

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927  
Minority (202) 225-3641

November 14, 2017

The Honorable Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D.  
National Institutes of Health  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Collins:

We write to express concern about recent press reports that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has discontinued the dedicated funding program for gun violence research.<sup>1</sup> Gun violence is an urgent public health crisis facing communities across the country. It continues to present a hazard for public health and safety and resulted in the deaths of nearly 34,000 Americans in 2015.<sup>2</sup> Approximately two-thirds of those deaths were due to suicide and the remaining one-third were due to homicides.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, in 2015, there were more than 80,000 non-fatal gun related injuries, including 60,000 people who survived intentional attacks and 3,700 who survived suicide attempts.<sup>4</sup>

The number of sponsored research studies and articles published on gun violence is disproportionately low in comparison to those for health conditions and other factors that threaten human health and safety in the U.S.<sup>5</sup> Unlike other threats to human health like car accidents or heart disease, the federal government has been largely absent in providing funding

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<sup>1</sup> *NIH Quietly Shelves Gun Research Program*, Science (Sept. 13, 2017) (<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/09/nih-quietly-shelves-gun-research-program>).

<sup>2</sup> Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. *Key Gun Violence Statistics* (2016) (<https://www.bradycampaign.org/key-gun-violence-statistics>).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Research Letter: Scientific Publications on Firearms in Youth Before and After Congressional Action Prohibiting Federal Research Funding*. JAMA (Aug 7, 2013).

for gun violence research. This largely has resulted from Congress' inclusion of the so-called "Dickey Amendment," initially prohibiting the use of federal funds to "advocate or promote gun control" at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and later extended to the Department of Health and Human Services. While the "Dickey Amendment" is not an explicit ban on gun violence research, it has had a chilling effect on such research for the past 20 years.

After the tragic loss of life as the result of gun violence in Newtown, Connecticut, the Obama Administration announced a sweeping proposal to combat reduce gun violence in America. As part of *Now is the Time: The President's plan to protect our children and our communities by reducing gun violence*, President Obama clarified that "research on gun violence is not advocacy; it is critical public health research that gives all Americans information they need."<sup>6</sup> Further, President Obama called on all scientific agencies to conduct research into the causes and prevention of gun violence.<sup>7</sup>

NIH answered that call through the creation of a gun violence research program in September 2013. This program has provided \$18 million in dedicated funding for gun violence research to date.<sup>8</sup> By providing such funding, NIH guaranteed that it would provide funding for gun violence research in a given year.

This funding was critical because the difficulty in obtaining federal research funding has limited the number of current researchers and the development of the next generation of researchers focused on gun violence prevention. In fact, many graduate and professional students have avoided pursuing research into this subject due to how the lack of available funding for gun violence research affects their career prospects. According to a recent *Science* article, Dr. Rinad Beidas, a clinical psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, stated "[t]he funding stream [made available for by NIH for gun violence research] was mission critical to bringing me into a new area."<sup>9</sup>

In order to better understand the status of the program of dedicated funding that NIH made available for gun violence research, please respond to the following questions:

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<sup>6</sup> The White House, *Now is the Time: The President's plan to protect our children and our communities by reducing gun violence*, (Jan. 16, 2013) ([https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/wh\\_now\\_is\\_the\\_time\\_full.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/wh_now_is_the_time_full.pdf)).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> NIH, *NIH calls for research projects examining violence*, (Sept. 27, 2013) (<https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/nih-calls-research-projects-examining-violence>); *NIH Quietly Shelves Gun Research Program*, *Science* (Sept. 13, 2017) (<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/09/nih-quietly-shelves-gun-research-program>).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

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1. Has NIH discontinued this program? If so, please provide an explanation of why this program was discontinued. If not, please explain your plans for funding the program in fiscal year 2018 and beyond.
2. How many gun violence research grants were awarded during the three fiscal years prior to the creation of the dedicated funding stream for gun violence research at NIH?
3. How many gun violence research grants were awarded as a result of NIH creating the dedicated funding stream for gun violence research? If the program is discontinued, please provide an explanation for how NIH is ensuring that these critical research efforts are continued.
4. Please list other actions NIH has taken or will take to advance gun violence research.


Individuals, families, and communities affected by gun violence cannot afford for NIH to leave funding for this critical research to chance. That is why we believe that NIH must ensure it is adequately funding gun violence research.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We would appreciate your response to these questions as soon as possible, but no later than November 28, 2017. If you should have any questions regarding this request, please contact Waverly Gordon on the Democratic Committee staff at (202)225-3641.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Ranking Member



Bobby L. Rush  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Energy