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Cancer Research Receives Infusion of Federal Funds

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National Cancer Institute Director John E. Niederhuber, MD, recently announced the first broad highlights of plans for the more than \$1.3 billion over two years the NCI received from the economic stimulus package President Obama signed in February.

The plans include funding more research grants, developing a platform for personalized cancer care, and an accelerated cancer genetics program, Niederhuber said at the American Association for Cancer Research annual meeting in April.

Calling the ARRA funding a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” Niederhuber told the audience that NCI discussions about where to use the funds focused on better ways to prevent cancer, diagnose it earlier, and “new therapies with fewer side effects that turn cancer into a condition you can live with and not die from.”

With the funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and a nearly 3 percent budget increase, the NCI will be able to fund the top 25 percent of grant applications that pass peer review, up from 12 percent funded last year.

ARRA funds will be targeted at unfunded grants submitted in 2009 and first-time investigators. All grants paid on the ARRA funding plan will receive two years of support, while selected grants will receive an additional two-year commitment of support from NCI-appropriated funds. However, ARRA money must be kept separate from the overall budget.

“The bottom line is that NCI is committed to the core belief that how we spend all of the resources we are granted, how we strive for comprehensive plans and strategies must, by their boldness and vision, provide answers that ultimately change the course of the diseases we call cancer; not one disease, but hundreds of diseases,” Niederhuber said at the meeting.

As part of this comprehensive plan, he outlined three key initiatives: expand The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA), which is designed to accelerate understanding of the molecular basis of cancer; build upon TCGA data to design and construct a

personalized cancer care drug development platform; and develop a network of physical sciences and oncology centers to explore new and innovative approaches to better understand and control cancer through the convergence of the physical sciences and cancer biology.

“Hand in hand with the effort to develop a platform for personalized medicine, we need to develop an improved clinical trials system to better accommodate the validation of highly targeted therapies and to accurately assess the targeting of those therapies in patients in real time,” Niederhuber said in his speech. “The challenge in translation is optimally matching the tumor and therapeutic recipe. As we move forward this will be the pattern of treatment for all malignancies.”