

November 22, 2023

Office of the Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

RE: Request for Information on Updating NIH Mission Statement

The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology is an international nonprofit scientific and educational organization that represents more than 11,000 students, researchers, educators and industry professionals. The ASBMB strongly advocates for strengthening the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) workforce, supporting sustainable funding for the American research enterprise and ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion in STEM.

The society commends the National Institute of Health for acting quickly to implement recommendations from the Advisory Committee to the Director Subgroup on Individuals with Disabilities by proposing a revised mission statement that is free of language that perpetuates ableist beliefs. Individuals with disabilities are integral to the scientific enterprise and it is vital that all individuals are included and respected within the NIH's mission statement.

The NIH is requesting feedback on three items: (1) whether the proposed new mission statement reflects the goals and objectives as outlined in the [NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021–2025](#), (2) language that could be added and why, and (3) language that could be removed and why.

The ASBMB is pleased to provide feedback for each, along with an additional recommendation:

Recommendation 1: Update the strategic plan to reflect the proposed revised mission statement

The majority of the goals and objectives within the NIH-wide strategic plan are consistent with the proposed revised mission statement. However, we recommend that the agency update any language in the strategic plan that mirrors the current mission statement. For instance, in the “Preventing Disease and Promoting Health” section, there remains language that mentions preventing disability. The NIH should update this and any other language that has ableist connotations.

Additionally, we encourage the NIH to collaborate with the Subgroup on Individuals with Disabilities and [UNITE](#) on updating the strategic plan to adhere to the proposed revised mission statement.

Recommendation 2: Replace “Optimize health” from the proposed mission statement with “enhance health”

The ASBMB recommends the NIH remove “optimize health” as it could still be interpreted as ableist, and difficult to define. Instead, we suggest replacing “optimize health” with “enhance health” or similar language.

Additional recommendation: Collect data from scientific disability community on the proposed revised mission statement if there is sufficient time.

As we’ve stated [in previous comments](#), the NIH must collect data on scientists with disabilities to better understand potential disparities in funding and other barriers to inclusion for scientists with disabilities. To continue this effort, we suggest that the NIH consult with disability advocacy groups such as the [Association on Higher Education and Disability](#) and [Disabled in Higher Education](#) as well as the wider disability community to seek input on the mission statement to ensure that the statement is free of ableist language.