

## **NIH Office of Research on Women's Health Statement on Gender Disparities in NIH Funding Progress, Action, and Determination to Resolve Gaps**

*JAMA's* publication of "[Comparison of National Institutes of Health Grant Amounts to First-Time Male and Female Principal Investigators](#)" (March 2019) brought attention to some of the challenges faced by women researchers but did not reflect many of the funding successes at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The *JAMA* paper, which focused on first-time awards, did note one funding disparity by gender that played in favor of women: Award amounts were larger for R01s associated with women program directors/principal investigators (PDs/PIs), R01 awards being the NIH gold standard for independent research awards. Consistent with this study, [NIH has long found that the amounts awarded for R01 grants with women as PDs/PIs are larger than they are for men](#). More recent data from the [NIH Data Book](#)—which shows every award, not just first-time awards—confirm that women are receiving larger research awards than their male counterparts in the R01-equivalent award category, which constitutes the bulk of extramural research awards. Further, [once women are funded, their funding longevity is similar to men's](#).

In addition, over the past two decades, women have steadily earned an increasing percentage of NIH awards. The current funding success rates for new R01-equivalent grant applications are virtually identical for men and women. Women also have higher funding success rates than men for Research Career Development Awards, Research Project Grants, Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs, and other research-related grants. The SBIR and STTR grants, known as America's Seed Fund, are one of the largest sources of early-stage capital for technology commercialization in the United States.

NIH applauds these successes and acknowledges a significant challenge: Men have more awards overall and therefore more total funding. Consistent with the *JAMA* study, women have a lower funding rate and draw smaller Center Grant awards than men. Center Grants, however, are typically led by experienced PIs rather than first-time PDs/PIs, as noted in [Science](#), and support broadly based, multidisciplinary, often long-term research programs that have specific major objectives or basic themes. Despite the gender parity achieved in other grant areas, the Center Grants remain an area of concern.

The greatest funding disparity by gender is the low number of grant applications that are submitted by women relative to men, stemming largely from the disparately low proportion of women faculty in the NIH research grant applicant pool. Training in grant writing or the review process alone will not drive parity. The solutions are intertwined with removing the obstacles women face in transitioning to independent research careers and subsequent career advancement. Progress depends on the biomedical research community's shared commitment to fostering greater diversity among PDs/PIs, addressing entrenched gender stereotypes, and instituting systemic policies and practices that lead to inclusive environments—so that all scientists can maximize their potential and contributions to science.

The NIH Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH) coordinates or leads many of the efforts across NIH to [address the underrepresentation of women in biomedical careers](#). In fact, one of the goals of the [Trans-NIH Strategic Plan for Women's Health Research](#) is "promoting training and careers to develop a well-trained, diverse, and robust workforce to advance science for the health of women." One such effort was the co-sponsorship, with our National Science Foundation and L'Oréal partners, of a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) consensus study on [addressing the underrepresentation of women in science, engineering, and medicine](#). The study included a focus on the barriers to the widescale adoption and

implementation of effective institutional interventions and ways to overcome these barriers. The study report is now publicly available on the [National Academies Press website](#). With a similar goal of promoting culture change and inclusive research environments, ORWH is also leading the development of a [Challenge Prize competition](#) to recognize institutions with a demonstrated commitment to systemically addressing faculty diversity and equity issues within their biomedical and behavioral science departments—and bring to scale the approaches, strategies, and interventions for other institutions to replicate.

Administrative decisions within NIH contribute to culture change as well. NIH Director Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., has taken a principled stand to no longer participate in “[manels](#)” (all-male conference panels). Dr. Collins and ORWH Director Janine A. Clayton, M.D., serve as co-chairs of the [NIH Working Group on Women in Biomedical Careers](#) to consider innovative strategies to help advance women in their biomedical research career trajectories.

NIH also offers [family-friendly policies and programs](#) to the extramural scientific community, such as funding time off for parental leave and dependent care at conferences and allowing early-stage investigators (ESIs) to [extend their ESI status for 1 year for childbirth](#). New to the NIH portfolio are recently published administrative supplement programs to promote research continuity and retention of early-career investigators who are affected by critical life events such as childbirth and primary caregiving. (See the text box and [Nature](#) for more information.) Developed in response to Dr. Collins’ challenge to the NIH Working Group on Women in Biomedical Careers to design concepts to address the persistent underrepresentation of women in NIH-relevant research, these pilot programs complement ongoing efforts and programs of NIH Institutes, Centers, and Offices. And to combat sexual harassment in grantee institutions, NIH released [new guidance](#) that sets clear expectations for reporting to NIH when a grantee institution has a finding of sexual harassment from a PI named on an NIH grant. The guidance sends an unmistakable message to dispel the perception that reports of sexual harassment are ignored and without consequence for investigators.

These are all important parts of NIH’s efforts to promote the entry, recruitment, retention, and sustained advancement of women in biomedical research careers. Thanks to the attention of the public, the media, and the many groups working to improve the biomedical field, positive changes are occurring. NIH anticipates that these changes will soon accelerate out of necessity, for the future of science depends on diversity of thought.

## **Administrative Supplements to Promote Research Continuity and Retention of NIH Mentored Career Development (K) Award Recipients and Scholars**

**Notice Number: NOT-OD-20-054**

The overarching goal of this program is to support the transition of investigators from individual mentored career development to research independence and to minimize departures from the biomedical research workforce at this critical juncture. This supplement program is intended to ensure continuity of research among recipients of [K awards](#) by providing supplemental research support to help sustain investigators' research during critical life events.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

## **Administrative Supplement for Continuity of Biomedical and Behavioral Research Among First-Time Recipients of NIH Research Project Grant Awards**

**Notice Number: NOT-OD-20-055**

The overarching goal of this program is to enhance the retention of investigators who are facing a critical life event and are transitioning to the first renewal of their first independent Research Project Grant award or to a second NIH Research Project Grant award. Retention at the first renewal or continuous NIH Research Project Grant support is crucial for both sustaining the ongoing research NIH has made an investment in and retaining diversity in the biomedical research workforce.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

[Frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#) on these supplement programs can be found on the [NIH Family-Friendly Initiatives webpage](#).