



June 9, 2008

Thomas Insel, M.D., Director
National Institute of Mental Health
6001 Executive Blvd.
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Insel,

I am writing to you on behalf of the American Psychological Association regarding the NIMH Strategic Plan and the Institute's commitment to include behavioral science as a priority at NIMH.

As you know, APA is the world's largest organization of scientific and professional psychologists, with over 148,000 members. Basic behavioral science has much to contribute to our understanding of normal and abnormal behavior, and the support of NIMH and other Institutes for that undertaking is a necessary challenge.

I was grateful to have the opportunity to share with you APA's comments (attached) concerning the NIMH draft strategic plan. The comments are an integration of the views of a wide range of individual APA members. APA commends NIMH for the broad and ambitious scope of the Plan, but a common theme that emerged among concerns we received was the inadequate coverage of behavioral research among the Plan's stated objectives. In our review, I urged the Institute not to exclude basic behavioral research, just as it does not exclude studies of normal brain function that are conducted solely at the neural level.

At a recent NIMH Council meeting during which you discussed the Plan, you presented several themes that emerged from the public comments, including Theme 2: "More focus on behavioral and social science research as well as environmental factors associated with mental disorders". I was encouraged to hear your assurance that the value of basic behavioral science will be underscored in the final version of the Plan, and I look forward to reading it and assisting with its implementation.

Even more recently at the NIMH Professional Coalition for Research Progress meeting several weeks ago, you promoted the importance of discoveries in the brain and behavioral sciences for treating and preventing mental disorders. Your discussion of the interplay among genes, circuits and behavior was enlightening, and I am gratified to see that you share our goal of ensuring that behavioral science is supported, funded and lauded.

The APA urges NIMH to fully and explicitly incorporate behavioral and social science research in its mission. I look forward to working with you and the behavioral and social science communities to encourage rigorous and innovative multidisciplinary research that will contribute to understanding all areas of public health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steve Breckler".

Steven J. Breckler, Ph.D.
Executive Director for Science
American Psychological Association