

To champion the prevention,
diagnosis, and treatment of chest
diseases through education,
communication, and research.

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Bethesda, MD 20892

Board of Regents

Doreen J. Addrizzo-Harris, MD, FCCP
President

November 24, 2023

John D. Buckley, MD, MPH, FCCP
President-Elect

Re: Request for Information (RFI): Inviting Comments and Suggestions on
Updating the NIH Mission Statement

David A. Schulman, MD, MPH, FCCP
Immediate Past President

Dear Director Bertagnolli,

John Howington, MD, MBA, FCCP
President-Designate

This letter is in response to a request for information from interest groups throughout the scientific research, advocacy, and clinical practice communities, those employed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) or at institutions receiving NIH support, and the public, on a proposed revised mission statement. The bolded language reflects differences between the current and proposed mission statements.

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Current mission statement:

"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."

Proposed revised mission statement:

"To seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and to apply that knowledge to optimize health and prevent or reduce illness for all people."

Robert De Marco, MD, FCCP
CHEST Foundation Chair

Cassie C. Kennedy, MD, FCCP
Council of Networks Chair

Semra Bilaceroglu, MD, FCCP
Council of Global Governors Chair

Chief Executive Officer

Robert A. Musacchio, PhD

1. Feedback on whether the proposed new mission statement reflects the goals and objectives as outlined in the [NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025](#)

We support the proposed revised mission statement for the reasons outlined below. The proposed revised mission statement is aligned with the broad goals and specific objectives outlined in the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan. The pursuit of health optimization, as described in the sub-objective "Developing and Optimizing Treatments, Interventions, and Cures" of Objective 1 "Advancing Biomedical and Behavioral Sciences," supports the evolution of treatment and individuation of patient needs for best possible outcomes. Health optimization also has implications for public health and the need to create responsive, agile systems that reduce illness for all people.

As reflected in Objective 3 and the crosscutting themes, social responsibility and the reduction of health disparities is a critical focus of this strategic plan. The current mission statement's stated goal to "reduce illness and disability" perpetuates health disparities and the false perception of disability as something to be cured and, by extension, disabled people as "broken" and in need of

“fixing.” This harmful narrative is one that the disability justice community has fought against for years, beginning with the rejection of eugenicist forms of institutionalization and treatment that denied autonomy and agency to people with disabilities. Creating a false equivalency between illness and disability further marginalizes people with disabilities by suggesting a separation of disability as a thing to be cured from the person living with a disability rather than a holistic and comprehensive view of the individual that includes their disability as part of their identity. Disability is a biological reality that every individual will encounter if they live long enough. The revised mission recenters the work of the NIH on health optimization and universal accessibility.

2. Suggestions for specific language that could be added to the proposed mission statement and why

We have no additional suggestions for language that should be added to the proposed mission statement.

3. Feedback on any specific language that could be removed from the proposed mission statement and why

We have no suggestions for language that could be removed from the proposed mission statement.

CHEST appreciates the opportunity to submit comments to NIH regarding its mission statement and its efforts for inclusivity. We welcome the opportunity to discuss our suggestions further.