



NAEVR
National Alliance For
Eye And Vision Research

Serving as Friends of the National Eye Institute

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FEDERAL FUNDING FOR VISION RESEARCH IS VITAL

The National Eye Institute (NEI) within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is responsible for funding sight-saving and sight-restoring vision research. Congressional actions in Fiscal Years (FY) 2014-2016 have restored NEI's operating budget to \$708 million—slightly above its FY2012 funding level after a \$36 million sequester cut in FY2013. After four fiscal years, the NEI budget has begun to grow minimally while its purchasing power has continued to decline due to biomedical inflation. NEI has lost 25 percent of purchasing power since FY2003.

The 2014 annual cost for vision disorders in the U.S. was \$145 billion and is projected to grow to \$373 billion by year 2050—or \$717 billion in inflation-adjusted dollars. The direct medical costs of vision disorders are the fifth highest—only less than heart disease, cancers, emotional disorders, and pulmonary conditions. Adequately funding vision research is vital since:

- NEI's FY2016 operating budget of \$708 million is still less than 0.5 percent of the \$145 billion annual cost of vision disorders. The U.S. spends only \$2.20 per-person, per-year for vision research, while the cost of treating low vision and blindness is \$6,680 per-person, per-year.
- The first wave of the 78 million Baby Boomers—also called the “Silver Tsunami”—started turning age 65 in 2010. Each day, for the next 18 years afterward, 10,000 Americans will turn age 65 and be at greatest risk for age-related eye disease.
- Vision loss can be a co-morbid condition of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, which is at epidemic levels due to the increased incidence of obesity.
- The African American and Hispanic communities, which increasingly account for a larger share of the population, experience a disproportionately greater risk of eye disease.
- A 2016 *JAMA Ophthalmology* article reported that a majority of Americans across racial and ethnic lines describe losing vision as potentially having the greatest impact on their day-to-day life, more so than loss of limb, memory, hearing, and speech.
- Vision research is a cost-effective investment since it leads to therapies that can delay or avoid vision loss and associated healthcare expenditures. Vision loss is associated with increased depression and accelerated mortality.
- The U.S. is the world leader in vision research. Without adequate funding, the NEI may not be able to pursue its primary “audacious goal” of regenerating neurons and neural connections in the eye and visual system, thereby restoring vision and returning individuals to productive, independent, and quality lives.
- The U.S. is also a leader in scientific training. Not adequately funding the NEI threatens the development of the next generation of vision scientists.