

On April 2, the House Labor HHS Appropriations Subcommittee held a hearing on the Fiscal Year 2020 NIH budget request. NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins' opening statement and a webcast of the hearing can be found [here](#). Witnesses included:

- Dr. Francis Collins, Director NIH
- Dr. Diana W. Bianchi, Director, Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
- Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
- Dr. Gary Gibbons, Director, National Heart Lung and Blood Institute
- Dr. Doug Lowy, Deputy Director, National Cancer Institute
- Dr. Nora Volkow, Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse

At the beginning of the hearing Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) said she intends to hold hearings with other NIH institutes not represented at the hearing later this year.

She also said that Congress will reject the Trump administration's proposed cuts to NIH. She noted that the budget would slash funding for research on Alzheimer's, cancer and infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS. She made it clear that the committee will continue to invest in NIH research despite the administration's "shortsighted and misguided budget." Ranking member Tom Cole (R-OK) concurred and said that NIH will "do pretty well" as Congress works through the FY20 appropriations process.

Dr. Collins used his opening statement to highlight individual success stories due to medical research focusing on individuals participating in NIH studies including the All of Us Research Program, Down Syndrome, and Sickle Cell Disease. He said that NIH research is making these and new stories possible every day.

Several members brought up prioritizing research conducted by younger scientists. Dr. Collins told the panel that in five years the NIH more than doubled the number of early career investigators receiving grants, from around 600 in 2013 to nearly 1,300 in 2018.

Other Items of interest that came up during opening statements and questioning include:

DeLauro (D-CT) - The committee has provided needed funding for the opioid crisis and she believes that funding is also needed to address the gun violence emergency.

Cole (R-OK) - Supports enacted bill language on indirect costs. Want to maintain important protection for these grants.

Cole – Elaborate on potential of All of Us research program.

Collins – flagship initiative for NIH, goal is precision medicine – determine what works. The momentum behind the initiative is substantial and he wants to be able to sustain it going forward. He noted that it will open to researchers later this year. The initiative is funded in part by the annual appropriations process and in part by 21st Century Cures – he noted that funding will go down just as the initiative is ramping up. In total, the law is supposed to provide \$1.5 billion for the project over 10 years, but it is scheduled to decrease from \$186 million in FY19 to \$149 million in FY20.

Cole - indicated appropriators would aim to prevent this decrease.

Cole (R-OK) – Spoke about the success of IDeA.

Collins – wonderful investment in states and talent. Current funding \$361 million – 1% but extremely effective.

Lowey (D-NY) – e-cigarettes are a public health risk. What are we learning about them and what more should the public know about their harm?

Gibbons - Leading cause of cardiovascular disease is tobacco use. Have a lot to learn about what they do to development and their effects.

Volkow – area of great concern. In 2018 38% of 12th graders reported vaping. Already know nicotine is addictive and harmful. If kids start with vaping they are more likely to move to combustible tobacco. Nicotine influences the development of the brain – referenced the ABCD study and also that vaping is one way teens are using cannabinoids.

Harris (R-MD)– referenced the global availability of CBD. He says CBD is clearly a drug and now an FDA licensed drug. He says it makes sense that research needs to be done before it becomes widely available. What is the current state of research on CBD?

Volkow – Concerning that people are buying CBD with the expectation that it cures something and are forgoing other treatments. Many of the claims regarding the usefulness CBD do not have substantiated evidence behind them. She is also very concerned about the use of CBD to treat opioid use disorder and the fact that some people are moving towards CBD and away from MAT. The ABCD study and the HEALthy Brain and Child Development (BCD) Study will look at brain development and NIDA hopes to look at how CBD affects this.

Harris – He hopes to pass legislation to make it easier to study cannabis.

Pocan (D-WI) – he wanted to know what the impact would be on research on Kratom if it was made a schedule I drug.

Volkow – She noted that schedule I status makes research much harder and restricts the source of a drug/compound (used marijuana as an example). She said NIDA has been working with FDA and DEA to create a path to allow researchers to work with schedule I substances so there is no delay in the work/momentum.

DeLauro and Lee (D-CA) - criticized Trump's budget for making deep cuts to research on HIV as well as global prevention efforts, despite the president's goal of ending HIV in the U.S. in the next decade.

Fauci - said he was also concerned about the president's proposed cuts to HIV/AIDS research saying they are doing the best they can with what they have but are concerned if there are cuts they will have to slow things down.

Roybal-Allard (D-CA) – Asked about animal-based models and what NIH has done to identify models where studies are not successful when applied to humans.

Collins – There are examples where studies have not been as successful, but others that allow us to develop therapies faster because of using animal models. Have to make sure picking the best model and investing sufficiently to make progress. He mentioned that NIH has moved away from using chimpanzees.

Clark (D-MA) – Asked about the gap between treatment that white youth are receiving in contrast to that which those of color are receiving. Is NIDA doing work to better understand and find solutions for the growing gap and disparities in treatment?

Volkow- Yes, there is a disparity in the way approaching treatment intervention. NIDA is funding research to develop models to provide evidence quality of care for screening and treatment of individuals with OUD. Addresses the difficulties in bringing models of care to place like rural communities. This is a key priority for the \$500 million that Congress appropriated to address the opioid crisis. Another issue affecting minorities overwhelmingly is the criminalization of individuals with an addiction. NIDA is developing models of care and research targeting justice setting to prevent this from happening.

Clark (D-MA) – Seeing a rise in mental health issues for young adults. Do you believe we have comorbidities happening, are they tied and what kind of work is NIDA doing on increasing substance use disorders and increasing mental health issues for young adults?

Volkow – incentivizing in Hill initiative how to address treatment of OUD that have a comorbid mental illness.

Harris (R-MD) – Decision on the use of fetal tissue for research and where is the tissue obtained?

Collins - Deadline extended until June because the HHS review is not complete. Programs have been linked up with a UCSF source. HHS wanted research to go forward in the meantime. Collins said there is an existing contract with UCSF but said he would get back to Harris on the source of UCSF's fetal tissue.

Roybal-Allard (D-CA) – Are current measles cases more virulent or dangerous? Can choosing not to vaccinate create public health emergency?

Fauci – No indication that more virulent but there is a perception that it is not a serious disease. The situation of not vaccinating and leading to the cases we are seeing now will create a public health emergency. There have been more cases already in 2019 than all of 2018 due to under-vaccination of children. He said that NIAID does not do research on vaccine acceptance but on why immunity wanes in a small percentage of people.