Policy Watch

Spotlight
This month’s Policy Watch includes information about the proposed reorganization of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, with a link to Dr. Alan Guttmacher’s presentation from the recent NICHD Council meeting describing the current and proposed organization of the Institute, as well as a link for providing input on the proposed reorganization. Policy Watch also provides an update on the 2012 Federal poverty guidelines. It highlights a National Academies workshop on child maltreatment, and outlines the Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) new nutrition standards for school meals. To close, Tisha Wiley, Ph.D., shares her experiences as an SRCD Policy Fellow in the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research within the National Institutes of Health.

I. Science Policy

National Advisory Child Health and Human Development Council Considers Proposed Reorganization of Institute
The National Advisory Child Health and Human Development Council met on January 26 to advise, consult with, and make recommendations to the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Director, Dr. Alan Guttmacher. A focus of the meeting was the proposed reorganization of NICHD, which was informed by NICHD’s recent scientific visioning process. Dr. Guttmacher’s PowerPoint presentation, Discussion of NICHD's Proposed Reorganization Plans, is now available on the NICHD website. Members of the public are encouraged to submit feedback on the proposed reorganization, and can do so by sending an email to NICHDDirectorsOffice@mail.nih.gov by March 1, 2012. The meeting also included legislative and budget updates, news, awards and recognition, and recent research advances related to NICHD and the National Institutes of Health; updates on the National Children’s Study; and updates from the NICHD Board of Scientific Counselors. For more information on the meeting, including links to the agenda and Director’s Report, click here.

National Advisory Mental Health Council Meets to Advise Director of National Institute of Mental Health
On January 20, the National Advisory Mental Health Council met for its quarterly meeting to advise Dr. Thomas R. Insel, Director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). During the Director's Report, Dr. Insel noted that the NIMH Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 budget is expected to be $1.480 billion, which is a 0.2% increase over last year's budget. Dr. Insel added that although the change in NIMH's budget from FY 2011 to FY 2012 is less than inflation and less than the President's proposed budget, NIMH—and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in general—have done well in weathering budget cuts as compared to other Federal agencies. Dr. Insel also noted in his report that NIMH is being proactive in supporting early career investigators and also in supporting “big science” initiatives. Seeing that the NIMH Strategic Plan was last revised in 2007, Dr. Insel has begun working with the NIMH Office of Science Policy, Planning and Communications to oversee a new strategic planning process—one that will involve NIMH’s many stakeholders, including the extramural research community. Click here for more information.

Administration Releases Report on the Competitiveness and Innovative Capacity of the US
On January 6, the Department of Commerce and the White House released a report to Congress on “The Competitiveness and Innovative Capacity of the United States,” as required by the American COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010. The report emphasizes the role of the Federal government in supporting research and development (R&D), including basic and applied research. It states that the “National Institutes of Health (NIH), in particular, has been the source of many significant advances in medical science, advances that have improved the well-being of the US population, as well as populations around the world.” The Administration proposes to enhance and extend a corporate R&D tax credit in order to incentivize and reward private sector R&D investment. Click here to read the report.

II. Social Policy

Child Maltreatment

National Academies Holds Workshop on Child Maltreatment
On January 30-31, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and the National Research Council (NRC) held a public workshop to review and assess research on child abuse and neglect, identify gaps in the existing literature, and consider potential future research priorities. The purpose of the workshop was to inform a future study that would identify ways in which the available research could inform policy and practice for child welfare and other family support services as well as recommend research priorities for the next decade. The project is sponsored by the Administration for Children, Youth and Families of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Click here for more information, including meeting materials.

