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September 5, 2019

AACI Supports NCI Plan to Increase Success Rate for Cancer Research Grant Applications

The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) commends the National Cancer Institute (NCI) on the release of its Annual Plan & Budget Proposal for Fiscal Year 2021 and its request for \$6.9 billion in funding. Stable, predictable funding is necessary for AACI's 98 member cancer centers to continue to make advances against cancer.

AACI also greatly appreciates NCI Acting Director **Douglas R. Lowy, MD**, highlighting the 50-percent increase in grant applications to NCI over the past five years. Unfortunately, that increase has outpaced NCI's ability to fund research proposals at an acceptable rate.

The FY 2018 success rate for NCI applications was 12 percent, while the rate for the rest of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) was 22 percent. Under its new budget proposal, NCI would begin raising the grant approval payline—the cutoff point used to determine which applications will be funded—from the current 8th percentile to the 15th, opening the door to funding additional research proposals. The association maintains an open dialogue with NCI leadership and staff regarding potential solutions.

“The NCI's bypass budget indicates a shared interest in increasing the payline for grant applications. This cannot be achieved without an additional investment in the NCI. Failing to increase the payline threatens our momentum in cancer discoveries, and undermines the contributions of researchers seeking their first grant or renewal,” said **Roy A. Jensen, MD**, AACI president and director of The University of Kansas Cancer Center.

In August, AACI sent a letter to House and Senate appropriators and congressional leadership regarding the NCI payline, underscoring the boom in grant proposals, and stressing the need for more support from Congress.

A survey of cancer center directors found that 88 percent supported AACI's advocacy for



increasing the NCI payline to the 15th percentile, allowing for an overall funding success rate of 18 percent.

The case for an increased payline is straightforward: By 2040, new cancer cases globally are expected to grow to 27.5 million. In the U.S., there will be an estimated 1.76 million new cancer cases diagnosed just in 2019. More research is our best defense against this disease.

“Every advance in understanding cancer is the result of years—even decades—of work,” said **Karen E. Knudsen, MBA, PhD**, AACI vice president/president-elect, and enterprise director of Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center at Jefferson Health in Philadelphia. “Reversing the shortfall in cancer research grant approvals means a stronger economy, a vibrant cancer research community, and better cancer care. We applaud Dr. Lowy and the NCI on this sound budget proposal for FY 2021.”

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The [Association of American Cancer Institutes](#) (AACI) comprises 98 premier academic and freestanding cancer research centers in the U.S. and Canada. AACI is dedicated to reducing the burden of cancer by enhancing the impact of the leading academic cancer centers.