

Improve Medical Rehabilitation Research at the National Institutes of Health

BACKGROUND

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) conducts and supports approximately \$514 million in medical rehabilitation research annually, \$70 million of which is supported by the National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research (NCMRR), located in the Eunice Shriver National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Currently, varied disability and rehabilitation research occurs across several of the 27 NIH Institutes and Centers with limited coordination or strategic focus at National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, (NINDS), National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) to name a few.

In March, Senators Mark Kirk (R-IL.) and Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Congressmen Jim Langevin (D-RI) and Gregg Harper (R-MS) introduced companion bills (S. 800; H.R. 1631) to improve, coordinate, and enhance medical rehabilitation research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The legislation builds upon the conclusions and recommendations of an NIH Blue Ribbon Panel on Medical Rehabilitation Research which issued a comprehensive report in January 2013. The panel concluded that rehabilitation research is not thriving at NIH and that reforms are needed to assist people with injuries, illnesses, disabilities and chronic conditions maximize their health and their ability to function, live independently, and return to work if possible. This broad range of topics not only includes research efforts to find cures for those of us with neurological disorders and disease, but to enhance the quality of the daily lives of each of us given our current neurological conditions. By applying the latest technologies to our challenges and opportunities including the Internet, universal design and growth in smart applications, existing research holds many concrete promises for the spinal cord injury/disease (SCI/D) population.

United Spinal Association has played a leading role in the dialogue with the National Institutes of Health to ensure that the medical and rehabilitation needs of individuals with spinal cord injury and other neurologic conditions are understood and incorporated into NIH research priorities.

This legislation:

- Focuses on creating greater links within NIH to help coordinate rehabilitation research across Institutes and Centers to streamline rehabilitation research priorities and maximize the current federal investment in this area of research.
- Involves the Office of the NIH Director in coordination activities, raising the stature of rehabilitation science across the NIH's 27 Institutes and Centers.
- Calls for a Rehabilitation Research Plan to be updated every five years following a scientific conference or workshop. The existing research plan has not been updated since 1993.
- Provides for an annual progress report; ties co-funding of medical rehabilitation research projects to the Research Plan, and includes a definition of medical rehabilitation research to ensure consistent tracking of rehabilitation research across NIH.
- Is bipartisan, has been fully vetted with NIH officials, and there is continued dialogues in support of this bill with rehabilitation research organizations, clinical associations and disability and consumer groups
- is expected to have no budgetary impact.

REQUEST TO POLICYMAKERS

United Spinal Association urges Congress to pass S. 800 / H.R. 1631, Enhancing the Stature and Visibility of Medical Rehabilitation Research at the NIH Act. Senate sponsors: Sen. Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO). House sponsors: Rep. James Langevin (D-RI 2nd) and Rep. Gregg Harper (R-MS 3rd).