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The mission of ADEA is to lead institutions and individuals in the dental education community to address contemporary issues influencing education, research and the delivery of oral health care for the overall health and safety of the public.

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August 7, 2015

Electronically Submitted

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

Re: Request for Information: A Framework for the NIH-wide Strategic Plan; Notice Number NOT-OD-15-118

Dear Dr. Collins:

The *American Dental Education Association's (ADEA)* members include all 66 U.S. dental schools and many allied and advanced dental education programs, deans, program directors, administrators, faculty and students, residents and fellows. The mission of ADEA is to lead institutions and individuals in the dental education community to address contemporary issues influencing education, research and the delivery of oral health care for the overall health and safety of the public. On behalf of ADEA members, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) request for information (RFI) on a framework for the NIH-wide Strategic Plan.

As an advocate of dental and craniofacial, biomedical, clinical and translational research, ADEA is committed to supporting and promoting the importance of cutting-edge scientific research that NIH produces and which has the potential of life-saving and life-altering benefits for the country.

Research serves as the foundation of dental education, and of the science and practice of dentistry; ultimately, improving the nation's overall and oral health and well-being. The vast majority of dental, oral and craniofacial research in the United States is conducted by dental schools with the support of the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR). NIDCR's research yields new discoveries and effective treatments that prevent disease, provide practical applications of research, and offer quality-training opportunities for faculty and students. As one of the first institutes of the NIH, the NIDCR serves as the lead agency for scientific discoveries and research on dental, oral and craniofacial health and disease. NIDCR-supported research fosters interdisciplinary research teams, provides evidenced-based practices and interventions to advance oral and overall health and makes significant contributions to the overarching biomedical research portfolio. With the aforementioned in mind, we provide the following comments to the requested topics put forth in the RFI.

- ***Effective Dissemination and Application of Research Findings***

Effective translation and dissemination of research is needed to advance any scientific discovery into clinical studies, practice and patient care. Therefore, it is important that the NIH develops, refines, and implements effective methods to disseminate research findings that can be easily understood and applied by individuals, clinicians and public health decision-makers. In the end, implementing comprehensive dissemination strategies is necessary to heighten the visibility and impact of NIH-supported research.

- ***Comprehensive Trans-NIH Research Themes Apply Across Biomedicine***

Salivary gland research is a cross-cutting area of opportunity to include in the NIH-wide Strategic Plan that can improve the lives of millions suffering from head and neck cancer and dry mouth. Additionally, saliva can be a non-invasive measure of proteins to indicate disease development in the mouth and the rest of the body. Saliva plays a significant role in preventing infection and tooth decay. The destruction of salivary glands makes it difficult to taste, eat, swallow, and talk. Radiation therapy for head and neck cancer can damage salivary glands and reduce the ability to secrete saliva. Each year, hundreds of Americans are left with severely damaged and destroyed salivary glands after undergoing radiation therapy for head and neck cancer. Salivary gland cancers are rare but they are often fatal and reoccurrence is common, only 66 percent with aggressive treatment have a 10-year survival rate. Also, salivary glands can be destroyed by specific genetic defects in Sjögren's Syndrome, a chronic autoimmune disease affecting as many as four million Americans.

Salivary gland research can involve identifying the quantity, location and function of salivary gland stem cells to learn how salivary glands are destroyed and can be regenerated. There is opportunity to develop more targeted anti-cancer drugs through comprehensive genetic analysis and mapping of salivary gland tumor formation and progression. Research has found functional similarities with salivary gland tumors and endometrial and ovarian cancers, suggesting a promising area of research for more effective therapeutic strategies.

- ***Developing the Next Generation of Learned, Diverse Scientific Researchers***

ADEA is committed to promoting a robust and diverse scientific workforce capable of *turning research discoveries into health*. The increased demand of research to support evidence-based practice has intensified the need of a diverse, well-prepared workforce. ADEA believes the upcoming Strategic Plan must include a plan and efforts to develop and maintain a critical mass of investigators from diverse backgrounds and scientific disciplines, especially those dedicated to address the complex and multifaceted nature of chronic diseases, such as dental caries or tooth decay. Eliminating silos and incorporating cross-discipline training will ultimately strengthen the outcomes of the research and improve the health of the public.

- ***Investing in Personalized Medicine***

The emerging field of personalized medicine offers an unprecedented opportunity to customize health care decisions, products and therapies to the unique characteristics of an individual. Personalized medicine can foster better-designed clinical trials to yield more targeted therapies with faster results, leverage genetic information and develop a more robust understanding of

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biomarker treatments; and curtail long-term health care costs by providing the “right treatment for the right patient at the right time.” The possibilities of this kind of research is unlimited.

ADEA is excited by the scope and promise of the NIH-wide Strategic Plan. Do not hesitate to let us know if we can be of further assistance in this regard. Please feel free to contact Yvonne Knight, J.D., ADEA Senior Vice President for Advocacy and Governmental Relations at knighy@adea.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard W. Valachovic". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard W. Valachovic, D.M.D., M.P.H.
President and CEO