



COUNCIL FOR THE  
ADVANCEMENT OF  
NURSING SCIENCE

September 2, 2021

Shannon N. Zenk, PhD, MPH, RN, FAAN  
Director  
National Institute of Nursing Research  
National Institutes of Health  
31 Center Drive, Room 5B03  
Bethesda, MD 20892-2178

Dear Director Zenk,

The Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science (CANS) and the American Academy of Nursing (Academy) appreciate the opportunity to respond to the call for insights into the development of the National Institute of Nursing Research's (NINR) Strategic Plan for 2022-2026. The Academy serves the public by advancing health policy through the generation, synthesis, and dissemination of nursing knowledge. Academy Fellows are inducted into the organization for their extraordinary contributions to improve health locally and globally. With more than 2,800 Fellows, the Academy represents nursing's most accomplished leaders in policy, research, administration, practice, and academia. As the scientific voice for the Academy, CANS formulates and advances research, scientific training, and career development within the profession. In the effort to promote better health, CANS enhances communication among nurse scientists and the public to develop, disseminate, and implement nursing research.

We appreciate that NINR has made great efforts to connect with the nursing community and solicit feedback as the Institute works to finalize its 2022-2026 strategic plan. It was important to hear the discussion during the 104th Meeting of the National Advisory Council for Nursing Research on May 18, 2021, which reviewed the report from the Strategic Plan Working Group and reflect on the trajectory of the Institute. As NINR is meeting with various stakeholders for input into the development of the strategic plan, we welcome a conversation to further discuss our comments, which focus on two distinct areas:

- Sustaining and elevating nursing science to address diversity, equity, and inclusion; and
- Championing scientific advances in a changing environment.

#### **Sustaining and Elevating Nursing Science to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

The CANS and the Academy appreciate the difficult task of considering the future direction for NINR and supports the need to address the challenges our nation faces to overcome health inequities and disparities. Social, behavioral, environmental, and structural determinants of health will continue to impact individuals, families, communities, and populations if research is not dedicated to uncovering their roots and help transform practice as well as policy. A new strategic plan establishes a platform to elevate and integrate more of these methods and questions into future studies while amplifying the goal of achieving health equity and eliminating structural racism in health care.

The CANS and Academy believe that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is the responsibility of all and is an all-encompassing effort, which is clearly guided by the direction the National Institutes of Health

(NIH) is coursing through its *NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021–2025*.<sup>1</sup> During the call for comments of this strategic plan, the CANS and the Academy recommended that the NIH create a new standalone cross-cutting theme focused on improving health equity.<sup>2</sup> We were heartened to see this included in the final plan so that each Institute and Center (IC) can complement and contribute to the theme of “Improving Minority Health and Reducing Health Disparities.” With each IC focused on their purpose outlined in federal statute and adopting DEI to their portfolio of funded research, real progress is within reach. To that end, NINR is a beacon for nursing science within the NIH and it is important to have a strategic plan that embraces DEI through the lens of nursing science. Moreover, with NIH focusing on health equity across its ICs, it creates ample opportunities for partnerships that reinforce the collective commitment to DEI research. It is through partnerships that nurse scientists can offer its unique lens to uncover real and lasting solutions.

As the plan is developed, the CANS and the Academy suggests that the NINR consider the necessary time and effort needed to train, educate, and integrate elements of DEI into study designs. Many nurse scientists have been at the forefront of research that focuses on vulnerable, low-income, and minority populations with the goal of reducing health disparities and eliminating structural and social barriers to health. Their findings have created significant and meaningful change. It will be important that researchers, PhD programs, and post-doctoral training programs have access to resources and experts to ensure DEI is not something that is added to meet a criterion and that it is truly incorporated to address all health challenges facing our nation.

This is critically important as the profession works to educate and prepare the next generation of nurse scientists. It is well documented in the research community that a stronger investment must be made in recruiting, retaining, and advancing scientists from underrepresented groups. From the *NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021–2025*<sup>1</sup> to the *NIH’s Minority Health and Health Disparities Strategic Plan 2021–2025*<sup>3</sup> the call to increase capacity building efforts for diverse scholars will not only bolster scientific discovery, but improve health for all. This directly aligns with the Academy’s vision of Healthy Lives for All People. With these cross cutting strategic plans as guides, the NINR can help focus on the nursing profession.

