



Director's Letter

On behalf of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), I am transmitting NIH's Congressional Justification for the fiscal year (FY) 2026 budget. This request for \$27.9 billion, including discretionary and mandatory resources, will support the NIH mission to turn biomedical research discoveries into better health for all.

As I begin my tenure as the 18th NIH Director, I am honored to lead this agency in service of the American people. I want to first express my appreciation for NIH staff and NIH-funded scientists across the country whose work has contributed to lifesaving breakthroughs in biology and medicine. I look forward to playing an instrumental role in shaping the agency's activities and outlook and ensuring they align with the goals of the President's Make America Healthy Again Commission.

NIH's mission to advance science to improve health remains vital as millions of children and adults in this country face poor outcomes due to chronic conditions like obesity, heart disease, and cancer. We must Make America Healthy Again by building on the agency's track record of tackling complex challenges and recommit to our mission to address the chronic disease crisis. While basic research will continue to lay the groundwork for future discoveries, we will invest in innovative, cutting-edge research that has the power to transform health. Most importantly, we will invest our resources where they are needed most, maximizing the impact of NIH research. Additionally, we need to restore our reputation among the American people – our discoveries will only make an impact if the public has confidence in our findings and trusts that we are working in their best interests.

NIH Priorities

To help achieve these goals, I have established the following five top priorities:

1. **Focus on Improving Population Health:** The work of NIH, whether basic or applied, must address the health needs of the American people, including the chronic disease crisis that has hampered the well-being of countless Americans.
2. **Reproducibility and Rigor:** The research NIH conducts and supports must be rigorous, reproducible, and unbiased. NIH must address and solve the reproducibility crisis in the biomedical sciences.
3. **Innovation and Collaboration:** NIH must be at the forefront of biomedical innovation. This will involve embracing new technologies, new ideas, and new approaches to old and emerging problems.
4. **Research Safety and Transparency:** NIH must ensure that all the experiments we support pose no risk of harm to human health and meet the highest ethical standards. We must maintain the highest standards of transparency in all our endeavors.



5. **Academic Freedom:** Advances in science require the freedom to think differently from the scientific consensus. I will foster an environment where varied perspectives are valued and encouraged at NIH and the broader scientific community.

Innovative Research

NIH will continue its vital research in support of these priorities. Chronic disease is a major contributor to disability, morbidity, and mortality for millions of Americans. NIH funds many programs across multiple Institutes to address this issue. The Nutrition for Precision Health (NPH) study, powered by the *All of Us* Research Program, is examining how genes, lifestyle, health history, the gut microbiome, and other factors influence how a person's body responds to different foods, thus potentially leading to new discoveries about the role of nutrition in preventing many chronic conditions and diseases. The National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR) is a public-private partnership to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and application of childhood obesity research, and to halt—and reverse—childhood obesity through enhanced coordination and collaboration.

Combatting neurodegenerative diseases is among the greatest public health challenges of the 21st century. These conditions, including Alzheimer's disease (AD) and AD-related dementias (ADRD), amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), and Parkinson's disease (PD), have devastating consequences for people and their families, and the associated economic costs are staggering. An estimated 6.9 million Americans currently live with AD, and it is predicted that more than 13 million will be living with the disease by 2060. PD affects another 1 million Americans. NIH leads federal research efforts on dementia, the sixth leading cause of death for adults 65 and older and a major contributor to loss of independence, as well as emotional and financial burdens borne by affected families. NIH-funded research on disease mechanisms has identified biomarkers to aid early detection and treatment along with a growing number of potential targets for new therapies to prevent or modify the progressive course of these conditions.

Rural communities in the United States are often significantly impacted by chronic diseases and other health conditions. This is due to many factors, including poverty and limited access to care that are often found in these communities. Due in part to these same factors, people from rural communities often do not have the same ability to participate in clinical research studies, which hampers the ability to effectively apply medical research findings to them. Increasing rural representation in clinical trials and other studies creates opportunities for research findings that address the unique challenges of delivering care to people living in rural areas as well as the burden of diseases and conditions faced by these communities. The new NIH CARE for Health™ initiative aims to address these issues by building a network of research networks to expand research opportunities to the frontlines of clinical care in primary care settings, with its pilot focused on testing feasibility in rural areas.

NIH also continues its ongoing programs to address rural health. The Institutional Development Award (IDeA) program funds capacity-building programs that broaden the participation of institutions in 23 states and Puerto Rico that have historically received lower levels of NIH support. The IDeA Clinical and Translational Research (CTR) program funds statewide networks to build capacity for clinical and translational research in IDeA states, many of which have



substantial rural populations. Also central to our efforts is bringing care to Americans where they live – across America’s heartland and beyond. The Risk Underlying Rural Areas Longitudinal (RURAL) cohort study is addressing the high burden of chronic diseases in rural areas through its state-of-the-art mobile exam unit, bringing high-tech health care, health technologies, and health research directly to communities and neighborhoods.

