

RSA e-News

UP TO THE MINUTE NEWS FROM THE RESEARCH SOCIETY ON ALCOHOLISM

NIH Appropriations

Working into the weekend, the Senate on Saturday took up and passed the conference report for the “megabus” appropriations bill by a vote of 67 to 32. The House had passed the legislation late last week and the President is expected to sign the bill this week. The appropriations package (Conference Report to accompany H.R. 2055, House Report 112-331) funds the federal government for the remainder of FY 2012 and covers numerous federal agencies including the Department of Health and Human Services which, in turn, includes funding for the National Institutes of Health. Overall, the 1200-page conference agreement amounts to \$915 billion and completes action this year on appropriations measures.

The package provides \$69.7 billion for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which represents a \$700 million decrease from FY 2011 levels. The President’s budget requested \$73.1 billion for HHS. The bill provides the NIH with \$30.7 billion in total funding, exceeding the FY 2011 funding levels by nearly \$299 million. The President requested \$31.5 billion for the NIH for FY 2012. The bill provides \$460 million for the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and \$1.055 billion for the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). By way of comparison, the funding levels for NIAAA and NIDA for the last two years are as follows:

NIAAA (FY11 Enacted) \$458.3 million
(FY10 Actual) \$462.0 million

NIDA (FY11 Enacted) \$1.051 billion
(FY10 Actual) \$1.067 billion

Over the last year, RSA has worked alongside other research-oriented organizations to ensure that the enormous deficit reduction pressures in Washington did not result in a substantial diminution in funding for NIH and its individual institutes. While these collective efforts were effective this year, the war is not over. It cannot be gainsaid that Congress will have to confront burgeoning federal deficits for years to come and RSA and like-minded organizations will have to be vigilant in protecting NIH funding.

NIH Reorganization/SMRB

The Statement of Managers for the report also contains the following language pertaining to the SMRB and the proposed combination of NIAAA and NIDA: “While the conferees welcome the creation of NCATS, they were disappointed by the way the administration requested it. The President's proposed budget for fiscal year 2012 included a vague description of NCATS but did not formally request funding for the restructuring or provide any details about

which components of NIH would be consolidated into the new Center. The failure to do so caused unnecessary uncertainty about the proposal and contributed to the impression that it was being rushed. The conferees are also aware of concerns that the NIH process for evaluating the merits of the NCATS reorganization did not comply with the NIH Reform Act of 2006 with respect to the role of the Scientific Management Review Board (SMRB). Lessons learned with NCATS should guide NIH as it considers another proposed restructuring, one that would involve consolidating NIDA, NIAAA and components of other Institutes and Centers (ICs) into a new Institute devoted to research on substance use, abuse and addiction. The conferees understand that NIH plans to adopt a more deliberate approach in evaluating the need for this Institute. The conferees strongly recommend that this approach should include full consideration by the SMRB and that if the administration ultimately decides to seek such a restructuring, it should provide sufficient details in a formal budget request to Congress.” (Emphasis added.)

RSA is pleased that this language was included in the Statement of Managers because it affirms a number of the arguments which RSA has advanced with respect to the proposed merger of NIAAA and NIDA. In addition, the report suggests that Congress does not view the SMRB decision as final and indicates that the SMRB should revisit the issue. It also makes clear that NIH must respect the statutory requirements for processing and implementing any such reorganization which are specified in the NIH Reform Act of 2006. RSA will continue to aggressively protect the interests of its members as this process unfolds in 2012.