

March 9, 2024

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**Re: Request for Information on National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research's Proposed Research Initiatives.**

via website: <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/grants-funding/funding-priorities/future-research-initiatives-concept-clearances/nidcr-requests-input-january-2024-proposed-research-initiatives>

The American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research (AADOOCR) is the leading professional community for multidisciplinary scientists who advance dental, oral, and craniofacial research. We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts on the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research's (NIDCR) fiscal year (FY) 25 proposed research initiative. AADOOCR recognizes and applauds NIDCR's effort to support early career researchers and research in significant and understudied areas of science as well as continually build upon NIDCR's research portfolio. To respond to this request for comments, AADOOCR engaged its Science Information Committee and its Board of Directors.

**Reissuance of NIDCR Small Grant Program for New Investigators (R03)**

AADOOCR would like to congratulate NIDCR on a successful program that is specifically geared towards early career research scientists (ECRSs) and increases the likelihood of applying for and being awarded an R01 grant (1.6 and 2.4 times respectfully) as compared to unsuccessful counterparts<sup>1</sup>. One of the strengths of the United States healthcare system compared to other systems in the world is robust health-sector research<sup>2</sup>. This strength is bolstered by the development of new and innovative research scientists. Therefore, the investment into ECRSs in dental, oral, and craniofacial health is critical. Additionally, the dedication of NIDCR grant monies to ECRSs may "fast track" promising young researchers into positions where their innovations bring about great discoveries.

The reissuance of NIDCR Small Grant Program for New Investigators is an important tool in helping ECRSs overcome the barriers of a career in research. Young researchers in biomedical research including those in dental, oral, and craniofacial health face significant challenges. High competition, poor job stability, lack of

recognition, lack of publication opportunities, minimal mentorship, and minimal opportunities for funding, can be overwhelming barriers to their career<sup>3</sup>. This small grant program addresses the challenge of funding opportunities and therefore, **AADOOCR supports the re-issuance of this research initiative.**

Additionally, to further support ECRs, **AADOOCR would support reassessing the scoring criteria for R01s** that evaluates the expertise and capability of the investigator. ECRs may receive poor investigator scores due to the absence of a previous R01 or other grants in their Reporter resume. This may contribute to their failure to be able to secure an R01 on initial attempts. This is supported by data that shows that between 1995 to 2020, the mean age of a Principal Investigator with a PhD receiving support on their first NIH R01 increased from 39 to 43 years<sup>3</sup>. While it is theoretically possible that a new investigator secures an R01 with their first submission, it is extremely rare and is not a true indication of their research capability. Therefore, in addition to the R03 experience, removing this criterion for researchers that are within the early career categorization may further increase their likelihood of securing an R01.

AADOOCR appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on NIDCR's proposed research initiative for FY25. AADOOCR stands ready to work with NIDCR to promote the continuous quality and improvement of dental, oral, and craniofacial research programs but also to further move the needle on the transfer of knowledge from this research initiative to policy making processes.

If you have any further questions, please contact Dr. Makyba Charles-Ayinde, Director of Science Policy, at [mcayinde@iadr.org](mailto:mcayinde@iadr.org).

Sincerely,



Christopher H. Fox, DMD, DMSc  
Chief Executive Officer



Alexandre Vieira, DDS, MS, PhD  
President

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<sup>1</sup>National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, Division of Extramural Research. (2023). Reissuance of NIDCR Small Grant Program for New Investigators (R03). Retrieved from: <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/grants-funding/funding-priorities/reissuance-nidcr-small-grant-program-new-investigators-r03-nidcr-division-extramural>. Accessed on: February 23, 2024.

<sup>2</sup>Rice T, Rosenau P, Unruh LY, Barnes AJ, Saltman RB, van Ginneken E. (2013). United States of America: Health System Review. Health Syst Transit. 15(3):1-431. PMID: 24025796.

<sup>3</sup>National Institutes of Health Advisory Committee to the Director. (2023). Re-envisioning U.S. Postdoctoral Research Training and Career Progression within the Biomedical Research Enterprise. Retrieved from: [https://acd.od.nih.gov/documents/RFI\\_Postdocs\\_Report\\_2023.pdf](https://acd.od.nih.gov/documents/RFI_Postdocs_Report_2023.pdf). Accessed on: February 23, 2024.

<sup>4</sup>Lauer M. (2021). Long-Term Trends in the Age of Principal Investigators Supported for the First Time on NIH R01-Equivalent Awards. Retrieved from: <https://nexus.od.nih.gov/all/2021/11/18/long-term-trends-in-the-age-of-principal-investigators-supported-for-the-first-time-on-nih-r01-awards/>. Accessed on: February 23, 2024.