To solve these health issues and many more, NIH uses every avenue of research available, including supporting High Risk High Reward (HRHR) research. The NIH’s Common Fund, which supports bold scientific programs that catalyze discovery across all biomedical and behavioral research, funds the HRHR program to support creative scientists proposing innovative and transformative research in any scientific area within the NIH’s mission. These awards are intended to address questions that are inherently difficult and scientifically risky, but necessary to accelerate the pace of scientific discovery and advance human health. The HRHR program has resulted in many exciting breakthroughs, including a potential molecular treatment that could reverse changes associated with aging at the cellular level, safer ways to treat gut inflammation using therapeutic bacteria, and a potential new type 2 diabetes treatment that targets brain circuits that control glucose metabolism.

New Initiatives

I would like to highlight two new NIH initiatives within the Office of the Director that will be essential to restoring trust in NIH and advancing the health of all Americans. First, NIH will continue its work to better understand the cause of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and associated conditions, and to translate that causal research into better treatment strategies that improve quality of life and address ASD community priorities. The goal of this Understanding ASD Initiative is to integrate diverse data to examine complex factors influencing the rapid rise in ASD. Earlier this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released data estimating that 1 in 31 children were affected by ASD in 2022, a sharp increase from previous years. ASD has many potential causes, and understanding its etiology is crucial to treating and preventing the range of conditions this disorder presents. Working with patient organizations and the autism community, NIH is committed to finding causes, risk factors, and treatments through investments in research programs and coordination of interagency activity. NIH will fund researchers across the United States to use methods ranging from basic science to epidemiological approaches to help millions of families manage the difficulties that arise with having a child with ASD.

Second, NIH is making a strategic shift toward ensuring human-based research technologies are incorporated throughout NIH-funded science. This new initiative aims to expand the development and use of cutting-edge, non-animal models—such as organoids, tissue chips, computational models, and real-world data—to address long-standing translational challenges in biomedical research.

NIH will establish the Office of Research Innovation, Validation, and Application (ORIVA). ORIVA will coordinate NIH-wide efforts to develop, validate, and expand the use of non-animal research methods, while serving as a central hub for interagency collaboration and regulatory alignment to support public health. This initiative reflects NIH’s commitment to advancing



innovative, translationally effective research while aligning with broader federal efforts to reduce reliance on animal models where an alternative approach may provide more value.

The U.S. biomedical enterprise is primed to Make America Healthy Again, and NIH Institutes are dedicated to working together to address the range of diseases and scientific problems we face. Each Institute provides a specific research focus, recruiting experts from across the United States. However, we also tackle the toughest problems together as one agency, with cross-cutting platform initiatives that engage multidisciplinary teams to address issues like chronic conditions, data science, drug development, neurodegenerative diseases, and mental health. NIH is ready to continue to support vital research to enhance the health of the American people and rebuild the trust in the agency for many years to come.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Mission 1
Overview of Budget Request 2
Overview of Performance 19
All Purpose Table 22
Impact of Budget Level on Performance 23

OVERALL APPROPRIATIONS

Budget Mechanism Table 24
Narrative By Activity Table/Header Table 26
Program Descriptions and Accomplishments 27
Funding History (Five-Year Funding Table) 40
Summary of Request Narrative 41
Outputs and Outcomes 45
Grant Awards Table 64

SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES

Budget Request by IC (Summary Table) 65
Appropriations Adjustment Tables (FY 2024) 66
Appropriations Adjustment Tables (FY 2025) 67
Budget Mechanism Table 68
Budget Authority by Object Class Including Type 1 Diabetes 70
Budget Authority by Object Class Including SSF and MF 71
Detail of Full-Time Equivalent Employment (FTE) 72
Programs Proposed for Elimination 73
Physician’s Comparability Allowance Worksheet 74
Statistical Data: Direct and Indirect Costs Awarded 75
RPGs – Total Number of Awards and Funding 76
RPGs – Success Rates 77
Total R01 Equivalent Data for First-Time and Established Investigators 78
MF General Statement 79
MF Budget Authority by Activity 79
MF Budget Authority by Object Class 80

MF Detail of Positions	81
SSF General Statement	82
SSF Budget Authority by Activity.....	82
SSF Budget Authority by Object Class	83
SSF Detail of Positions	84
LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS	
Legislative Proposals	85
COMMON FUND	
Common Fund	87
Summary	91
Major Changes	92
Budget Mechanism Table	93
Budget by Initiative.....	94
Justification of Budget Request	95
OFFICE OF AIDS RESEARCH	
Office of AIDS Research	101
Summary	105
Budget Authority by Institute, Center, and Office.....	106
Budget Authority by Mechanism.....	107
Budget Authority by Research Capacity Goal.....	108
Justification of Budget Request	109

General Notes

1. FY 2025 Enacted levels cited in this document reflect the FY 2025 full-year continuing resolution (Public Law 119-4) and include the effects of the FY 2025 HIV/AIDS transfer.
2. FY 2026 FTE levels reflect estimates and are subject to change.
3. Detail in this document may not sum to the subtotals and totals due to rounding.