**Nutrition**

**USDA Unveils New Nutrition Standards for School Meals**
On January 25, First Lady Michelle Obama and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack unveiled the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) new nutrition standards for school meals. The new meal requirements will raise standards for the first time in more than fifteen years and improve the nutrition of the nearly 32 million kids who participate in school meal programs. The healthier meal requirements are a key component of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which was championed by the First Lady as part of her Let’s Move! campaign and signed into law by President Obama in December of 2010. The final standards include: (1) Ensuring students are offered both fruits and vegetables every day of the week; (2) Substantially increasing offerings of whole grain-rich foods; (3) Offering only fat-free or low-fat milk varieties; (4) Limiting calories based on the age of children being served to ensure proper portion size; and (5) Increasing the focus on reducing the amounts of saturated fat, trans fats and sodium. The new standards are expected to cost $3.2 billion over the next five years and are based on recommendations from a panel of experts convened by the Institute of Medicine (IOM). The USDA proposed to limit the serving of starchy vegetables (such as French fries) to two servings a week and to eliminate pizza sauce as a serving of vegetables, however provisions in a fiscal year (FY) 2012 spending bill blocked the USDA from using money to carry out such changes. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act also calls for nutrition standards to extend to other foods sold in schools that are not part of the school lunch program, including “a la carte” foods and snacks in vending machines. Those standards have not yet been proposed. Click here for more information.

**Poverty**

**Annual Update of the HHS Poverty Guidelines**
On January 19, the Office of the Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released its 2012 poverty guidelines, which are used as an eligibility criterion by the Community Services Block Grant program and a number of other Federal programs. The poverty guidelines are calculated by increasing the latest published Census Bureau poverty thresholds by the relevant percentage change in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). The guidelines in this 2012 notice reflect the 3.2 percent price increase between calendar years 2010 and 2011. After this inflation adjustment, the guidelines are rounded and adjusted to standardize the differences between family sizes. Under the updated poverty guidelines, a family of four in the lower 48 states and the District of Columbia needs to have an income of less than $23,050 to be considered as “living under the poverty line.” Click here for more information.

**III. Invitations for Input and Participation**

**Request for Comments and Input**

**Head Start Health Managers Descriptive Study**
The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is proposing a data collection activity that will provide descriptive data about the Head Start Health Component. The goals of the Head Start Health Manager Descriptive Study are: (1) to describe the characteristics of Health Managers and related staff in Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) programs; (2) to identify the current landscape of health programs and services being offered to children and families; (3) to determine how health initiatives are prioritized, implemented, and sustained; and (4) to identify the programmatic features and policy levers that exist to support health services including staffing, environment, and community collaboration. These objectives will be accomplished through an online survey of all HS/EHS Health Managers, including American Indian/Alaskan Native and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start grantees. The survey responses will be further informed by semi-structured interviews conducted with a subsample of Head Start Health Managers, teachers, and family service workers. ACF specifically requests comments on: (a) whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including
whether the information shall have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information; (c) the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on respondents, including through the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology. Comments are due by March 4, 2011. Click here for more information.

Input into the Deliberations of the Advisory Committee to the NIH Director Working Group on Diversity in the Biomedical Research Workforce
The Advisory Committee to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director (ACD) has established a working group to examine diversity in the biomedical research workforce and provide concrete recommendations to the ACD and the NIH Director on ways to enhance diversity throughout the various research career stages, particularly with regard to underrepresented minorities, persons with disabilities, and persons from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Working Group would like to gather input from various sources, including extramural and intramural researchers, academic institutions, industry, and the public, to help inform the development of recommendations to present to the ACD and the NIH Director on actions the NIH can take to increase the diversity of the biomedical research workforce. In its initial deliberations, the working group identified the following issues as important to consider when developing recommendations: (1) The appropriate transition points where NIH’s training, career development and research grant programs could most effectively cultivate diversity in the biomedical research workforce; (2) The role of mentorship in the training and success of biomedical researchers throughout their careers; (3) The influence of role models whose qualities and characteristics can positively affect the training and success of underrepresented biomedical researchers through their careers; (4) The role of institutional infrastructure support and climate as a factor in the success of underrepresented researchers; and (5) The potential role of institutional affiliation, academic pedigree, and various conscious and unconscious factors on review outcomes. Input is sought for each of the identified areas and any other items the working group might consider. Comments should address: (1) For any of the areas identified and any other specific areas you believe are worthy of consideration by the working group, please identify the critical issue(s) and impact(s) on institutions, scientists, or both; (2) Please identify and explain which of the issues you identified are, in your opinion, the most important for the working group to address and why; and (3) Please comment on any specific ways you believe these or other issues would or should affect NIH policies or processes. Comments are due by February 24, 2012. Click here for more information.

