

July 31, 2020

Jon Lorsch, Ph.D.  
Director  
National Institute of General Medical Sciences  
Bethesda, MD  
RE: NOT-GM-20-044

Dear Dr. Lorsch:

On behalf of the American Thoracic Society (ATS), thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the draft NIGMS Strategic Plan Framework, 2021 – 2025. The ATS is a 16,000-member international medical society dedicated to the prevention, treatment, and cure of pulmonary, critical care and sleep related illnesses through research, education, patient care, and advocacy. We believe the draft plan thoughtfully articulates appropriate cross-cutting themes and objectives that effectively guide the NIGMS's efforts over the next five years. We have the following comments:

### **Goal 1: Sustain strong support for investigator-initiated research**

The ATS fully agrees with this goal to maintain top prioritization of investigator-initiated research. We note that specific support for early-career professionals is not currently articulated in the draft framework as it is in the previous strategic plan. The ATS urges the institute to maintain prioritization of support for early-career professionals. This support is particularly important now, as early-career clinician scientists have been heavily impacted during the COVID-19 public health emergency with substantially increased clinical time needed to save lives on the frontlines of the pandemic. We urge the NIGMS and all NIH institutes to support early-career scientists through expanded research funding, more mentorship opportunities and other mechanisms to support the continued career development of our next generation of scientists.

The patient-based organizations comprising the ATS Public Advisory Roundtable (PAR) strongly concur with the ATS position related to prioritizing support of early-career professionals, as sustainability of the field is an area of increasing concern for positive outcomes in our patient communities.

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**Goal 2: Invest in the Development of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce**

Although the ATS agrees with the intent of this goal, its objectives may be too broad. We recommend expansion of the specific intent and mechanisms for how this goal will be implemented to ensure equitable balance among scientists at all career levels. Moreover, we recommend that the institute include a well-articulated focus on diversity in this goal, to ensure support for minorities and women in science.

**Goal 3: Enhance Research Capacity and Critical Resources**

The ATS supports this goal but we urge the institute to ensure support for the required research capacity and technology. We agree with the need to support large-scale equipment and state-of-the-art core facilities that serve as the foundation for major advances in basic research, for example, CryoEM and synchrotron facilities which have enabled rapid technological evolution in structural biology. We also encourage continued support of high-throughput resources that serve to reach the greatest possible number of investigators pursuing wide-ranging scientific questions (e.g., NextGen sequencing and advanced cell culture platforms). In addition, we recommend expanding support for the Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) and other mechanisms to support research capacity in IDEA states.

**Goal 4: Advance the Public's Understanding of the Critical Role Played by Fundamental Biomedical Research Goal 4 – Stapleton**

The ATS supports this goal and objectives. In addition to ongoing issues including climate change and vaccination, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the significance of educating and building trust with the American public about the importance of biomedical research and the need to foster our research enterprise.

The ATS urges the institute to ensure that patients and patient organizations are involved in the development of education, outreach, and messaging to the public about scientific research. Organizations such as the ATS, which has the PAR patient partnership, can be instrumental in these efforts. The organizations comprising the ATS-PAR agree with the ATS in that public education about the critical role of scientific research across the research spectrum is a priority. The ATS encourages NIGMS to work with patient communities who are experts in public education initiatives and to value incorporation of the patient/public perspective in their educational efforts.

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**Goal 5: Maintain or Enhance Investments in the NIGMS Workforce to Better Enable Delivery of Mission****Objective 5.5.\* Develop and optimize cooperative and synergistic partnerships with other NIH institutes and centers, other federal agencies, and other organizations.**

The ATS supports the intent of objective 5.5 to develop partnerships and collaborations between NIH institutes, particularly in disease/health areas. Specifically, the ATS supports the creation of new partnerships between NIGMS and other NIH institutes including NHLBI, NIDDK, NIAID, NIEHS and NICHD, which support basic and clinical research on pulmonary, critical care and sleep related health conditions that lack an NIH institute home, such as sepsis.

Sepsis was already major public health concern in the U.S. and globally, but the COVID-19 pandemic has substantially increased the morbidity and mortality burden from this syndrome, illustrating the clear need to expand and accelerate basic, clinical, and translational research into the causes and pathogenesis of sepsis disease, as well as to develop preventive interventions, rapid point-of-care diagnostics, and more effective treatments.

The ATS appreciates the opportunity to comment on the NIGMS Draft Strategic Plan Framework. Please contact Nuala S. Moore, ATS Director of Government Relations, with any questions, at [Nmoore@thoracic.org](mailto:Nmoore@thoracic.org).

Sincerely,



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