

March 2, 2022

Dr. Francis S. Collins, MD, PhD
Science Advisor to the President
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20504

Dear Dr. Collins,

Welcome back and thank you for your continued service to this country. You leave enormous shoes to fill at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and identifying the next Director of the NIH will be no easy task. The undersigned organizations collectively represent tens of thousands of scientists whose research in the behavioral, brain, cognitive, economic, and social sciences bear on human health and well-being and carry significant potential to improve the public health. We write to offer our perspective on key qualities and essential actions of an incoming NIH Director.

Scientists in our disciplines listened carefully as you reflected on your tenure and remarked that both the COVID-19 pandemic and the continuing obesity epidemic led to a greater appreciation for the role that human behavior plays in public health. Your leadership was notable for your appreciation for new approaches and an ability to learn from past efforts. To build on your achievements, a new Director will pick up where you left off by continuing to ask these very questions concerning the role of human behavior in health and how social context and modes of communication optimize health or worsen it.

As you know well, our country faces ongoing urgent health concerns on troubling trajectories. A mental health crisis, addiction, obesity, and health disparities are all growing problems with significant behavioral and social contributors. These issues coincide with the major societal challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and racial injustice. To most effectively prevent illness and address the negative health consequences of these cascading circumstances, the NIH must recognize the interactions between biological factors and behavioral and social ones to build a better understanding of the interconnectivity of complex systems that contributes to health outcomes. A successful Director would be able to articulate a vision for a comprehensive and balanced approach to improving Americans' health that considers biological, behavioral, social, and environmental factors in tandem.

The next nominee should demonstrate a commitment to and appreciation for the behavioral and social sciences to inform prevention and interventions for all aspects of health. Specifically, we encourage you to consider a nominee who is committed to taking full advantage of the existing Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR). Inviting OBSSR to participate in NIH-wide leadership meetings would be a meaningful first step toward enhancing its integrative capacity. OBSSR serves an efficient coordinating role, improving the synergy of basic and applied behavioral and social sciences research with biomedical research; enhancing the research infrastructure, methods, and measures needed to support a more cumulative and integrated approach; and facilitating the adoption of research findings in practice.

We are grateful to the President and the Administration for a clear commitment to advancing science and we appreciate this opportunity to offer our perspective on the qualities that will allow your successor to best serve the American people. We are eager to work together with you and this Administration in leveraging the behavioral and social sciences to improve the health of our nation.

Please contact Juliane Baron, FABBS, with any questions. Email: jbaron@fabbs.org. Phone: (202) 669-4834.

Sincerely,

Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research
American Anthropological Association
American Economic Association
American Psychological Association
American Sociological Association
Association for Behavior Analysis International
Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies
Association for Psychological Science
Association of Population Centers
Behavior Genetics Association
Behavioral Medicine Research Council
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Council of Graduate Departments of Psychology (COGDOP)
Division of Behavioral Medicine, University at Buffalo, State University of New York
Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences
International Congress of Infant Studies
International Society for Developmental Psychobiology
National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives
Population Association of America
Society for Computation in Psychology
Society for Experimental Psychology and Cognitive Science (APA Division 3)
Society for Personality and Social Psychology
Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD)
Society for the Scientific Study of Reading
Society of Behavioral Medicine
Society of Experimental Social Psychology (SESP)
The Cognitive Science Society
University of Oregon Prevention Science Institute
Vision Sciences Society