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2022 AACI/AACR Hill Day Highlights Importance of Strong Funding, Continued Advocacy

By Jaren Love



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Commentary Overview

- Bipartisan efforts in Congress over the past decade have led to funding increases for the National Institutes of Health, but funding for the National Cancer Institute has not kept pace with that of other institutes.
- Advocating for cancer research funding is particularly important now, in light of President Biden's focus on initiatives like ARPA-H and the Cancer Moonshot 2.0.
- Ongoing engagement with the NIH, NCI, Congress, and the Biden administration is key to accelerating progress against cancer.

On June 15, AACI jointly hosted the 2022 virtual Hill Day with the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR). During 87 meetings with legislators, cancer center directors, researchers, physician-scientists, cancer survivors, and other advocates made the case for robust, sustained federal investments in biomedical research—and cancer research in particular—through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI).

Bipartisan efforts in Congress over the past decade have led to increased support for the NIH. Specifically, Congress has increased the NIH budget by \$14.9 billion—more than 49 percent—over the last seven fiscal years. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, AACI is advocating for an increase of \$4.1 billion for the NIH. We are also asking Congress to provide at least \$7.766 billion—a roughly \$850 million increase—for the NCI in FY 2023, in line with the NCI director's professional judgment budget.

These increases are especially important now, in light of President Joe Biden's focus on the ARPA-H and Cancer Moonshot 2.0 initiatives and ongoing concerns regarding the NCI payline.

ARPA-H: An Innovation Incubator

President Biden has made it a priority to launch the [Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health \(ARPA-H\)](#), which is modeled after the [Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency \(DARPA\)](#).

With ARPA-H, the Biden administration hopes to bring DARPA's spirit of innovation to the health care research enterprise. While the debate continues on how its mission should be executed, the first \$1 billion to establish ARPA-H was allocated in the FY 2022 budget. Potential cancer-related targets for ARPA-H include multi-cancer blood tests and the use of mRNA technology to develop a cancer vaccine.

At an ARPA-H listening session hosted by the White House last summer, AACI urged that the new agency complement, rather than diminish, the base budget for the NIH and the NCI, and that Congress should commit to increased funding for these agencies outside of ARPA-H funding.

The president's budget proposal for FY 2023, announced in March, allocated \$5 billion of NIH funding to ARPA-H. We will continue to advocate for complementary funding to ensure that the advances made possible by ARPA-H don't come at the expense of other cancer research discoveries.

A Revamped Cancer Moonshot

Earlier this year, President Biden acted to extend the focus on cancer research by revamping the Cancer Moonshot, originally established after his son, Beau, died from brain cancer at 46 years old. The Cancer Moonshot, passed as a part of the larger 21st Century Cures Act signed by President Barack Obama in 2016, authorized \$1.8 billion in funds for cancer research, spread out over seven years.

President Biden launched [Cancer Moonshot 2.0](#) at a White House event attended by AACI Executive Director **Jennifer Pegher**. AACI strongly supports the Moonshot goals of earlier cancer diagnoses, better prevention, and a greater focus on cancer disparities, and maintains an open dialogue with the president's Moonshot team.

Opportunities for Continued Advocacy

While there are many reasons for optimism in relation to federal support for cancer research, there are also areas of serious concern, including the discrepancy between the percentage of research grants funded by the NCI and that of other NIH institutes. This discrepancy and the decline in NCI-funded grants from 28 percent in 1997 to 8 percent in 2019 were discussed in depth in the [February 2022 Commentary](#). While incremental progress has been made, the NCI continues to lag behind other institutes. The consequences of this shortfall can't be overstated. Without appropriate funding, promising science—even potential cures—may not see the light of day, discouraging emerging scientists from pursuing cancer research.

The joint Hill Day allowed advocates to further highlight the benefits of a strong investment in the NIH and NCI. Legislators and staff on both sides of the aisle expressed their support for funding the NIH and NCI.

AACI looks forward to continued engagement with the NIH, NCI, Congress, and the Biden administration to realize the ambitions of the Cancer Moonshot 2.0 and foster new research discoveries through ARPA-H, bringing us closer to our shared goal of ending cancer as we know it.

AACI Government Relations Forum

The AACI Government Relations (GR) Forum meets monthly via Zoom. All AACI cancer centers are welcome to participate.

The meetings provide a platform for AACI government relations colleagues to share what their cancer centers are working on and discuss concerns, legislative updates, and other issues impacting their center or state.

Our Mission

The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) represents 104 premier academic and freestanding cancer centers in the United States and Canada. AACI is accelerating progress against cancer by empowering North America's leading cancer centers in their shared mission to alleviate suffering.

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

