with fiscal year 2007 well under way, we write to report on the status of our budget for the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). As a result of a Congressional joint resolution, the NHLBI received an allocation of $2,918,808,000, which represents an increase of ~1% over the comparable figure for fiscal year 2006.

The NHLBI has a longstanding and powerful commitment to preserve and enhance investigator-initiated research and to develop and support new investigators. In these difficult times, the NHLBI’s top priorities will be to stay true to these core values. To accomplish this objective, we have developed a number of strategies to assist investigators in launching successful research careers and riding out tough times. Several policies are designed to ease the path to independence for new investigators (http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/funding/policies/operguid.htm):

- Investigator-initiated research: We intend to use ~70% of the NHLBI budget for research project grants and to scale back, as necessary, the release of NHLBI-initiated programs.
- New investigators: We are strongly committed to expanding the pipeline of new talent needed to support biomedical research in the future. Since fiscal year 2005, we have been giving new investigators an advantage by increasing the pay line for their regular research grant (R01) applications by 5 percentile points and funding their R01s for the full recommended project period. Applicants who fall short of the new-investigator pay line by 6 to 10 percentile points are offered an opportunity to address the concerns of the initial review group and receive an expedited administrative review.
- First-time competing renewals: Recognizing that the initial competing renewal for a first-time R01 holder often represents a make-or-break career watershed, we offer a more generous pay line (5 percentile points higher) for such applications.
- National Institutes of Health (NIH) Pathway to Independence Award (K99/R00): To assist new scientists in achieving independent research faculty positions, we have set aside funds to support the new K99/R00 program. In fiscal year 2007, the NHLBI will fund ~25 awards.
- NIH Director’s New Innovator Award: The NHLBI strongly supports the NIH Director’s New Innovator Award, established this year to provide funding for new investigators to pursue creative research avenues that have the potential for exceptional impact on biomedical science.
- NIH Director’s Bridge Award: We recognize that continuity of grant support is a critical issue for established investigators as well. Accordingly, the NHLBI will support the NIH Director’s Bridge Award, which is designed to assist new and established grantees whose competing renewal grant applications fall just beyond the pay line. The award will provide 1 year of additional, limited support to enable principal investigators to continue their research while strengthening a resubmission application.

In addition to the measures mentioned above, we are pleased to report that in fiscal year 2007, the NIH Common Fund is receiving a direct allocation from Congress, such that NHLBI monies that would have been committed to NIH Roadmap programs will now be retained by the NHLBI. This amounts to approximately $35 million, which will be used to bolster investigator-initiated research and training programs.

We appreciate the expertise and wisdom that the scientific community provided in the development of our newly completed strategic plan (http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/strategic-plan/). You will be hearing more from us about the strategic plan in the coming months. We anticipate that many of the goals stated within the strategic plan will be accomplished through investigator-initiated research. Our commitments to supporting investigator-initiated research and new investigators may require that we scale back to some extent the development of NHLBI-initiated programs. It will also require that we establish a judicious timetable for implementing our strategic plan.

We are grateful for the generous support that the NHLBI has received from the community of investigators it serves, and we look forward to close collaborations with you as we push the frontiers of biomedical science forward. We will continue to do everything in our power to limit the adverse
effects of the current budget constraints and preserve the vitality and momentum of the research enterprise. We welcome comments, questions, and concerns and are pleased to hear from readers at any time. We look forward to continuing to work with you as we face our challenges and opportunities together.

None.

Key Words: budgets ■ health care economics and organizations ■ United States Institutes of Health
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