

Letter to Editor

## The Fallout of the 2013 Budget Cuts on the NIH and the NIA and an Urgent Call for Action to Prevent Similar Cuts in the Future

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### *To the Editor:*

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) released a notice (NOT-OD-13-064; link for notice is <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-13-064.html>) which provided guidance with respect to the remainder of its fiscal-year (FY) 2013 in light of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (P.L. 113-6) signed by President Obama on March 26, 2013 and the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act, as amended, 2 U.S.C. § 901a. With respect to FY 2013 funding levels, in anticipation of future cuts, non-competing continuation awards that have already been made in FY 2013 were generally funded at levels approximately up to 90% of the previously committed level. The NIH is likely to make a fewer number of competing awards in FY 2013 because it will make an effort to keep the average size of competing awards constant at FY 2012 levels. In short, there will be fewer awards granted in FY 2013. This strongly suggests that the success rates for investigators competing for an award will be lower than prior years. While commitments for continuation awards post-2013 remain unchanged, inflationary increases for post-2013 commitments will be discontinued for all awards granted in 2013. Budget cuts will need to be applied prior to September 30, 2013 because that is when the fiscal year for government entities such as the NIH ends. That said, it is very clear that the investigators which are at risk the most are those who are competing for FY 2013 funds.

For sure, the impact of the sequestration on the NIH is significant. Instead of making across-the-board cuts, the NIH being more judicious and has applied a bottoms-up approach. It has asked each Institute or Center (IC), such as the National Institute on Aging (NIA) to develop their plan and post their fiscal policies consistent with overall NIH goals and funding allotment. The primary IC that academic geriatricians seek funds from is the NIA. Of the NIH's \$30.9 billion in FY2012, \$1.1 billion was allocated to the NIA.

The 2013 budget cuts were recently released. The appropriation to the NIH resulted in a 5.5% reduction from 2012 levels, as stated in The Sequestration Transparency Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-155). The NIA published its funding policy for FY 2013 on its website, [www.nia.nih.gov/research/dea/nia-funding-policy-fy-2013](http://www.nia.nih.gov/research/dea/nia-funding-policy-fy-2013). Specifically, the NIH's budget in 2013 will be \$29.2 billion, a \$1.7 billion decrease from its 2012 budget.

The NIA aims to meet this 5.5% cut by reducing non-competing research project grants, as well as Centers, career development, training, and scientific meeting lines. The NIA will impose an average of 18% funding reduction to the amount which was recommended by the study-section for competing research project grant (RPG) awards. Non-competing RPGs will receive awards equal to 94.5% of their committed levels for 2013. Funding for non-RPG mechanisms such as non-competing training, career development, fellowship, and scientific meeting awards will be reduced by 5.5%. The funding line for Center for Scientific Review-reviewed applications is 11% for applications with direct costs less than \$500,000

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and 8% for larger applications. The line is slightly higher for new investigators and early stage investigators. The funding line for program projects and other NIA-reviewed RPG applications is a priority score of 13. To put this in perspective, a score of 13 is essentially a perfect grant application. A true perfect score on an application is 10 and the lowest possible score is 90.

To have a successful career in research requires patience and determination. This especially holds true in 2013. Future funding rates for NIH grants are not certain. Only near perfect grant applications will likely be funded if the above-mentioned cuts are continued in the future. This not only impacts research-oriented faculty and personnel because much of their salaries are depended on grant funding, but also the cuts may cripple the ability for the NIH to achieve its goal – “to seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance

health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability.” The NIH mission statement can be found on its website at [www.nih.gov/about/mission.htm](http://www.nih.gov/about/mission.htm). In short, academic focused careers are at risk and so is the advancement of science.

The United States Congress is made up of two houses, the House of Representatives and the Senate. Your voice to the federal government is largely by way of the Congress person of your district and Senators. If NIH funds are important to you, it is advisable that your representative and senators hear your concerns. Speak now to your legislative representative to prevent similar budget cuts imposed on the NIH from happening again.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

None.