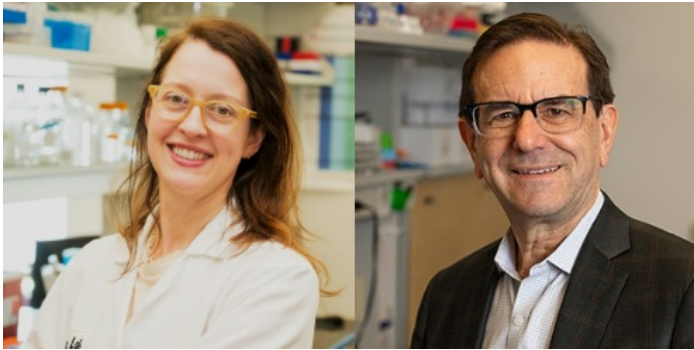


May 2025



The Impacts of NIH Cuts and Uncertainty on Cancer Research Trainees

By Larisa Nonn, PhD, and Jan Kitajewski, PhD



Larisa Nonn, PhD, is Associate Director, Cancer Research Training and Education Coordination (CRTEC), at the University of Illinois Cancer Center.

Jan Kitajewski, PhD, is Director of the University of Illinois Cancer Center.

Commentary Overview

- Uncertainties in funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the abrupt termination of several NIH-supported institutional biomedical training programs have profoundly affected cancer trainees at all levels.
- The pause in NIH grant council meetings and the cancellation of study section reviews has made faculty members hesitant to oversee predoctoral students, led institutions to reduce the number of admitted students, and affected the ability to find mentors for cancer center-run summer programs.
- The loss of key training grants and fellowships threatens not only individual career trajectories but the future of biomedical research as a whole and the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans.

Cancer centers across America catalyze our nation's preeminence in biomedical research through workforce training and development. Research leaders in these centers invite the best and the brightest to join their labs and, in turn, position these trainees to build a future with better health and a strong economy.

In all 50 states, from rural areas and small towns to suburbs and big cities, young people step forward to become scientists. They start with science fairs and volunteering in labs, eventually transitioning to physicians caring for cancer patients and doctorate researchers finding new drugs. Just in our own two labs, trainees come from Texas, North Carolina, Illinois, New Jersey, and California, as well as from other nations, just like our scientific forefathers, some of whom are now Nobel laureates and pharmaceutical industry leaders.

When these trainees enter a laboratory at a cancer center, they are positioned for success. That is what cancer centers do, with dedicated offices for training, under the umbrella of the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Research Training and Education Coordination (CRTEC), which create programming and infrastructure to assure a strong pathway for all levels of trainees.

The recent uncertainties in funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the abrupt termination of several NIH-supported institutional biomedical training programs have profoundly affected cancer trainees at all levels. The cancer centers are strong stewards of this funding. By translating support into action, they make new scientists.

Indirect Effects of NIH Cuts on Cancer Trainees

The pause in NIH grant council meetings and the cancellation of study section reviews has heightened financial concerns among faculty members, making them hesitant to oversee predoctoral students. At the University of Illinois Cancer Center and nationwide, graduate programs are attempting to address this challenge by reducing the number of admitted students for the fall 2025 cohorts. The funding uncertainty has also affected our ability to find mentors for the high school and undergraduate students in our cancer center-run summer programs.

Direct Impact of Program Terminations

Nationwide, the termination of key training grants supported by the NIH's National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS)—including the K12 Institutional Research and Academic Career Development Award (IRACDA), R25 Postbaccalaureate Research Education Program (PREP), T34 Bridge to Baccalaureate (B2B), and the Maximizing Opportunities for Scientific and Academic Independent Careers (MOSAIC) K99/R00 awards—has dismantled crucial pathways for undergraduate, postbaccalaureate, and postdoctoral scholars pursuing cancer research careers. At University Illinois Chicago (UIC) specifically, the Postbaccalaureate Research Education Program (PREP) was terminated in its second year, B2B in its fourth year, and IRACDA in its fifth year.

Taking a deeper dive into UIC IRACDA (co-directed by Dr. Nonn), the competing renewal proposal for our IRACDA was never reviewed, as study sections were canceled and the program dissolved. The UIC IRACDA program was highly successful, supporting 14 postdoctoral scholars, with two of the senior scholars obtaining K99/R00 awards, and four of the five matriculated scholars obtaining tenure-track faculty positions. One of the K99/R00 awardees had her award terminated, and she is currently in the middle of her faculty interviews.

Trainees nationwide have worked tirelessly to secure positions in PhD, PREP, and IRACDA programs, often relocating from across the country—only to find their opportunities revoked through no fault of their own. The sudden loss of these programs threatens not only individual career trajectories but the future of biomedical research training as a whole.

In addition, at our institution, we lost existing NIH Supplements to Increase Diversity, and those submitted in Fall 2024 were not reviewed. These supplements have been instrumental in expanding the scope of research projects and providing financial support to trainees who are underrepresented in science.

Call to Action

Although these NIH-related concerns are at the top of our minds, the cuts have not been widely reported, leaving much of the public unaware of the impact. Moreover, institutions are focused on the larger research program cuts and indirect cost recovery. One thing we can do is share the consequences of these cuts with our friends, family, and colleagues. We need to spread the word, tell the stories of the trainees, and highlight the importance of bringing fresh minds into science.

We call on you to reach out to your legislators and tell them how the loss of funding for training has impacted your institution. Give them details and real numbers to consider. The future of cancer research is at stake – and so are the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans.

Our Mission

The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) represents over 100 premier academic and freestanding cancer centers in the United States and Canada. AACI

About AACI Commentary

To promote the work of its members, AACI publishes *Commentary*, a monthly editorial series focusing on major issues of common interest to North American

is accelerating progress against cancer by enhancing the impact of academic cancer centers and promoting cancer health equity.

cancer centers, authored by cancer center leaders and subject matter experts.

Copyright 2025 | Association of American Cancer Institutes



Share This Email



Share This Email



Share This Email

Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) | Medical Arts Building 3708 Fifth Ave, Suite 503
| Pittsburgh, PA 15213 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!