

March 20, 2018

Lawrence A. Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D.
Principal Deputy Director
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Tabak:

Thank you for your letter of February 23, 2018 and your recognition that the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health (FNIH) continues to be an essential partner for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in support of science that improves human health. The FNIH recognizes that the opioid epidemic is a critical public health problem that negatively and dramatically affects many lives. The FNIH is keen to be part of a solution and is well positioned to marshal intellectual, technical, financial and human resources to support the mission of the NIH and to achieve public health aims.

The FNIH Board held an extraordinary meeting on Friday, March 16, 2018 to consider a public-private partnership to address the opioid crisis. We are pleased that Dr. Collins, Dr. Wolinetz and you were able to attend and explain the NIH's vision for the partnership. The discussion was enhanced by the participation of outside experts in the areas of epidemiology, bioethics, patient advocacy, research and public policy. I think you will agree this was an engaging and wide-ranging discussion. After all guests were excused, the Board met in executive session to consider the Foundation's potential role.


The Board agreed that the FNIH has a critical role to play in helping the NIH explore solutions to the crisis and stands ready to assist. Moreover, the scientific objectives proposed to be addressed by the NIH appear sound.

Nevertheless, the FNIH Board decided that an approach that relies disproportionately on input and financing from pharmaceutical companies is not appropriate in this circumstance. The FNIH is uncomfortable seeking or receiving monetary donations from any pharmaceutical company or industry representative at this time to support implementation of the research plan as presented. Doing so poses an unacceptably high risk of public skepticism concerning the eventual scientific outcomes given the responsibility some companies may bear in having created the crisis. Also, it would likely undermine public confidence in the many other valuable public-private partnerships that the NIH and the FNIH have created and will create to improve human health.

The Board considers that an opportunity exists for the NIH to lead a national movement incorporating the views and resources of all stakeholders to the crisis. For example, the NIH and the FNIH might invite additional stakeholders to provide input into the scientific proposal, and the FNIH could explore funding from such stakeholders for the plan and other activities that address the crisis. Also, some pharmaceutical companies have indicated that they might be willing to donate compounds and other assets directly to the NIH with no strings attached. In summary, the Foundation is prepared to consider many kinds and types of partnerships aside from the currently proposed structure to address the epidemic.

The FNIH looks forward to working with the NIH to address this devastating public health challenge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maria C. Freire". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line drawn underneath the name.

Maria C. Freire, Ph.D.
President and Executive Director

cc: Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Carrie Wolinetz, Ph.D.;
Steven M. Paul, M.D.