

The Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF) is deeply concerned about recent efforts by some members of Congress to interfere with important social and behavioral research funded by the National Institutes for Health (NIH). All NIH-funded studies go through a highly competitive and rigorous scientific peer-review process. This process is widely regarded for producing high quality science and ensuring that the pursuit of knowledge is objective, scientifically sound and ethical. APIAHF believes that attempts by special interest groups to undermine this peer review process are a disservice to the public and threaten the integrity of merit-based, scientific oversight. We fear that the circulation of this list within Congress and NIH has already had a profoundly chilling effect upon the willingness of scientists to undertake certain research.

APIAHF urges Congress to respect the integrity of the NIH peer review process and not to allow issues of ideology and politics to halt or interfere with important scientific research. We urge the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to take a public stand in support of the public health value of biomedical and behavioral research aimed at reducing the toll of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, and the integrity of the peer-review process.

According to reports, the Traditional Values Coalition generated a list of NIH researchers who they claim are conducting "prurient" health research. The list was made available to members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee as part of an ongoing investigation of objectionable NIH programs. The list in turn was handed over to the NIH along with a request for, according to NIH spokesperson John Burklow, a "written explanation of the medical benefits that could hope to be derived from these projects." The written response of the NIH to Congress is expected by mid-November. Burklow says that the agency will not comment on the merits of individual grants but will respond to Congress with a letter that describes the value of the studies and the review process.

The list contains project descriptions (including funding level) for over 150 projects on topics such as HIV prevention, adolescent sexual behavior, substance abuse, and female sexual response. Most of the research projects would benefit marginalized groups of women, children, gay men, and minorities. Several of the research projects on the list could yield important insights on the social and behavioral components of health for Asian American and Pacific Islanders, particularly regarding sexual health and HIV/AIDS.

APIAHF is a national advocacy organization whose mission is to enable all Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) to attain the highest possible level of health and well-being. AAPI are among the fastest growing racial/ethnic populations in the United States, increasing 95% from 1980 to 1990, and another 75% percent from 1990 to 2000 when you include multi-racial AAPI. We work very closely with community-based organizations around the country and in the U.S. Pacific territories, and HHS to promote policies, programs and research that will benefit our communities. APIAHF will join other organizations interested in protecting the NIH peer-review process on December 10, 2003 at the first meeting of "The National Alliance to Support Sexual Health Research and Policy". For additional information please go to http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/nih_support.htm .