

MEMORANDUM

To: Francis Collins
CC: Jim Anderson, Chris Lynch
Re: ONR Budget

Dear Dr. Collins:

We want to express our appreciation to you, as well as to Drs. Anderson and Lynch for their leadership and tireless efforts in working to advocate for the inclusion of a nutrition agenda in the broader NIH work. As you know, with nutrition research occurring across NIH Institutes and Centers, the Office of Nutrition Research's (ONR) work is essential for coordinating and advancing nutrition research across NIH and with other federal agencies. To that end, we want to express the importance of robust budget for the ONR to ensure that its transfer to the Office of the Director is a successful one.

Poor nutrition is challenging almost every aspect of our society, contributing to poor health, health inequity, and preventable healthcare spending. A [recent NIH analysis](#) evaluated the leading risk factors and causes of death and disability in the United States, compared the amount of dedicated NIH funding for each these factors, and concluded that large disparities exist between the top causes of poor health and the research funding allocated to address them, with the largest gap existing for nutrition.

Robust funding to secure leadership, staffing, and resources to effectively oversee inter-NIH and external coordination will ensure the ONR's continued success. Increased federal coordination and investment from ONR into nutrition research could accelerate discoveries across numerous critical areas and positively impact public health, societal equity, the economy, national security, as well as bolster the nation's resilience to new threats.

Given the myriad of relevant and needed research areas that fall under the ONR's purview – indispensable for other NIH institutes, as well as for the health of the nation – a strong budget would allow for the NIH and ONR to establish a sturdy platform and increased capacities to:

- Strengthen existing close communication and coordination with the NIH Director, other divisions and offices within the NIH Office of the Director, and nutrition activities across all the NIH institutes and centers
- Ensure successful implementation of the [2020-2030 Strategic Plan for NIH Nutrition Research](#) and [NIH Common Fund Precision Nutrition Initiative](#)
- Build and coordinate new and enhanced collaborative relationships and synergies within the NIH, with other federal departments and agencies (e.g., USDA, DOD, VA, CMS, CDC, FDA, etc.), and with external stakeholders – including public-private partnerships – to drive nutrition research and innovation
- Provide guidance on rigorous research methodology
- Offer trainings to build the next generation of diverse scientists capable of addressing diet-related diseases and health disparities

- Enhance approaches and resources to support analyses and reporting of the NIH nutrition research portfolio
- Increase the impact, visibility, and dissemination of nutrition science findings, including through efforts of new and enhanced communications specialists
- Structure a more formalized approach to engage strong external advisory mechanisms and strengthen input from other federal departments and agencies, academic institutions, advocacy groups, state and local governments, community members, and other stakeholders

We also hope such funding will assist in securing a strong and permanent ONR director (understanding that Dr. Lynch, while an able and skilled director, is a temporary one), who would also serve as the NIH Associate Director for Nutrition Research. Similar to the NIH Office of Disease Prevention Director who also serves as the NIH Associate Director for Prevention ([P.L. 99-158](#)), this role is of the utmost importance in growing an area of study that has [historically been under-represented](#) in federal research.

Stronger funding would also ensure sufficient staffing and resources for ONR by retaining and securing additional mid- and senior-level scientific staff and communications specialists. The funding would also be used to establish new areas of focus, similar to the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research and Office of Dietary Supplements.

Conclusion

Support from the NIH Director's discretionary fund would bolster the ONR's vital work and ensure success after its [recent move](#) to the Office of the Director. Such funding would allow for the permanent appointment of a strong long-term director for the ONR, ensure adequate staffing and resources, and bolster indispensable and cutting-edge nutrition research. It is time we close the deadly gap between our investment in nutrition research and the heavy toll diet-related conditions wreak upon our nation. We would like to offer our assistance to support this important effort to invest in the future of nutrition research.

Best,