President’s Message

Throughout this edition, you will read how the new National Eye Institute (NEI)-sponsored research on the incidence of age related eye disease in Americans age 40 and older has fortified NAEVR’s message about the importance of adequately funding federal research to deal with the looming public health issue of eye disease and vision impairment. The findings have not only proven useful in testimony presented to the Congressional Appropriations Committees and in Capitol Hill briefings, but have enabled NAEVR and AEVR to broaden their advocacy and educational outreach on Capitol Hill.

A major NAEVR goal is to expand the base of Capitol Hill Champions for eye and vision research. The new data, with their implications for the aging population, generally, and for women, specifically (due to their longer life expectancy), as well as implications for the African American and Hispanic populations (which experience a disproportionately higher incidence of glaucoma and cataracts), enable NAEVR to expand its base of Champions. Indeed, NAEVR has reached out to the Older Americans and other Caucuses to educate these groups on the finding’s implications for public health—and to seek their support with the House and Senate Appropriators to adequately fund the NEI. As NAEVR advocates for a $711 million budget for the NEI in the very tight FY2005 budget process, we can emphasize the value and cost-effectiveness of NEI-sponsored research for all Americans.

At its April meeting, the NAEVR Board adopted a resolution commending the NEI and each member of the Eye Disease Prevalence Research Group (EDPRG) for their leadership in proactively examining this issue. In transmitting a letter to NEI Director Dr. Paul Sieving, National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni, and the EDPRG, I could write from firsthand experience about the impact of the data on the Hill, as I used it effectively in a recent visit with the staff of Sen. Larry Craig (R-ID), an Appropriator and the Chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging.

I encourage each of you to be available to email letters to your Members of Congress. Or better yet, make a Capitol Hill or district visit. We’ve always had a good story to tell—and now it is even more compelling! If you have any comments, feel free to email me at sryan@doheny.org.