

Comments of The American Association of Immunologists on
the Cures2.0 Draft Legislation

July 15, 2021

The American Association of Immunologists (AAI), the nation's largest professional association of research scientists and physicians who are dedicated to understanding the immune system through basic, translational, and clinical research, appreciates the RFI solicited, which solicits views on President Joe Biden's proposal to create a new agency, the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA). AAI is enthusiastic about ARPA's potential, which will help to advance human immunology by supporting broad collaborations in high-risk, high-reward research. We believe, however, that any funding provided for ARPA must supplement, and not replace, the regular budget of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), its parent agency, and that stakeholder input to help answer many outstanding questions, including whether existing NIH entities and programs like the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS), will be integrated into the new agency, and which research areas will be identified and selected.

Our specific responses to the RFI questions (in italics) appear below (in black):

x In calling for the creation of ARPA, President Biden has cited the success of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and expressed his belief that ARPA should be similar. Please provide specific details which aspects of DARPA ARPA should replicate and why this would lead to similar success.

- o AAI does not have experience with DARPA and so cannot comment on exactly which aspects should be replicated within ARPA. AAI does know, however, that the "culture" at NIH, in which investigators receive funding only after their project proposals have been peer-reviewed, scored highly, and scrutinized by professional staff, differs significantly from the culture at DARPA.

military-oriented program to a robust life sciences enterprise. If done right, however, AAI sees great value in encouraging a subset of researchers to pursue bold, transformational ideas that would likely not be funded by existing federal agencies.

x To ensure it has the biggest impact, on what activities or areas should ARPA focus? What activities or areas should ARPA avoid?

- o The decision regarding the activities or areas on which ARPA should initially focus should ultimately be made by the ARPA Director and the ARPA program managers, but only after meaningful consultation with, and appropriate consideration of, the views of a wide range of scientific stakeholders. AAI is encouraged that NIH Director Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D., has already reached out to NIH Institute and Center Directors to solicit their feedback on projects ripe for consideration. Similar conversations should be held with other federal scientific agencies.
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Research Investment to Spark the Economy (RISE) Act, which would authorize supplemental relief funds for federal science agencies, including \$10 billion to NIH.

AAI also strongly supports many of the public health provisions included in Title I of the discussion draft. The national survey of patients with Post-Acute Sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 (PASC or long COVID), as well as the learning collaborative on long COVID, are wise short-term steps to ensure that the U.S. is poised to continue making progress against the significant health challenges caused by this novel virus. For the long-term, AAI agrees that it is vital to develop a national testing and response strategy for future pandemics. As the legislative text notes, this strategy must be based heavily on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus AAI continues to support a holistic review of the current pandemic by a nonpartisan entity like the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

In both the short and long term, global success in defeating highly infectious, dangerous diseases like COVID-19 depends on our ability to quickly develop safe and effective vaccines and to facilitate both domestic and international vaccine uptake. Continued robust investment in basic biomedical research is crucial to laying the groundwork for rapid vaccine development. But vaccine acceptance and hesitancy remain major problems, and thus AAI supports the discussion draft's authorization of funds for an