

# WHY AMERICA NEEDS A STRONG INDEPENDENT NIDCR



On June 14, 2024, House Energy & Commerce Committee Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers released a [Framework for Discussion to Reform the National Institutes of Health](#) (NIH).

The proposal includes structural reforms that would consolidate the NIH's 27 Institutes and Centers (ICs) into 15 newly renamed entities, including eliminating the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) and consolidating its operations under a newly created "National Institute of Neuroscience and Brain Research".

AADOCR opposes the proposed consolidation for the following reasons:

## The Critical Role of NIDCR

- *Established to Address a National Health Crisis:* NIDCR was signed into law by President Harry S. Truman in 1948 (originally named the National Institute of Dental Research), in response to an epidemic of tooth decay in the United States that adversely affected the oral health, overall health, and military readiness of the Nation. It was a matter of national security, and its mission remains critical today.
- *Continuing Health Burden:* While progress has been made since 1948, today oral diseases and conditions continue to place an undue health burden on the American people, particularly vulnerable populations. As noted in a recent *New England Journal of Medicine* perspective by D'Souza, Collins and Murthy:
  - 47% of U.S. adults 30 years of age or older have periodontal disease.
  - Oropharyngeal cancer associated with human papillomavirus (HPV) has become more prevalent than HPV-associated cervical cancer, with men more than five times as likely to be affected as women.
  - Nine out of 10 adults 20 to 64 years of age have had dental caries, a figure that hasn't meaningfully changed during the past 20 years.
  - Caries in permanent teeth still rank among the most common childhood diseases.
  - Untreated carious lesions cause pain and infections in bone and soft tissues.
- *Economic Impact:* The latest CMS health expenditures data shows Americans spent \$174 Billion on dental care in 2023, with a much higher percentage of that coming directly out of pocket compared to the rest of health care.
- *A Singular Mission:* NIDCR is the Nation's primary dental, oral, and craniofacial (DOC) biomedical and behavioral research and research training organization, advancing fundamental knowledge about dental, oral, and craniofacial health and disease, disease prevention, early detection, and treatment strategies – benefitting individuals and communities across the lifespan.

## Why Elimination is a Step Backward

- *Erosion of Expertise:* Institutes dedicated to specific organs, body functions, and diseases help foster a research community focused in that area. They provide specialized training programs for the next generation of researchers, build expertise, offer mentorship opportunities from experts in the field, and ensure that there is a robust research community investigating how to advance health in every area of the body. Eliminating ICs that have decades of knowledge and specific research agendas will result in a loss of prioritization, hinder scientific advancement and lead to adverse health outcomes.

- *Implications for the Dental Profession:* NIDCR is one of just two institutes that specifically supports a profession, the other being the National Institute of Nursing Research. A strong independent NIDCR is vital to the oral health of the American people and to America's dental schools. Research and scholarly activity are the foundation of the dental profession.
- *Impact on Public Health Leadership:* Eliminating an independent NIDCR and attempting to consolidate its scientific aims under a broader neuroscience and brain research context will dilute its original focus and undermine its entire mission. Further, eliminating an independent NIDCR would threaten the United States' position as the world's leader in dental, oral, and craniofacial health research.
- *Unique Complexity of Oral Health:* As an entry to the body, the oral cavity and microbiome represents a distinct and complex ecosystem with unique functions and challenges. Having a dedicated institute centered on this region is essential to ensure research into areas such as tooth development, gum disease, orofacial pain, and craniofacial birth defects.
- *Loss of Targeted Funding:* Eliminating NIDCR and attempting to consolidate its unique Mission under a broader focused institute would also remove a dedicated funding structure for DOC research. Consolidation risks a reduction in funding and prioritization, jeopardizing progress made over decades.

Oral diseases and conditions place an undue health and economic burden on the American people. NIDCR is the nation's primary and only dental, oral, and craniofacial biomedical and behavioral research and research training organization dedicated to reducing and eliminating these burdens. Progress is being made, but eliminating an independent NIDCR will significantly dampen if not stop this progress all together. The American people deserve better.

As recently stated in a 2024 U.S. Senate Resolution commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NIDCR, "The United States Senate declares that the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research is a vital, venerable, and essential component of the National Institutes of Health and America's overall public health and science strategy".