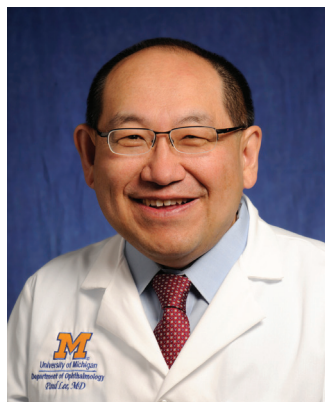


PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Messaging About the Value of Vision Research with a New Administration and Congress



The Boards hope that you are staying healthy as we begin to see light at the end of the tunnel with expanding COVID-19 vaccinations. Despite the pandemic's challenges, the NAEVR and AEVR Alliances have proceeded unabated with their respective virtual advocacy and educational activities on behalf of the eye and vision research community, as detailed in this Report.

Per the *Scorecard* Legislative Issues section, with Congress finalizing and the President signing final Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 appropriations in late December 2020, the new 117th

Congressional leadership has focused on passing President Biden's \$1.9 trillion *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*, which he signed into law on March 11. Concurrently, NAEVR began its advocacy for FY2022 National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Eye Institute (NEI) funding increases, as well as an increase for the Peer-Reviewed Vision Research Program within the Department of Defense (see Report's back page).

Your support throughout the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 has enabled the Alliances to adapt and effectively use new formats and approaches to advocate for and educate about the value of vision research.

As in past years, the NAEVR-managed mid-February Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) Advocacy Day served as an early and effective means to advocate for FY2022 funding increases of \$3.2 billion for NIH to a level of \$46.1 billion and \$64.3 million for NEI to a level of \$900 million. The requested 7.7 percent NEI increase, reflecting 2.4 percent biomedical inflation and 5.3 percent growth, is critical since its FY2021 funding increase of \$12 million or 1.4 percent was less than inflation, reducing NEI's purchasing power. ARVO's advocates conducted virtual visits with 50 Congressional offices, including Members assigned to key committees with NIH funding and oversight jurisdiction, and NAEVR followed up to submit specific Programmatic Requests for NEI funding at \$900 million. This activity supplements NAEVR Executive Director James Jorkasky's own direct outreach with leadership with whom he has worked through the years.

NAEVR also continued its advocacy for scientific agency research relief due to pandemic-related laboratory closures. The ARVO advocates also requested support for the *Research Investment to Spark the Economy (RISE) Act*, introduced in each the House and Senate, to authorize \$26 billion for scientific agency research relief, including \$10 billion for the NIH.

Under its new sustained educational program *Research Saving Sight, Restoring Vision Initiative*, AEVR continued its virtual education with the *World Glaucoma Week 2021* Congressional Briefing, featuring clinician scientist-educators Mona Kaleem, MD and Elyse McGlumphy, MD from the Wilmer Eye Institute at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and patient advocate Amanda Eddy, who represented the Glaucoma Research Foundation. Since AEVR quickly toggled to virtual education in 2020, it now has a video library accessible on the Web site consisting of four Congressional

Briefings and the 30-minute *Impact of COVID-19 Lab Closures on the Next Generation of Vision Scientists* reflecting a conversation with emerging vision scientists held last September.

The NEI has also been active virtually, holding its February 12 National Advisory Eye Council (NAEC) meeting—the first at which new NEI Director Michael Chiang, MD presided. The NEI announced important initiatives and new Offices that align with its in-process Strategic Plan and detailed how vision researchers have continued to successfully receive funding from NIH's BRAIN Initiative.

In closing, the Boards wish to thank all members—and our vision community—who have committed financially to supporting the Alliances in 2021. Your support throughout the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 has enabled the Alliances to adapt and effectively use new formats and approaches to advocate for and educate about the value of vision research. We look forward to working with all of you to further enhance the communications about the value of vision research and to achieve greater levels of funding for our critical work together.

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National Advisory Eye Council (NAEC) Meets



NEI Director
Michael Chiang, MD

On February 12, new NEI Director Michael Chiang, MD presided over his first NAEC meeting in which he held an interactive discussion with the Council about the planning, conduct, and follow-up to meetings. He also announced the creation of two new Offices that align with key areas within NEI's in-process Strategic Plan:

- **Office of Vision Health and Population Sciences, led by former Acting NEI Deputy Director Mary Frances Cotch, PhD**
- **Office of Data Sciences and Health Informatics, led by Kerry Goetz**

Dr. Chiang plans to develop his own narrative message about the "value of vision research" and asked vision community members to provide any data or information.

NEI also announced results of its analysis of the seventh round of new funding awards within NIH's FY2020 Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative, in which the NEI is one of ten Institutes and Centers whose mission and research complements BRAIN's goals. NEI identifies vision in the retina or brain as "vision" research, and "vision-related" research includes current or past NEI grantees funded by BRAIN. Combined, these two categories received 87 new awards of the 190 new awards, competing renewals, or supplements, for a total of \$113.6 million. Since funding for BRAIN began in FY2014 appropriations, "vision/vision related" research has received more than \$423 million in new grant awards, competing renewals, and supplements.