Dr. Zerhouni Meets with the Medical Research Advocacy Community

On January 11 and 12, Dr. Zerhouni met with the National Health Council and the ad hoc Medical Research Group, respectively, to provide an update on NIH activities. NAEVR was an active participant in both meetings and was pleased that, just as he had done at the October 20 NIH Town Hall Meeting, Dr. Zerhouni heralded the NEI-sponsored discovery of an AMD gene as an NIH breakthrough. He also acknowledged the NEI-sponsored Age-related Eye Disease Study (AREDS), which demonstrated that high levels of dietary antioxidants and zinc reduce the risk of AMD by 25 percent, as an example of a cost-effective preventive measure.

In defining a new paradigm for the 21st century, he stressed the importance of the predictive, personalized and preemptive role of healthcare research and delivery, offering poignant examples of NIH accomplishments and emphasizing the attendant healthcare costs reduced and lives saved/quality of life improved. He noted that a comprehensive and collaborative approach to research—much along the lines of the NIH Roadmap, which is now part of the newly-created Office of Program Analysis and Strategic Initiatives (OPASI), as well as the “common fund” he has proposed for trans-Institute research—will be increasingly important, especially if NIH is funded at a flat rate over the next several years. Based on current NIH funding, the government spends $96 per person for research, as compared to an annual per-person cost of healthcare of $6,700, which was as of FY2004 and continues to grow.

Dr. Zerhouni’s comments likely reflect the message in testimony he will present to Congress in FY2007 House and Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee hearings. At this time, a House hearing had not yet been scheduled; the Senate has scheduled a hearing for March 15. NAEVR, ARVO and the American Optometric Association have submitted requests to the House Subcommittee staff to appear at any Citizen Witness hearings that may be planned.