Promising and Practical Strategies to Increase Postsecondary Success
The Department of Education (ED) seeks to collect information on promising and practical strategies that institutions of higher education, States, or other entities have used with the goal of helping improve rates of postsecondary success, transfer, and graduation. ED is seeking information on measurable contributions that have accelerated the attainment of postsecondary degrees or certificates, including industry-recognized-credentials that lead to improved learning and employment outcomes. Public comments may focus on, but are not limited to: (1) A detailed description of the strategy; (2) A description of an evaluation of the strategy, including references to published or related studies and links to the relevant data or evaluation; (3) A discussion of any challenges that arose during the implementation of the strategy and subsequent responses to those challenges; (4) A description of the factors that are key to the success of the strategy; (5) Suggestions about how other institutions may replicate the strategy; and (6) A detailed discussion of any Federal regulatory or statutory requirements or other laws, rules, or regulations that made successfully implementing the promising and practical strategy easier or more difficult. ED requests that respondents demonstrate how the promising and practical strategy is supported by data on outcomes. If a strategy described in a submission does not have extensive outcome data, the respondent should submit evidence that the proposed strategy, or one similar to it, has been attempted previously, even if on a limited scale or in a limited setting, and yielded promising results. Comments are due by April 30, 2012. Click here for more information.

IV. Information Sources

New Reports

GAO Report Recommends that the Office of Science and Technology Policy Work with Agencies to Coordinate Their STEM Activities, Diminish Overlap, and Strengthen Evaluation
On January 20, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released its report on Federal STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education programs. The report finds that in fiscal year (FY) 2010, 13 federal agencies invested over $3 billion in 209 programs designed to increase knowledge of STEM fields and attainment of STEM degrees. 83% of those programs overlapped to some degree with at least 1 other program, often because of broad and overlapping target groups. GAO found that many of these programs have little or no evaluation mechanisms. The report recommends that the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), which leads the government wide STEM education strategic planning effort, should work with agencies to align their efforts in this area with a strategic plan, work to coordinate efforts across agencies, review programs for possible consolidation or elimination, and assist agencies in planning for the evaluation of their programs. Click here to read the report.
U.S. and International Science and Engineering Indicators 2012
The National Science Foundation (NSF) recently released its biennial report, “Science and Engineering Indicators 2012,” highlighting major developments in international and U.S. science and technology (S&T). The report provides an overview of research outputs, including patents and publication in scientific journals, and finds that although researchers in the European Union (EU) and the U.S. dominate the world article production, their share of published articles decreased steadily from 69% in 1995 to 58% in 2009. This is largely due to the increase in China’s output of published articles. The report also notes that relatively few students at grades 4, 8, and 12 reached their grade-specific proficiency levels in science on the 2009 NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress). In terms of higher education, in 2008, students in China earned approximately 23% of university degrees awarded in science and engineering worldwide, while those in the EU earned about 19%, and those in the U.S. earned approximately 10% of these degrees. Public attitudes about S&T remain positive, with nearly 82% of Americans expressing support for government funding of basic research. Click here to read the report.

Sex-Specific Reporting of Scientific Research
In 2010, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released a report that found that, among other things, data not being reported by sex had slowed progress in women’s health. The number of women participating in clinical trials has increased over the last two decades, though they are still underrepresented. Even when women are included in these trials, however, the results are often not analyzed separately by sex. On August 30, 2011, the IOM’s Board on Population Health and Public Health Practice hosted a workshop to address the recommendation in Women’s Health Research: Progress, Pitfalls, and Promise that journals should adopt a guideline that, where appropriate, articles reporting the outcomes of clinical trials report on men and women separately. The workshop focus went beyond clinical trials, to look at sex-specific reporting in all types of scientific research. Speakers at the workshop discussed the need for sex-specific reporting, potential barriers to such reporting, as well as what must be done to report sex-specific results. Click here for the summary of the workshop.

