

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies

June 5, 2026

Dear Chairs Aderholt and Capito, and Ranking Members DeLauro and Baldwin:

On behalf of the Alliance for Vision Research and the undersigned organizations representing patients, providers, researchers, and industry, we thank you for your continued bipartisan leadership in supporting the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Eye Institute (NEI). As you develop the FY27 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we respectfully urge you to prioritize vision and vision research as a national priority by maintaining NEI as an independent institute, rejecting harmful policy proposals impacting the research ecosystem, and providing \$1 billion for NEI.

Vision impairment and eye disease affect nearly 100 million Americans and impose an estimated \$200 billion annually in direct and societal costs. Vision loss is closely tied to loss of independence, increased risk of injury, diminished quality of life, and broader health complications. At the same time, vision research represents one of the most translationally successful and innovation-driven areas within NIH and patient-impactful areas within NIH, delivering breakthroughs that improve health outcomes, reduce long-term healthcare costs, and preserve quality of life for millions of Americans.

Vision Research Drives Biomedical Innovation

The NEI's focused and strategic investments have positioned vision research at the forefront of biomedical innovation, generating breakthroughs that extend far beyond ophthalmology and fundamentally shape modern medicine. Vision research has repeatedly served as a catalyst for transformative advances across genetics, artificial intelligence, imaging, regenerative medicine, and precision health, including:

- The first FDA-approved gene therapy for an inherited disease, transforming treatment pathways across medicine
- The first FDA-approved autonomous AI diagnostic tool for diabetic retinopathy, expanding access to care and early detection and care
- Pioneering advances in stem cell science and regenerative medicine, including emerging therapies for corneal repair and retinal disease
- The development of advanced imaging technologies such as optical coherence tomography (OCT), now considered foundational across multiple medical specialties
- Leadership in artificial intelligence, big data, and emerging fields such as oculo-mics, where the eye is used to detect, monitor and better understand systemic disease

These breakthroughs underscore the uniquely cross-cutting nature of vision research and its ability to accelerate innovation across the broader healthcare ecosystem. Investments in vision science not only advance treatments for blinding and vision-threatening diseases, but also drive discoveries that improve diagnostics, expand access to care, reduce healthcare costs, and enhance patient outcomes across medicine.

Vision Must be a National Public Health and Research Priority

Vision is fundamental to quality of life, independence, and overall health. The eye's accessibility and connection to systemic health make it a powerful platform for early detection and intervention across diseases, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and neurodegeneration.

As the burden of vision loss continues to grow alongside an aging population, maintaining a dedicated federal focus on vision research within the NIH is essential. The NEI's independence ensures the specialized scientific expertise, targeted investments, and strategic leadership necessary to advance discovery, accelerate translational research, and improve patient outcomes.

Preserving NEI Independence is Essential to Sustained Progress

Proposals to consolidate NEI into a broader institute would jeopardize decades of scientific progress and undermine one of the most innovation-driven models within NIH. Vision science encompasses a wide range of diseases, biological systems, technologies, and translational pathways that do not align with a singular neurological framework and require dedicated expertise and prioritization. The potential consequences of consolidation include:

- Loss of dedicated scientific focus and specialized peer review expertise
- Dilution of already limited vision research funding within broader research categories
- Disruption to established clinical trial networks and translational research pipelines
- Reduced attention to non-neurological eye diseases, pediatric vision conditions, and vision rehabilitation research
- Slower progress toward treatments, cures, and preventative strategies for blinding diseases

Preserving NEI as an independent institute is critical to maintaining momentum in scientific discovery, public health advancement, and patient-centered care.

Concerns Regarding Forward Funding Proposals

We are increasingly concerned about proposals to implement a universal 100% forward funding model across all NIH grants. While multi-year funding mechanisms can provide stability in certain contexts, broadly applying this approach risks significantly reducing the number of new and competing awards in a given fiscal year.

Recent implementation of expanded forward funding in FY25 has demonstrated that such policies can lead to:

- Fewer grant opportunities for investigators, particularly early-career scientists
- Reduced flexibility to respond to emerging scientific priorities and public health needs
- Increased uncertainty across the biomedical research workforce and institutional planning processes
- A constrained pipeline for innovative and high-risk scientific ideas

A balanced funding approach is necessary and is essential to ensure both long-term stability and continued investment in scientific discovery.

Reject Arbitrary Indirect Cost Caps and Support Thoughtful Reform

We strongly oppose proposals to impose a blanket 15% cap on indirect (F&A) cost reimbursement. Such caps would significantly undermine the infrastructure that supports biomedical research nationwide and would disproportionately harm academic medical centers, research institutions, and underserved communities.

At the same time, we recognize the importance of transparency, accountability, and responsible stewardship of research funding. We support thoughtful, bipartisan reforms developed in partnership with the research community. Frameworks such as the FAIR model (referenced in the FY26 appropriations process as worthy of further consideration) offer a more constructive path forward by improving clarity and efficiency while preserving the integrity and competitiveness of the national research enterprise.

