

**TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF THE FRIENDS OF NIAAA
SUBMITTED BY CARLO DICLEMENTE, CHAIR**

On behalf of the newly re-launched Friends of NIAAA, I urge the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations Subcommittee to support at least \$32 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), including \$478 million for NIAAA for FY2015. This funding recommendation represents the minimum investment necessary to avoid further loss of promising research and at the same time allows the NIH's budget to keep pace with biomedical inflation. Our coalition includes organizations representing scientists, physicians, health care providers, patients and families all pleased to support the work of NIAAA.

Since its establishment in 1970, NIAAA has achieved great success in meeting the objectives of its broad research mission. With sufficient resources, NIAAA could build upon the promising initiatives described in this testimony and produce new insights into why and how people drink; why some people develop alcohol use disorders; how alcohol affects the development of young brains and bodies; why there is end organ damage in some people and not others; and how prevention, treatment and recovery programs can be improved. Scientific breakthroughs supported by NIAAA will reduce alcohol-related problems, and the Institute will highlight and disseminate its findings to help develop science-based policies around alcohol use and abuse.

Critical research is being conducted at NIAAA in many areas, including those highlighted below:

Alcohol and Pregnancy: Despite the known effects of alcohol use in pregnancy, 1 in 5 women will drink alcohol during their first trimester, 1 in 14 women will drink during their second trimester, and 1 in 20 will drink during their third trimester. This situation results in 40,000

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babies born each year with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), making it the number one cause of preventable birth defects. And FASD is a lifespan issue – FASD children become FASD adults. It is imperative that we better understand the link between maternal alcohol use and FASD..

The resources provided by the NIAAA, including the handout for patients: Re-thinking Drinking and the print and video materials for providers has become a standard of care for our providers. NIAAA staff has been a guiding force in the development clinical of intervention methods.

Impact on Families: NIAAA informs public health by supporting research on children, families, and alcohol abuse. Research on children and families is especially important as, according to a 2012 study, more than 10% of U.S. children live with a parent who has alcohol problems.

Research also tells us that alcohol abuse can start young: In 2009, 10.4 million young people ages 12 to 20 reported that they drank alcohol beyond “just a few sips” in the past month.

NIAAA-supported researchers have investigated a range of topics that help us better understand how to support children and families facing issues related to alcohol use. For example, studies have looked at:

- Behavior problems in the children of alcoholic parents;
- Friendship characteristics and problem behaviors among adolescents; and
- Behavioral control and resiliency (the degree to which people can adapt flexibly to express or contain impulses and behaviors) in the onset of alcohol and illicit drug use among adolescents.

Moreover, given the scope and complexity of the problems associated with underage drinking--including date rape, assault, unintentional injury and even death--it is critical that one of

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NIAAA's major research initiatives is the Underage Drinking Research Initiative, an interdisciplinary program that looks at the environment, genetics, biology, and behavior.

Through this initiative, NIAAA has not only funded important research but has also created valuable tools for parents, pediatricians, and colleges.

Liver and End Organ Damage Research: No less than 30,000 Americans die annually from alcohol-related liver disease. Research guided by NIAAA on alcohol metabolism and its consequences have been the foundation for discoveries in obesity and metabolic syndrome research, two fields critical to public health. NIAAA is the only NIH Institute that supports research on the combined effects of alcohol and other liver diseases like hepatitis B and C viral infections and HIV. NIAAA funded research has been critical in examining the linkage between the gut, liver and brain as well as addressing end-organ damage caused by alcohol.

Public Health Practices: The NIAAA might exist to guide research on the impact of alcoholism, but it is the transformation of this research into health practices that most directly illustrates the value of this institute. Health professionals across the spectrum, from physicians to nurses to addiction counselors to psychologists to social workers, rely on NIAAA research to design treatment and prevention protocols that are efficient, effective, and modern. These professionals rely on research to design evidence based practices, combining what they have learned about the psychology, biology, and sociology of alcohol abuse at all age levels and across all demographics. Treatment for alcoholism is not a “one size fits all” proposition, and we must continue to support NIAAA research if we are to see improved treatment outcomes. In a time when so much emphasis is being placed on access to quality health care, we cannot ignore the role research plays in shaping such care. Alcoholism is one of the deadliest, costliest diseases in America. As Americans gain greater access to care, research must keep pace.

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Furthermore, strong federal support of NIAAA is needed in order to ensure that the work of the Institute is ultimately translated into every day practice. In particular, federal funds are needed in order to maintain a strong partnership between NIAAA and State substance abuse agencies – the entities in each State responsible for planning and implementing the substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery system. NIAAA’s partnership with these leaders is critical in order to ensure research findings are relevant and implementable by state substance abuse systems. Further, resources are needed to promote “Practice-to-Research” initiatives – allowing for the rigorous study of “promising practices” that in turn may potentially be replicated elsewhere in the country.

These research efforts have made significant contributions to the well-being of all Americans, but there is still much to discover. We urge you to support NIAAA at funding levels that meet current needs for addressing these and other critical health issues addressed by NIAAA research. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you on these critical issues.