



March 12, 2025

Matthew J. Memoli, M.D., M.S.
Acting Director
National Institutes of Health (NIH)

RE: DRRC Support for Strategic Plan for Disability Health Research

Dear Director Memoli:

The undersigned members of the Disability & Rehabilitation Research Coalition (DRRC) commend the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives (DPCPSI) for their work to improve disability research across NIH on behalf of the one in four Americans with disabilities. Supporting disability research and investing in training the next generation of disability researchers must be a central goal at NIH given the critical need for biomedical, functional, and outcomes research for the estimated 70 million adults and 4 million children living with disabilities. **We wholeheartedly endorse the draft framework goals for the Strategic Plan for Disability Health Research FY26-FY30 and encourage the NIH to publish and implement this strategic plan in summer 2025 as planned.**

The DRRC is a coalition of 28 national research, clinical, and consumer non-profit organizations committed to improving the science of disability, medical rehabilitation, independent living, and chronic illness. The DRRC seeks to maximize the gains that can be achieved through the development of evidence-based care with the goal of improving the ability of Americans with disabilities to live and function as independently as possible following an injury, illness, disability, or chronic condition. This includes improved health and function, higher quality of life, increased return to work and community participation, less dependency costs, and reduction of unnecessary health care expenditures.

Disability research is foundational to advancing medical knowledge, improving patient outcomes, and ensuring that millions of Americans with disabilities live healthy and independent lives. In its decades as the world's premier biomedical research institution, NIH research and medical breakthroughs have improved the lives of hundreds of millions of Americans. This research encompasses crucial areas such as spinal cord and brain injuries, stroke, intellectual and developmental disabilities, musculoskeletal and neurological conditions, assistive technology advancements, and chronic conditions affecting body systems, mobility, cognition, and overall function and well-being.

In recent years, the DRRC has been closely engaged in efforts at NIH and across the federal government to improve the collection and availability of disability data. Accurate and reliable data is essential for planning and conducting impactful disability research. We recommend adding a strategic goal encouraging the systematic collection of disability data and investigating innovative ideas for improving disability data at NIH.

Given the aging population and the alarming rise in rates of chronic illness, robust NIH support of disability research is critical to achieving the goals of the Make America Healthy Again initiative. Our coalition is dedicated to ensuring the federal investment in disability research is effective, results-driven, and continues to deliver cutting-edge advancements to improve the lives of all Americans.

We urge the NIH to continue its leadership role as the world's leading disability research institution by implementing a strategic plan that will improve efficiency and drive innovation. Thank you for your attention and consideration of our views. We appreciate your commitment to advancing biomedical research that improves the lives of all Americans, including those with disabilities. If you wish to contact the DRRC, please contact DRRC Co-Coordinator Peter Thomas at Peter.Thomas@PowersLaw.com or Natalie Keller at Natalie.Keller@PowersLaw.com.

Sincerely,

The undersigned organizations of the DRRC

American Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists
American Academy of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation
American Association on Health and Disability*
American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine
American Medical Informatics Association
American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association
American Music Therapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association*
American Physical Therapy Association*
American Spinal Injury Association
American Therapeutic Recreation Association
Amputee Coalition
Association of Academic Physiatrists*
Association of Rehabilitation Nurses
Brain Injury Association of America*
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
Clinician Task Force
National Association for the Advancement of Orthotics & Prosthetics
NARRTC*
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North American (RESNA)
Spina Bifida Association
United Spinal Association
VisionServe Alliance

****DRRC Steering Committee Members***