

Why We Need Federally Funded Cancer Research

Question: Why is federal funding critical for cancer research, and what is the role of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI)?

Answer: Federal funding is the backbone of all cancer research in the US. Federal funding for cancer research comes primarily from NIH and NCI. This funding supports the foundational scientific work that industry isn't motivated to invest in, such as the initial research into a new drug or the study of rare cancers. Bipartisan investment has directly contributed to a reduction in cancer deaths and led to groundbreaking treatments that have saved millions of lives.

Q: What is the outlook for 2026?

A: Congress has until Sept. 30 to pass a bill funding the federal government for 2026. In his 2026 budget proposal, the president called for a 40% cut to NIH and NCI. Congress ultimately decides the budget, and cancer research funding has traditionally had strong bipartisan support. Now is the time for people to contact their members of Congress and tell them to support federal cancer research funding.

Q: What impact would a funding reduction have on patient care and the future of cancer treatment?

A: A funding reduction would directly affect patient care by slowing down the development of new treatments and therapies. It would also discourage young scientists from pursuing careers in the field, leading to a "brain drain" of the country's brightest minds. This loss of talent means fewer clinical trials, fewer innovative discoveries, and ultimately, a slower pace of progress, which costs lives. Providers also would have fewer options and tools to treat patients effectively.

Q: What are some examples of what federally funded cancer research has accomplished over the last 50 years?

A: Sustained, strategic federal investment in cancer research has led to dozens of discoveries over the last 50 years, from a deeper understanding of the disease to new diagnostic tools and life-saving treatments. This has fundamentally changed the outlook for patients and their families, turning once-terminal diagnoses into manageable conditions and even cures.

Examples include:

- **Improved screening and detection.** Fifty years ago, about half of all breast cancers were found at late stages; today, thanks to federally funded research and improved screenings, about two-thirds of cancers are diagnosed at the earliest, most treatable stages. Similarly, colorectal cancer, once a "silent killer," has seen a dramatic 55%

drop in mortality thanks to the widespread adoption of screening tests like colonoscopies, developed through federal research.

- **Breast cancer.** The 5-year survival rate for breast cancer has jumped from 75% in 1977 to over 91% today, thanks to federally funded research that developed more effective targeted therapies.
- **Melanoma.** A decade ago, the five-year survival rate for metastatic melanoma was less than 10%. But because of federally funded research, particularly into combination immunotherapies, that rate now exceeds 50% for advanced cases.
- **Childhood Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia (ALL).** Fifty years ago, only 1 in 10 children diagnosed with ALL survived. Today, because of federally supported clinical trials and new drug combinations, the 5-year survival rate is over 90%, giving thousands of children a chance at a healthy future.
- **CAR-T Cell Therapy.** Federally funded research was also critical in the foundational science that led to this revolutionary treatment. CAR-T cell therapy involves reprogramming a patient's own immune cells to seek out and destroy cancer. For patients with certain leukemias and lymphomas where conventional treatments have failed, this therapy has achieved remarkable and durable remissions, essentially turning their own bodies into a powerful weapon against their disease.

Q: What specific areas of research would be most affected by funding cuts?

A: The proposed cuts would disproportionately affect basic scientific research, which is the foundational work for all future breakthroughs, as well as research into rare and pediatric cancers. These areas often lack the commercial viability to attract private investment, making them entirely dependent on federal funding.

Q: Does federal cancer research funding provide any economic benefits?

A: Every \$1 invested in NIH funding generates over double that amount in new economic activity, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs in every state and ensuring the continued strength of the U.S. economy and the biomedical industry.

Q: Why is it important for the US to continue investing in cancer research, even in times of economic uncertainty?

A: Investing in cancer research today ensures that we are prepared for the challenges of tomorrow. Federal funding not only accelerates scientific discovery but also secures our national health and scientific standing. Cutting this funding now would have devastating consequences for both the progress we've made and the health of future generations. It is an essential investment that ensures the US remains a global leader in medical innovation and that cancer patients have access to the best possible care.