We urge Congress to continue rejecting arbitrary caps and instead pursue reforms that are:

- Developed in partnership with the research community
- Transparent, data-driven, and evidence-based
- Bipartisan, sustainable, and operationally feasible
- Designed to strengthen, not weaken, America's global research leadership

Our Requests to Congress

In light of these considerations, we respectfully request that Congress:

- Maintain the NEI as an independent institute within the NIH to ensure sustained focus on vision research
- Recognize vision and vision research as a national priority a national public health and biomedical research priority
- Provide \$1 billion in funding for NEI in FY27 to sustain innovation, address the growing burden of vision loss in the United States, and support the leading role that vision research plays across biomedical science innovation
- Reject universal forward funding proposals that would reduce new grant opportunities and destabilize the research pipeline
- Reject blanket caps on indirect costs and instead pursue thoughtful bipartisan reforms such as the FAIR model
- Continuing strong bipartisan support for NIH to ensure stability, predictability, and continued global leadership in biomedical research innovation

Thank you for your leadership and continued support of vision research and the NEI. If you have any questions or would like to discuss these issues further, please contact Dan Ignaszewski, Executive Director of Alliance for Vision Research at dan@eyersearch.org or 202-742-1885.

We stand ready to work alongside Congress to ensure that vision research remains a central pillar of the nation's biomedical research enterprise and public health strategy.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Vision Research

(Serving as Friends of the National Eye Institute with support from the 126 undersigned organizations)

Advancing Sight Network
Alliance for Aging Research
American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Optometry
American Association of Ophthalmic Oncology and Pathology
American Association of pediatric ophthalmology and strabismus (AAPOS)
American Glaucoma Society
American Macular Degeneration Foundation
American Society of Ophthalmic Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery
American Uveitis Society
Assistive Technology Consultant
Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
Association of schools and Colleges of Optometry
Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology
Bascom Palmer Eye Institute
Bausch + Lomb
BrightFocus Foundation
Case Western Reserve School of Medicine Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences
Casey Eye Institute - Oregon Health and Science University
Center for Visual Science
Chicago
Cincinnati Eye Bank
Cornea Society
Dean McGee Eye Institute
Department of Ophthalmology, University of Pennsylvania/Penn Medicine
Diorasis Therapeutics Corporation
Doheny Eye Institute
Dry Eye Foundation
Duke University Department of Ophthalmology
East Tennessee Lions Eye Bank
Emory University Department of Ophthalmology
Endocrine Nurses Society
Eye Bank Association of America
Flaum Eye Institute and Center for Visual Science, University of Rochester
Foundation Fighting Blindness
Future Leaders in Sight
Gavin Herbert Eye Institute, University of California, Irvine
Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth
Georgia Eye Bank
Glaucoma Research Foundation

Hamilton Eye Institute, University of Tennessee Health Sciences
Icahn school of medicine at mount sinia
Illinois College of Optometry
Illinois Eye and Ear Infirmary, University of Illinois at Chicago
Indiana University School of Optometry
Infusion Access Foundation
Inland Empire Lighthouse for the Blind
International Society of Ocular Oncology
Iowa Lions Eye Bank
Kellogg Eye Center/University of Michigan Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences
Kresge Eye Institute, Wayne State University
LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Lighthouse Louisiana
Lions Clubs International Foundation
Lions Eye Bank of Nebraska
Lions eye Bank of the North East
Lions World Vision Institute
Loma Linda University Health Preventive Medicine Department
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
Marshall B. Ketchum University
Massachusetts Eye And Ear
Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University
Medical College of Wisconsin
New England College of Optometry
New Mexico Lions Eye Bank
New York Eye and Ear Infirmary of Mount Sinai
New York University Grossman School of Medicine
Northwell Health Eye Institute
Northwestern Medicine
Northwestern University, Feinberg School of Medicine, Department of Ophthalmology
NPHP1 Family Foundation
NuVisions Center
Oklahoma Lions Eye Bank
Optometric Glaucoma Society
Oregon Health and Science University
Prevent Blindness
Prevent Blindness Ohio
Prevention of Blindness Society of Metropolitan Washington
Research to Prevent Blindness
Rocky Mountain University

Rush University Medical Center
Save Sight Now
Save Sight Now
Scheie Eye Institute, University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine
Sjögren's Foundation
SK technology LLC
Society for Public Health Education
Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind
TED COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION
The American Association of Ophthalmic Oncologists and Pathologists
The American Society of Ophthalmic Trauma
The American Society of Retina Specialists
The Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO)
The Cornea Society
The Dry Eye Foundation
The Eye Bank of Kentucky
The Eye-Bank for Sight Restoration
The EyeSight Foundation of Alabama
The Fairfield Fund, Inc.
The Glaucoma Foundation
The Macula Society
The Ohio State University College of Optometry
The Retina Society
The Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute
The Vision Council
University of Wisconsin
University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry
University of North Texas Health science center
University of Southern California
University of Utah John Moran Eye Center
University of Washington
USC Department of Ophthalmology
Usher 1F Collaborative
Usher Syndrome Coalition
usher syndrome society
Utah Lions Eye Bank
Verum Research, LLC
Vision Health Advocacy Coalition
Vision Institute-University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine
Vision Products

Vision Sciences Society

VisionFirst Indiana Lions Eye Bank

VisionGift

VisionServe Alliance

Washington Academy of Eye Physicians and Surgeons

Wills Eye Hospital