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News:

Cancer research, stimulated

Posted by [Bob Grant](#)

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The US federal agency tasked with tackling cancer has laid out a plan to double the number of cancer research projects it funds, prioritizing first-time grants to young researchers and emphasizing genomic approaches to understanding the disease.

These goals are attainable, according to [John Niederhuber](#), director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI), thanks to an infusion of government funding from an increased annual budget and recently awarded stimulus funds.



But since stimulus funds must be spent within two years, Niederhuber said during a speech at the American Association for Cancer Research conference in Denver, the NCI is weighing grant awards carefully.

"It falls to NCI to carefully calculate and thoughtfully assume the risks of initially funding some four-year grants with economic stimulus money, knowing that we will need to find additional resources for the out years," Niederhuber said, according to a [transcript](#) of his speech. "I believe it falls, as well, to our grantees to come forward with only their strongest science."

In 2009 the agency will be able to fund the top 16% of grant applications instead of only the top 12%--last year's payline--based on budgetary increases alone, Niederhuber said. The NCI may be able to fund 25% of applications with the added \$1.3 billion that the agency is set to receive as part of the \$10 billion in stimulus funding for the National Institutes of Health.

But raising the payline is only half the story. "Economic stimulus funds give us the chance to be visionary," Niederhuber said, adding that the NCI will seek to fund more young, first-time investigators, and will emphasize prevention and early diagnosis in the research it supports in the future. "Patients still need better treatments, better prevention, and better early detection," he said. "We must recommit ourselves to answering that call."

This recommitment comes in the form of three initiatives--genetic screening of different cancers, developing personalized cancer care drug development platforms, and integrating the work of physical scientists in oncological study--that largely target cancer's molecular roots.

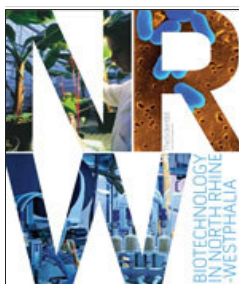
Through programs such as the Therapeutically Applicable Research to Generate Effective Treatments (TARGET) and The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA), the three year old project on which the NCI collaborates with the National Human Genome Research Institute, researchers hope to identify a slew of genes related to various tumor types, Niederhuber said. TCGA has already identified new genes involved with glioblastoma tumors and has characterized four different subtypes of the deadly cancer. "With that foundation of success, we plan to move TCGA forward, with a goal of identifying all of the relevant genomic alterations in 20 to 25 major tumor types."

"We are undoubtedly moving toward the day when cancers will be diagnosed early and controlled," Niederhuber said.

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