



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

February 5, 2007

Thomas Insel, M.D., Director
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
National Institutes of Health
Neuroscience Center, Room 8235
6001 Executive Boulevard
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Insel:

I am writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association to express our concern regarding recent changes in funding guidelines at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) for 2007. These changes have created the impression in the behavioral science community that NIMH is supplanting the peer review system by basing funding decisions primarily on program priority. We understand that the institute needs to adopt policies that leverage its restricted resources to fund the highest quality research that addresses the burden of mental disorders. At the same time, the behavioral science community is asking NIMH to provide a more comprehensive explanation of how the policy is being implemented. I am sure we share the same goal of ensuring that all funding decisions reflect an appropriate balance of program priorities with peer review recommendations.

As we discussed during the recent NIMH reorganization, one of APA's primary concerns was that the new organization would provide little support for some areas of basic behavioral research, and that even with high scores from peer review panels, researchers would be left with little certainty about ultimate funding decisions. Initially, NIMH assured the community that scientific proposals with scores from the peer review panels within the top ten percent would still be funded. In 2005, the institute clarified that research proposals that fell between the tenth and twentieth percentiles would be funded based on program priorities rather than strict priority-score order. The latest clarification of the NIMH funding guidelines makes it clear that program priorities will be the determining factor, even for those proposals that fall within the top ten percent. Of even greater concern is the recently stated NIMH policy of "supporting up to three fourths of the applications that fall below the twentieth percentile."

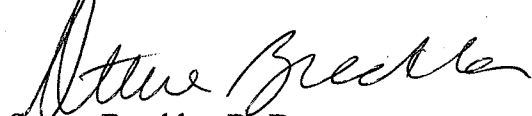
We understand that in times of increasing grant applications and more expensive scientific projects, it is necessary for the institute to become even more focused on its portfolio. However, this new policy has created more ambiguity, less transparency, and engendered a perception within the scientific community that the NIMH is asserting its authority in a manner that undermines the peer review process.

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On behalf of psychological scientists and others concerned about the changes in funding guidelines, we request more explicit explanations of how this new strategy is to be implemented and how the strategy has changed for 2007.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Steven Breckler".

Steven Breckler, Ph.D.
Executive Director for Science