

[NEWS](#) | POSTED SEPTEMBER 10, 2024

Tell SRCD Your Thoughts on the Strategic Plan for the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

Thank you for your inputs. SRCD is working on a response.

SRCD members are invited to give their views on [a draft strategic plan](#) that will shape the next five years of research and workforce support that the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) conducts.

SRCD's Policy Department will submit an official response to the Institute's request for information (RFI) on behalf of our members, in consultation with the [Policy Committee](#).

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Background

NICHD has been updating its strategic plan every five years to address emerging public health challenges impacting children and families. This is a key moment for stakeholders like SRCD to share our voice on its research agenda and plans.

Summary

Overall, the new proposal attempts to set out a comprehensive and integrated approach to research, with a stronger focus on precision medicine, health disparities, and emerging research areas. It also aims to address health throughout the entire lifespan and emphasizes broader and more collaborative research efforts. Finally, it looks to enhance programs and initiatives to better serve diverse populations and address public health issues.

There are five research goals and cross-cutting themes noted. Read the summaries below.

Research Goals

Research Goal #1: Understanding the Molecular, Cellular, and Structural Basis of Development

- **Summary:** Enhance understanding of developmental processes, including critical periods, and the origins of congenital anomalies, neurodevelopmental disorders, and intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- **Opportunities:** Focus on intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing development, using advanced technologies and tools to study developmental biology. This includes exploring how extrinsic factors can influence developmental and physiological processes, particularly in the context of congenital anomalies, neurodevelopmental disorders, and intellectual and developmental disabilities. Additionally, this goal aims to enhance collaborative developmental biology research by investing in improved infrastructure—along with novel tools and technologies—to analyze and validate data derived from model systems research, biophysics, biomechanics, optogenetics, and other emerging scientific areas. The goal is also to improve research infrastructure and foster collaborative developmental biology research.

Research Goal #2: Promoting Gynecologic, Andrologic, and Reproductive Health

- **Summary:** Enable individuals to manage their fertility and minimize the impact of reproductive health conditions.

- Goals: Improve understanding of reproductive health across different life stages, including puberty, andropause, and perimenopause. Focus on reproductive aging, infertility, and the impact of biological and environmental factors. Develop new methods for fertility stimulation, preservation, and contraception. Address gynecologic conditions and health disparities and improve contraceptive options and understanding of their effects on health.

Research Goal #3: Setting the Foundation for Healthy Pregnancies and Lifelong Wellness

- Summary: Improve pregnancy outcomes to enhance the lifelong health of women and their children.
- Opportunities: Improve outcomes for maternal health conditions, labor and delivery complications, and postpartum conditions. Enhance interdisciplinary collaborations aimed at understanding mechanisms and causes of preterm birth and aberrant fetal growth, integrating diverse data types to inform interventions. Support community-informed research and continue studying the placenta to understand its role in pregnancy outcomes. Support the development of prevention strategies for labor and delivery complications that contribute to maternal morbidity and mortality. Identify new approaches to mitigate maternal and paternal risk factors in the postpartum period and beyond.

Research Goal #4: Improving Child and Adolescent Health and the Transition to Adulthood

- Summary: Advance understanding of typical and atypical child development, address major causes of illness and death in children, improve transition to adult healthcare, and strengthen pediatric primary care.
- Opportunities: Identify strategies to reduce infant mortality and improve early interventions. Identify and assess risk-reduction strategies to address the systemic and individual causes of infant mortality both domestically and globally, including new approaches to prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Sudden Unexplained Infant Death, and stillbirth. Improve knowledge of how social and environmental factors affect infant, child, and adolescent health and development across the lifespan and understanding of how to optimize timing of interventions for healthy development. Develop and assess prevention and treatment strategies for trauma, injury, and violence. Enhance integration of pediatric and adult care systems and improve evidence-based practices in pediatric primary care.

Research Goal #5: Advancing Safe and Effective Therapeutics and Devices for Pregnant and Lactating Women, Children, and People with Disabilities

- Summary: Develop, test, and validate safe and effective therapeutics and devices specifically for pregnant and lactating people, children, and/or individuals with disabilities.

- **Opportunities:** Focus on foundational research for interventions targeting pregnant and lactating individuals, children, and people with disabilities. Identify biomarkers and validate outcome measures for testing therapies. Identify and validate biomarkers, modeling approaches, and outcome measures that can be used to support rigorous testing and/or regulatory approval of pharmacotherapies and devices for these populations, increasing access to treatments suited to the individual's needs. Possibly use data science techniques to assess patient outcomes, therapeutic safety or effectiveness, patient engagement, and/or health care delivery in datasets that include pregnant and lactating people, children, and/or people with disabilities.

Cross-Cutting Themes

In addition to the research goal areas noted above, there are several cross-cutting topics that are intended to integrate with the scientific research goals. These include:

- **Global Health:** Enhance understanding and interventions for culturally diverse populations and those with disabilities worldwide.
- **Health Disparities:** Address social, economic, and structural factors contributing to health disparities among underrepresented populations.
- **Infectious Disease:** Improve understanding of infections affecting pregnant individuals, children, and people with disabilities, and advance treatments.
- **Nutrition:** Study the impact of nutrition on reproductive health, pregnancy, and growth and development across the lifespan.
- **Prevention:** Advance methods to identify risk factors and enhance prevention strategies for diseases and disorders.
- **Research Training:** Training and career development of the next generation of the scientific workforce.

Thank you for your inputs. SRCD is working with the Policy Committee in drafting a response. For more information about this RFI, click [here](#). To review the current NICHD Strategic Plan, 2020-2024, click [here](#).