Members of Congress, NIH and NEI Directors Recognize AEVR/NAEVR

On June 9, AEVR and NAEVR celebrated their 15th anniversary with a reception in the foyer of the Rayburn House office building. At the event, NAEVR also released its updated joint fact sheet with Research!America entitled Vision and Blindness: Investment in Research Saves Lives and Money.

Cong. Pete Sessions (R-TX) provided an inspirational welcome, lauding the Alliances’ 55 member organizations for their efforts to prevent blindness and save and restore vision. Earlier in the evening, Congressional Vision Caucus co-Chair Cong. Gene Green (D-TX) mingled with attendees, which included Congressional staff, administration representatives, coalition partners, and contributor organizations.

“I am pleased to recognize 15 years since the founding of AEVR and NAEVR and I applaud your unwavering efforts to preserve the nation’s commitment to eye and vision research.”   NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni

In opening comments, Dr. Stephen Ryan acknowledged a letter of congratulations from NIH Director Dr. Elias Zerhouni which read, in part, “I am pleased to recognize 15 years since the founding of AEVR and NAEVR and I applaud your unwavering efforts to preserve the nation’s commitment to eye and vision research.” NIH was represented at the event by Alan Krensky, M.D., Director of NIH’s Office of Portfolio Analysis and Strategic Initiatives (OPASI), which manages the NIH Common Fund for trans-Institute research, and NEI Director Dr. Paul Sieving, who thanked the Alliances for their message about the value of the research emerging from the NEI. Dr. Ryan stated that, “During the past 15 years, we have seen dramatic breakthroughs in vision research emerging from the NEI, from understanding the genetic basis of eye disease to developing treatments that save and restore vision,” adding that, as a practicing ophthalmologist, “I can assure you that these therapies are having a fundamental impact on the productivity, independence, and quality of life of all Americans.”

Research!America President Mary Woolley highlighted details from the fact sheet, stating that polling data consistently demonstrate that Americans want more spent on medical research, even if it meant an increase in their taxes. In introducing the last speaker, Hyman Shapiro, who is the featured patient on the fact sheet, James Jorkasky emphasized that the focus of the Alliances’ work is ultimately patients with vision impairment and eye disease. Mr. Shapiro related his experience with AMD, noting his involvement in the Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS), an NEI-funded study which demonstrated that high levels of dietary anti-oxidants and zinc can reduce the risk of progression to advanced AMD by a factor of 25 percent. He is hopeful that dietary supplements, coupled with the new AMD treatments also emerging from NEI-funded research, can maintain his remaining vision.

The Alliances were founded in 1993 by the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO), the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO), and the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology (AUPO).