

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the NIDCD Strategic Plan. The Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences (FABBS) represents 27 scientific societies and over fifty university departments whose members and faculty share a commitment to advancing knowledge of the mind, brain, and behavior.

Before responding to specific language in the NIDCD Draft Themes and Goals, I want to bring your attention to a recent report on the [Integration of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research at the National Institutes of Health](#) led by the Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research, at the direction of Congress. The report was presented to and enthusiastically supported by the NIH Council of Councils at the May meeting. The group analyzed the level of integration of basic behavioral and social science research (bBSSR) across institutes and centers, considering measures of inclusion in strategic plans, Advisory Council representation, staffing, etc. FABBS comments offer opportunities to increase the inclusion of these sciences throughout the strategic plan that presents an emphasis on biomedical processes. We hope that you will see FABBS as a resource, given our umbrella role representing 27 scientific societies.

Vision: In reviewing the draft document, I was struck by the vision of NIDCD, 'to advance the sciences of communication to improve lives'. Representing behavioral and cognitive scientists, this vision begs questions about trust and the cognitive processing of information that leads to decision making. The current themes are very biomedical in nature, focusing largely on the mechanics, and lack adequate attention to behavioral and social questions around language and literacy - critical aspects of communication and key opportunities for prevention and intervention. FABBS encourages NIDCD to consider how behavioral and social factors can build on biomedical research to create a more robust understanding of human communication and contribute to more effective behavioral interventions and treatments.

Theme 1 - NIDCD seeks to leverage new technologies, cells, circuits, tissues, and systems. FABBS recommends including a fifth goal expanding upon the reference to 'systems' to include behavioral and social aspects such as environmental factors and social networks. For example, research in *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences* suggests that research is needed to develop better measures of language comprehension in school-aged children. Such systems could improve instructors' ability to identify children with language impairment, allowing more effective and timely interventions.

Theme 4 - 'Translate and implement scientific advances into standard clinical care.'

FABBS strongly supports this theme. We offer an example to help illustrate a service delivery mismatch that misses an opportunity to best support infants and children with severe hearing loss. Research suggests that proficiency of American Sign Language (ASL), in conjunction with learning spoken English, helps prevent language deprivation for this population. However, there are currently no wide-spread methods for providing access to ASL for parents and families with deaf children.

Theme 6 - Harness advanced technology to improve prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.

This theme would be strengthened by expanding the opportunities to promote healthy outcomes -prevention or enhanced diagnostics - beyond technology. Additionally, a stronger

emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches is essential to ensuring that investments in new technologies are as effective as possible. As noted in the draft, “NIDCD support can leverage expertise in fields, such as neuroscience, engineering, social, and behavioral science to help millions worldwide who cannot rely on their hearing or speech to communicate.” Including the behavioral sciences from the starting point of projects will ensure that technologies are developed in context and account for user interface from the beginning, maximizing the potential impact.

Workforce Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement

FABBS encourages NIDCD to add disability to the list of underrepresented communities and prioritize the inclusion of people who have lived experience of disabilities related to the NIDCD mission. If NIDCD has taken specific steps to engage deaf and hard of hearing individuals, it would be valuable to include in this section.