ARVO Advocates Urge NIH/NEI Funding Increases, Cite Return on Past Investment in OCT

Reflecting on the day, NAEVR Executive Director James Jorkasky stated, “I am pleased that the ARVO members were among the first of many advocates to visit Capitol Hill during the FY2018 appropriations cycle. This year’s participants did an outstanding job in justifying the requested NIH/NEI funding increases with the ARVO-generated OCT materials, which impressed many offices—not only of reliable NIH champions, but also those who have questioned the value of past NIH investment. We were fortunate to meet with the personal and Committee staff of so many key Republican leaders who have expressed support for a pattern of robust, sustained, and predictable NIH funding increases.”

On February 17, NAEVR managed for ARVO’s Annual Meeting Planning Committee (AMPC) an Advocacy Day that engaged 21 domestic and international advocates who visited 36 Congressional offices, including several of appropriators and authorizers. The group included six Emerging Vision Scientists (EVSs)—clinicians, clinician-scientists, and basic researchers dealing with a wide range of eye diseases who have not yet received an R01 grant—who discussed the impact that past funding cuts, flat funding, and lack of inflationary increases at the NEI have had on their training and career paths. The six international advocates described the important global role that NEI serves with respect to training and research collaborations.

The advocates requested $2 billion increases to NIH base funding in each FY2017 and 2018—in addition to the supplemental funding for specific projects in the 21st Century Cures Act passed by Congress last December. In requesting that Congress finalize FY2017 appropriations and not pass a full-year Continuing Resolution (CR), they emphasized the detrimental effects of long-term CRs/delayed appropriations, which essentially reflect a cut due to biomedical inflation and often require researchers to seek bridge or philanthropic funding while awaiting federal funding.

They demonstrated the value of past NIH/NEI investment with data from ARVO’s “Revealing the back of the eye with optical coherence tomography (OCT)” campaign. Focusing on information valued by policymakers, the data highlighted the more than 16,000 jobs supported by the technology and government spending avoided by using OCT to manage the prescription drug regimens for such retinal diseases as Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD). Congressional staff reacted enthusiastically to receiving these new data on the tangible value of past investments.