In a February 6 Advocacy Day conducted by ARVO and NAEVR, members of ARVO’s Annual Meeting Program Committee (AMPC) were joined by a group of young investigators in advocating for FY2016 NIH/NEI funding increases. As in past years, ARVO was among the first organizations to speak with Congressional staff. The visits were especially timely since the President’s budget request issued to Congress earlier that week, and staff were engaged in reviewing it and seeking feedback from research advocates.

The 13 ARVO AMPC members—including ARVO Executive Vice President Craig Crosson, Ph.D. (Medical University of South Carolina) and international advocates Caterina Gagliano, M.D., Ph.D. (Neurovisual Science Technology, Catania, Italy) and Qingjiong Zhang, M.D., Ph.D. (Zhongshan Ophthalmic Center, China)—and the eight young investigators visited 40 Congressional offices with three important advocacy tools that supplemented the legislative request:

- A graphic showing how NEI’s FY2015 appropriation of $684 million is still down $18 million from the FY2012 pre-sequester level, translating into 45 fewer grants not funded by NEI—any one of which may hold the promise to save sight and restore vision.
- A list of successfully commercialized products resulting from NEI-funded investigator-initiated research and Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grants that demonstrates the return on the nation’s investment in vision research.
- A “Federal Funding for Vision Research is Vital” document that included the latest data about the incidence and cost of eye disease, estimated in a June 2014 Prevent Blindness Vital study at $145 billion annually and growing to $717 billion annually by 2050, in inflation-adjusted dollars.

The young investigator delegation, which reflected clinicians, clinician scientists, and basic researchers dealing with a wide range of eye diseases, added greatly to ARVO’s message, stressing the impact that the combination of cuts, flat funding, and lack of an inflationary increase at the NEI has on their training and career paths. “In many cases, the young investigators were speaking to staff members who are their contemporaries, so their message resonated with these individuals who may be examining their own career paths,” observed NAEVR’s James Jorkasky, who joined each young investigator for training and career paths. “In many cases, the young investigators were speaking to staff members who are their contemporaries, so their message resonated with these individuals who may be examining their own career paths,” observed NAEVR’s James Jorkasky, who joined each young investigator for training and career paths. In many cases, the young investigators were speaking to staff members who are their contemporaries, so their message resonated with these individuals who may be examining their own career paths.”

The NAEVR and AEVR Alliances have a focus on young investigators in their 2015 activities. In May 2015, the Alliances will begin recruiting individuals to participate in a “Young Vision Investigator Day” on Capitol Hill, to be held on October 7-8 with a series of educational and advocacy events.