Electronic Newsletters and Resources

COSSA Washington Updates Online
The January 23rd issue of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) Washington Update is available here.

NIH Extramural Nexus
News and updates on NIH extramural grant policies, processes, events, and resources are posted on a continuous basis. The Extramural Nexus also incorporates a blog, “Rock Talk,” by NIH Deputy Director of Extramural Research Dr. Sally Rockey, which is open for comments by readers. The Extramural Nexus is available here.

Office of Science and Technology (OSTP) Policy Blog
The OSTP provides the President and his senior staff with accurate, relevant, and timely scientific and technical advice on “all matters of consequence” and ensures that the policies of the Executive Branch are informed by sound science. The OSTP Policy Blog enables greater transparency surrounding efforts to increase scientific integrity and is updated regularly to include posts by the US’ leading science advisors.

V. Spotlight on the SRCD Fellow
Tisha Wiley, Ph.D.

I am a second year fellow placed in the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR), which is situated within the Office of the Director at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). OBSSR was established in 1995 and its mission is to advance the scientific understanding of the role of behavioral and social factors in illness and health. OBSSR is responsible for integrating behavioral and social sciences research across the 27 NIH Institutes and Centers using a variety of tools, including funding initiatives, training opportunities, conferences, workshops, and lectures.

The breadth of OBSSR’s mission provided me with opportunities to interact with people from across the NIH as well as at government agencies outside of the NIH. The last year and a half at OBSSR have been an exhilarating experience and an incredible learning opportunity. I am trained as a social psychologist, though my research before coming to the fellowship focused and the long-term effects of child abuse and neglect on children and how such children interact with legal and social service systems. I have brought a developmental and social psychological perspective to my office and had numerous opportunities to work on projects and serve on committees that are directly relevant to my expertise. However, one of the most interesting aspects of my placement is that I have stepped outside (often far outside) of my comfort zone and learned about issues and research that I had limited (if any) knowledge of before coming to OBSSR. I have also had opportunities to explore areas of longstanding interest and to create momentum around new initiatives. For example, one
exciting project I have worked on is a workshop intended to bridge efforts in the computer science field to visualize complex data effectively with efforts by behavioral and social scientists struggling to make sense of complex and extremely large data sets. I planned a 1-day workshop that brought together people from various federal agencies, computer scientists, behavioral and social scientists, and software developers. The meeting was a great success and I look forward to working on future activities to push this effort forward, with the hope that this will benefit many areas of science, including developmental science.

In addition to my activities around data visualization, I have been involved in many other activities and projects. These activities included: drafting funding announcements, organizing various workshops, planning a summer training institute with colleagues at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), representing my office on trans-governmental committees, attending congressional briefings, planning activities for the 2012 National Science and Engineering Festival, responding to congressional inquiries about controversial NIH-funded research, and acting as a planning committee member on a research project lead by the National Institutes of Justice addressing teen dating violence. OBSSR is a unique and exciting place within NIH that has afforded me many opportunities to learn new things and interact with a wide variety of people and I have enjoyed my time at OBSSR immensely.

In addition to what I’ve learned through my work at OBSSR, I’ve also had access an impressive array of mentors and professional development activities. My time as an SRCD fellow has provided me with many opportunities to meet scientific and policy leaders and to come to understand (or at least begin to understand) the complexity of the public policy world. I anticipate transitioning into a position as a Project Officer at the National Institute on Drug Abuse, where I will manage a portfolio of grants and contracts relevant to the delivery of effective drug abuse treatment services to adults and juveniles involved in the criminal justice system. I am excited to take on this new role and to continue to work at the intersection of science and policy. I am deeply grateful to SRCD for providing me this amazing experience.