International AMD Awareness Week
12 Noon – 1:00 pm

AEVR's Seventh Annual Emerging Vision Scientists Day on Capitol Hill:
EVS Research Videos/Premier of Moving Beyond COVID in My Career Pathway Video
(supported by a grant from Research to Prevent Blindness and Novartis)
1:30 pm

September 22
EVS Capitol Hill Advocacy Day

Full details and an RSVP for the AMD Briefing and COVID video link will be available through the Web site.