### **Championing Scientific Advances in a Changing Environment**

Nurse scientists have worked diligently to create a body of research that is unique to the profession and its impact on health. The bold efforts of nursing leaders to create the Center, and now Institute, in the face of opposition to the profession’s role in biomedical research demonstrates the visionary direction of nurse scientists. As its federal statute defines, the general purpose of NINR is the “conduct and support of, and dissemination of information respecting, basic and clinical nursing research, training, and other programs in patient care research.”<sup>4</sup> Specific authorities outlined include “research traineeships and fellowships in the study and investigation of the prevention of disease, health promotion, and the nursing care of individuals with and the families of individuals with acute and chronic illnesses.”

For 35 years, NINR has been charting a course to create a strong vision that embodies its federal mandate. Through leadership, innovation, and rigorous science, NINR has made a critical impact on the wellness and recovery of countless individuals. Because of these efforts, NINR is recognized on the NIH

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<sup>1</sup> National Institutes of Health. (n.d.). *NIH-Wide Strategic Plan, Fiscal Years 2021–2025*. Www.Nih.Gov. <https://www.nih.gov/sites/default/files/about-nih/strategic-plan-fy2021-2025-508.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science & American Academy of Nursing. (2020, March 31). *Comments and Suggestions on a Framework for the NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for FYs 2021–2025*. www.aannet.org. [https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AANNET/c8a8da9e-918c-4dae-b0c6-6d630c46007f/UploadedImages/2020\\_03\\_31\\_FINAL\\_AAN\\_CANS\\_NIH\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_Comments.pdf](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AANNET/c8a8da9e-918c-4dae-b0c6-6d630c46007f/UploadedImages/2020_03_31_FINAL_AAN_CANS_NIH_Strategic_Plan_Comments.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> National Institutes of Health. (n.d.-a). *Minority Health and Health Disparities Strategic Plan 2021–2025*. <https://www.nimhd.nih.gov/docs/nimhd-strategic-plan-2021-2025.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> NIH Revitalization Act (1993). Pub. L. 103-43 (1993) <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2014-title42/pdf/USCODE-2014-title42-chap6A.pdf>

campus, nationwide, and globally for its symptom science, genetics, self-management, wellness and end-of-life as well as palliative care research. By building and maintaining a robust intramural and extramural program, the NINR integrates technology, innovation, and cutting-edge methods to advance patient care research. It is for these reasons that the CANS and the Academy suggests a comprehensive approach to developing the 2022-2026 strategic plan for NINR. One in which the work of the past is elevated by the direction of the future in a rapidly changing environment.

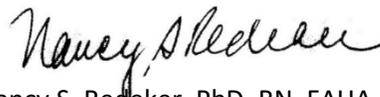
The importance of sustaining this trajectory (symptom science, genetics, self-management, and end-of-life as well as palliative care research) directly impacts research programs in schools of nursing across the country that have invested in current and future nurse scientists— through pre- and post-doctoral training, career development awards, and continued, long-standing programs of research. A new strategic plan must support this investment while incorporating DEI concepts into programs of research. A deviation or sharp turn from this body of work would be difficult to stand up quickly in schools and programs across the country. This could harm further scientific advancements as well as scientific careers. A staged approach creates the platform for schools, scientists, and students to build toward change and further integration of DEI elements in their research designs. Ideally, we see this as a “both/and” approach. We cannot diminish the contributions that the nursing scientific community has made but rather we need to continue to build that science. NINR has the opportunity to expand three-plus decades of scientific advancement, recognizing that innovation, change, and growth can occur without abandoning the important issues that nursing science has historically worked to address.

The CANS and the Academy thank you for the opportunity to provide initial input into the NINR’s strategic plan as it is being developed. We look forward to officially responding to NINR’s call for input into the strategic plan when it is available later this year. In the meantime, please call on the CANS and the Academy as vested partners in this work. If we can be of any assistance to you or your staff, please do not hesitate to contact the Academy’s Senior Director of Policy, Christine Murphy, at [cmurphy@aannet.org](mailto:cmurphy@aannet.org) or 202-777-1174.

Sincerely,



Eileen Sullivan-Marx, PhD, RN, FAAN  
President  
American Academy of Nursing



Nancy S. Redeker, PhD, RN, FAHA, FAAN  
Chair  
Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science