

May 21, 2020

Francis Collins MD, PhD
Director, National Institutes of Health (NIH)
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Re: NIH Emergency Supplemental Funding for SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 Research

Dear Dr. Collins,

On behalf of the Endocrine Society, I am writing today to request your support for critical endocrine-related research related to SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19. While we welcome the additional supplementary funds provided by the Congress to several institutes and centers (ICs) to support research priorities related to the current pandemic, other ICs are better prepared to advance research on COVID-19 in scientific areas within their mission. We encourage you to use the Director's transfer authority and other mechanisms as appropriate (e.g., joint FOAs, OD funds) to ensure that needed COVID-19 research across NIH ICs can be supported without jeopardizing progress on other research priorities.

Below, we share some examples of vital opportunities within the missions of ICs that have not been granted funding by Congress through recent emergency supplemental packages, which we urge you to support:

COVID-19 Comorbidities Require Additional Research by the National Institute of Diabetes, Digestive, and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK): Diabetes has quickly emerged as one of the most threatening comorbidities for COVID-19, precipitating significantly higher rates of death and severe kidney and other complications which require further study. Obesity may drive diabetes-related COVID-19 complications and may exert its own independent adverse effects. Additionally, we now know that the virus can have severe and widespread impacts on other endocrine organs and diseases, and that there are significant disparities in disease progression and outcomes. Researchers funded by NIDDK have expertise that could help us understand the mechanisms underlying the additional risks posed by endocrine and metabolic disorders and improve therapeutic approaches for such patients when affected by COVID-19.

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) Can Help us Understand Environmental Impacts on COVID-19: The environment is understood to be a universal contributor to disease burden, including for COVID-19. NIEHS-funded researchers are ready to explore environmental factors, including exposures to endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs), that impact susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection and the severity of disease. Endocrine scientists funded by NIEHS can also aid our understanding of how our environment can influence psychological stress for patients affected by COVID-19 and their families. As the pandemic continues NIEHS will be instrumental in determining additional potential sources of infection such as waste and water sources, the potential health effects of personal or community use of disinfectant products, and developing strategies to protect health care workers from occupational exposures to SARS-CoV-2.



National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)-Sponsored Research Needed to Understand Effects Across the Lifespan: As we learn more about the virus' impacts on various body systems, NIH will be called upon to advance our understanding of the short- and long-term effects of COVID-19 on maternal and infant health, child development, as well as acute and chronic pediatric manifestations of COVID-19, including Kawasaki disease. NICHD-funded researchers stand ready to ensure that these populations are included in clinical research on COVID-19 therapeutics. NICHD can also mobilize trans-NIH initiatives such as the NIH Pediatric Research Consortium to advance research facilitating the use of telemedicine for pediatric visits, and study the impact of the “digital divide” on children without reliable internet access given widespread school closures. Finally, indirect effects of COVID-19 on pediatric health, including interruptions in routine care, delays in immunization, and/or care for chronic diseases of childhood, are deserving of additional study.

Funding these and other research priorities across the NIH is necessary to maximize the returns on our research investment, improve outcomes for people who develop COVID-19, and understand the long-term effects on populations and society. We believe a trans-NIH approach will be required to address the pandemic, including intramural and extramural expertise, and with attention to endocrine-related research. We urge NIH to foster collaboration among the different ICs to support joint FOAs addressing the priorities mentioned above. Relevant NIH offices, such as the Office of Research on Women's Health, should also be consulted to ensure that research funds are wisely spent and appropriately consider sex as a biological variable. Throughout the NIH response, attention to health disparities is of critical importance. We respectfully request that NIH ensure that emergency supplemental funds are distributed across all NIH ICs so that these and other priorities can be funded without losing progress on other important research areas. We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss these issues with you and I have instructed Joe Laakso, PhD, the Endocrine Society's Director of Science Policy to reach out to your staff to find a mutually agreeable option for a videoconference.

Sincerely,

Gary D. Hammer, MD, PhD
President
Endocrine Society

Cc: Michael S. Lauer, MD
Carrie Wolinetz, PhD