AADR Responses: Request for Information on the FY2019-2023 Strategic Plan for the Office of Disease Prevention, National Institutes of Health

Strategic Priority I: Systematically monitor NIH investments in prevention research and the progress and results of that research.

The American Association for Dental Research (AADR) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the Office of Disease Prevention (ODP) on its strategic priority areas outlined for the next iteration of the ODP strategic plan.

AADR recognizes the importance of monitoring NIH investments in prevention research and the progress and results of that research. The two most common dental diseases, dental caries and periodontal diseases, are thought to be largely preventable, but their disease prevalence and disease inequalities would suggest otherwise. Clearly, further preventive research is critical to lessen the health and economic burdens of dental diseases and to reduce health disparities.

Strategic Priority II: Identify prevention research areas for investment or expanded effort by the NIH.

AADR is very supportive of the ODP including a strategic priority that centers on the building of collaborations between the ODP and a range of stakeholders, including NIH Institutes, Centers and Offices, other federal agencies, and non-federal stakeholders “that routinely conduct systematic evidence reviews.” Yet, while the ODP importantly focuses on the need for collaborative research, the Office may wish to build into this priority area an objective related to the benefits of interprofessional inclusion for disease prevention efforts.

Through this strategic plan, the ODP will be working to ensure that prevention research outcomes are adequately evaluated across settings, including at the community level, and integrating a wide range of stakeholders at the outset could help model the health system toward one that can better target research needs, prevention gaps and areas of opportunity.

We would also welcome the ODP’s suggestions and recommendations as to which prevention areas it believes to be worthy of investment. The background information included within Strategic Priority II indicates that the ODP’s involvement with other stakeholders, such as the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and the Community Preventive Services Task Force, informs the identification areas worth investing or expanding efforts. While we recognize that this Request for Information is designated specifically for feedback on the proposed priority areas for the ODP’s strategic plan, AADR would value the opportunity to review and weigh in on those areas in the full draft of the plan.

Strategic Priority III: Promote the use of the best available methods in prevention research and support the development of better methods.
Strategic Priority IV: Promote collaborative prevention research projects and facilitate coordination of such projects across the NIH and with other public and private entities.

AADR appreciates the ODP’s commitment during the previous strategic planning period to participating in trans-NIH and federal workshops and in groups related to addressing prevention. In this next iteration of the strategic plan, AADR supports the ODP looking to promote collaborative prevention research projects and would encourage the ODP not only to consider how to incorporate dental and oral health research inclusion as part of these collaborations, but also to promote cross-over research that improves our understanding of the relationship between the mouth and the body. To this end, the ODP may also wish to examine its approaches toward diseases with shared risk factors and identify efficiencies for researchers who are studying them.

Strategic Priority V: Advance the understanding of prevention research, increase the availability of prevention research resources and programs, and enhance the ODP’s stakeholder engagement.

AADR supports the ODP’s mission to increase the understanding and value of prevention research and to make information on this type of research more widely available to a more diverse audience. Therefore, as the ODP considers how best to increase outreach and engagement, AADR asks that the ODP make every effort to ensure that those efforts are inclusive of all research, including dental, oral and craniofacial research. As one example, we commend the ODP’s objective V.3 to build effective relationships with stakeholders to coordinate and enhance communications about disease prevention research, but would urge the ODP to involve dentists and dental practices in addition to physicians and clinicians.

What new strategic priorities should the ODP consider adding to its plan?

What opportunities or challenges in disease prevention research and methods could the ODP help to address?

Oral health holds tremendous potential when it comes to disease prevention in this country. Given oral health’s role in overall health and well-being, increasing access to effective prevention programs and ensuring access to oral care have significant ties to our nation’s public health efforts. Much of the progress this country has made with respect to oral health thus far is a result of effective prevention and treatment efforts. Therefore, as the ODP weighs areas of opportunity in disease prevention and methods, AADR would encourage the ODP to elevate oral health and oral health research.

Who should the ODP partner with to address pressing needs in disease prevention research and methods?

In addition to the many important federal and non-governmental partners and stakeholders identified as partners throughout the RFI, the ODP should also consider how it might work with partners across industry in its efforts to address disease prevention. Between startups and already established entities, industry groups and organizations have many prospective roles to play in disease prevention efforts. These roles may involve collaborating on the development and evaluation of disease prevention research activities; increasing awareness
and educating stakeholders about prevention research; or supporting the development of tools and resources that can be used in advancing prevention efforts.

**What areas transcend disease prevention research that the ODP should consider as it develops its new plan?**

AADR would suggest that the ODP make every effort to tie disease prevention research to implementation research and to health literacy research at the health professional, patient, and population-based level. Multi-pronged and multi-level approaches targeting the social determinants of disease are essential to reducing health disparities. This is an area of urgent need and therefore, one of opportunity for the ODP.