



January 5, 2009

Dear President-elect Obama:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Society for Neuroscience's (SfN) priorities for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) during this critical transition period. SfN represents more than 38,000 scientists and physicians devoted to advancing the understanding of the brain and nervous system. Many of our members receive funding through the NIH, as well as other federal sources, including the National Science Foundation (NSF). Our members are working to make scientific discoveries that increase understanding of the brain and will lead to treatments and new hope for millions of patients suffering with neurological and psychiatric disorders. These include many conditions that are among the most devastating for families and the American health care system: Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, traumatic brain injury, vision loss, paralysis, depression, schizophrenia, addiction, and others.

SfN stands ready to work with the new administration to advance science, health, and education. This can be accomplished, in part, by realizing President-elect Obama's pledge to double research funding within 10 years. To this end, we urge the President-elect and Secretary of Health and Human Services-designate to quickly appoint leaders to NIH, NSF, and other important scientific posts to further the administration's commitment to science, science education, and research. SfN submits the following priorities and recommendations for consideration by the transition team:

- **Support Science and Research as Drivers of Economic Recovery** — Biomedical research supported by the NIH, NSF, and other federal agencies is an essential national economic engine. It supports research that produces the discoveries that lead to new medical treatments and hope for families, while simultaneously benefitting local and national economies. A strong investment in these agencies helps ensure that the U.S. remains a competitive global science leader. Additionally, NIH funding is a major stimulus in local communities, producing high-wage jobs that spur increased economic output in the form of goods and services. Every dollar of NIH funding generates more than twice as much in state economic output. Including at least \$1.2 billion for NIH in the economic recovery bill allows high-quality, peer-reviewed grants already in the pipeline to be distributed immediately to research universities and institutions nationwide. These are strong projects deemed highly worthy of funding but they have fallen prey to the severe budget constraints currently imposed. Additional funding could enable funding of these projects within weeks, creating immediate jobs and economic stimulus while simultaneously making a concrete investment in major health issues of our time.
- **Ensure Strong, Predictable, and Sustainable Funding for Research** — For FY2009, SfN joined biomedical research advocacy groups and coalitions in urging further predictable, regular expansion of the nation's investment in biomedical research. The community urges Congress and the incoming administration to adopt an increase for the NIH budget of \$1.9 billion (6.6 percent) in FY2009. If increases are maintained near this level in FY2010 and beyond, such funding would permit the world's preeminent medical research enterprise to reinvigorate and sustain the momentum for discovery, restoring the purchasing power lost by NIH over six years of stagnant funding. SfN also urges inclusion of \$6.9 billion for NSF in the final FY2009 bill recognizing that basic and health-related neuroscience also depends on computational, chemical, and physical science advances, as well as educational efforts that originate at NSF.
- **Maintain Peer-Reviewed, Investigator-Initiated Research as the Bedrock of Biomedical Research Enterprise** — Numerous factors have made the NIH system the envy of the biomedical world and are crucial



to maintain. Foremost is its rigorous and impartial peer review process based on scientific merit, which is used for distributing research grants. Ensuring that this system remains the core mechanism for determining awards and grants is central to the integrity of U.S. scientific research. SfN commends NIH for conducting a thorough and participatory review of its peer review system and for making recommendations that seek to ensure it funds the best science, by the best scientists, with the least amount of administrative burden.

Additionally, NIH must continue to place a high priority on investigator-initiated grants, such as individual R01 and collaborative PO1 grants, which allow scientists to introduce innovation and new discoveries to their various fields. Unfortunately, funding for R01 grants has declined from 74.6 percent of the research grant budget in 2000 to 65.2 percent in 2007, and PO1 grants are under similar pressure. SfN urges the administration to preserve these important grant mechanisms as well as other mechanisms for investigator-initiated research, which are the foundation of the American biomedical research enterprise.

- **Support and Protect Responsible Use of Animals in Research** — Animal research has played a vital role in nearly every major medical advance of the last century and will be essential to the next decades' advances. In recent years, there has been an alarming increase in attacks on biomedical researchers conducting legal and necessary research by extremists who oppose all animal research using illegal tactics and methods. The FBI has classified many of these incidents as acts of domestic terrorism and most of the scientists targeted by these terrorist activities are funded by NIH. SfN believes that NIH must play a key role in ensuring that federally-funded neuroscientists and other investigators are assured of their safety in the face of threats against them and their families. For more information and SfN animal research resources, visit www.sfn.org/animals.
- **Ensure Opportunities for Young Researchers** — The March 2008 report *A Broken Pipeline? Flat Funding of the NIH Puts a Generation of Science at Risk* warns that America stands to lose a generation of young researchers and valuable scientific discovery if the investment in NIH (and NSF) is not strengthened and sustained. Reduced funding for training programs and declining grant opportunities are discouraging talented and highly trained individuals from entering or continuing in research careers. SfN recognizes the NIH has made an important number of steps to ensure that the most talented young scientists are brought into the research community, but the economic difficulties of the past year, along with the tight funding for research, have put the future of the present cohort of postdoctoral researchers at risk. This affects a generation of scientists just at the time when they are ready to assume independent research and teaching positions. We cannot afford to lose this talent pool just when they are able trained to become the next wave of scientific leaders.
- **Encourage Cross-Institutional Collaboration at NIH** — As NIH continues to examine and improve its organization, SfN encourages the expansion of cross-NIH Institutional collaboration, exemplified by the NIH Blueprint for Neuroscience Research. The Blueprint, a cooperative effort among the 16 NIH Institutes, Centers and Offices, pools resources and expertise to support the development of new tools, training opportunities, and other resources to assist neuroscientists in both basic and clinical research. Through the creation of resources of general utility for neuroscience research, the Blueprint aims to accelerate neuroscience research and to reduce the burden of nervous system disorders. Replicating this innovative model across various scientific disciplines would enable NIH to maximize its resources and foster increased collaboration across its 27 institutes and centers. SfN also applauds the innovative collaboration between NIH and NSF to foster the development of quantitative methods in neuroscience, and feels this is a model that can be expanded.

SfN looks forward to assisting the Obama administration in promoting biomedical research as a top national priority. More information on SfN advocacy priorities and activities is available at www.sfn.org/gpa, and please feel free to contact Mona Miller, Senior Director for Communications & Public Affairs, at (202) 962-4000 or mmiller@sfn.org with questions or requests for additional information.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Carew
President

Michael E. Goldberg
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Past President