For the sixth year, RPB organized a Convening of Private Vision Research Funding Foundations with federal agencies which support vision research (NEI) and vision loss prevention research and vision surveillance (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC), as well as approve new ophthalmic drugs and devices (FDA). With a theme of *The Eye as a Window to Overall Health*, the event featured keynote presentations on the use of visual imaging to diagnose and monitor the progression of various diseases and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in ophthalmology, as well as reports on collaborations between the participating foundations. NAEVR's James Jorkasky attended and provided an update on federal funding for vision research and NAEVR's advocacy efforts.

The eight participants representing seven organizations from across the nation met with 14 Congressional offices in both the House and Senate—including a number where the Member serves on a Committee with appropriations or oversight authority over the NIH. Commenting on the day's activities, RPB President Brian Hofland, PhD said:

"The National Eye Institute is by far the largest funder of vision research in the U.S. Thus, one of the most important things private foundations can do to support vision research is to engage in advocacy in support of the NEI."

ARVO and RPB Advocates Emphasize NAEVR's FY2020 Funding Requests

Unlike past years in which the government was still operating under a Continuing Resolution, the fact that Congress had already finalized FY2019 NIH/NEI appropriations enabled the advocates to focus on FY2020 messaging developed by NAEVR, which included:

- Thanking Congress for funding increases in FY2016 through FY2019 that increased NIH and NEI funding by a total $9 billion and $120 million, respectively.
- Requesting an NIH increase of $2.5 billion, or 6.4 percent, to a level of $41.6 billion, allowing for meaningful growth above inflation in the base budgets for the ICs, such as NEI, and ensuring funding for NIH's Innovation Account established by the 21st Century Cures Act for special initiatives (BRAIN Initiative, Cancer Moonshot, Precision Medicine, and Regenerative Medicine).
- Requesting an NEI increase of $53 million, or 6.4 percent, to a level of $850 million. Advocates shared a graphic (see below) that showed that, despite recent increases, NEI’s FY2019 enacted budget of $797 million is just 14 percent greater than the pre-sequester FY2012 funding level of $702 million, meaning a 2 percent annual growth rate over the past seven fiscal years as compared to the 2.8 percent average annual rate of biomedical inflation.
- To enable increases, advocates also requested that Congress pass a bipartisan budget deal to raise FY2020 and FY2021 Budget Control Act (BCA) caps to fund critical nondefense discretionary programs, such a medical research. During ARVO’s February 2018, Advocacy Day, vision researchers were among the first to thank Congress for passing the budget deal that raised FY2018 and 2019 BCA caps and facilitated an NIH and NEI funding increase in each fiscal year.

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