

SUMMARY

S. 800; H.R. 1469

ENHANCING THE STATURE AND VISIBILITY OF MEDICAL REHABILITATION RESEARCH AT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH ACT

Section 452 of the Public Health Services Act authorizes the establishment of the National Center on Medical Rehabilitation Research (NCMRR) to conduct, support, and coordinate medical rehabilitation research at NIH. NCMRR (the Center) is located within the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD, the Institute). In December 2012, the Blue Ribbon Panel on Medical Rehabilitation Research established by NIH concluded that NCMRR is “functioning, but not thriving within the NIH.”

On March 19, 2015, Senators Kirk (R-IL) and Bennet (D-CO) and Congressmen Jim Langevin (D-RI) and Gregg Harper (R-MS) introduced companion bills (S. 800 and H.R. 1469) to improve, coordinate, and enhance the stature and visibility of rehabilitation research at NIH. This bipartisan bill reflects extensive discussions with NIH and members of the disability and rehabilitation research community.

In summary, S. 800 and H.R. 1469:

- Clarifies the Respective Roles of the NCMRR Director, the Director of the Institute and the Director of NIH Regarding the Research Plan. The bills place the key subject matter expert (i.e., the NCMRR Director) at the helm of the Research Plan for conducting medical rehabilitation research at NIH while making it clear that the Director of the Center is exercising this authority on behalf of the Director of NIH and the Director of the Institute and in consultation with the Medical Rehabilitation Coordinating Committee (coordinating committee) and the National Advisory Board on Medical Rehabilitation (advisory board) established by statute.
- Updates the Trans-NIH Rehabilitation Research Plan. The bills specify that the Research Plan must include objectives, benchmarks, and guiding principles regarding the conduct, support, and coordination of medical rehabilitation research at NIH, consistent with the purpose of the Center. The Research Plan should be updated periodically or not less than every five years.
- Adds an Annual Rehabilitation Research Progress Report. The bills specify that the Director of NCMRR, in consultation with the Director of the Institute, must prepare an annual report for the coordinating committee and the advisory board describing and evaluating the progress made during the preceding fiscal year in achieving objectives, benchmarks, and guiding principles included in the Research Plan. In preparing the report, the Director of the Center and the Director of the Institute must consult with the Director of NIH and the report must reflect an assessment of the Research Plan by the Director of NIH.
- Adds a Scientific Conference or Workshop on Medical Rehabilitation Research. The bills specify that the coordinating committee periodically, or not less than every 5 years, host a

“scientific conference or workshop on medical rehabilitation research” in connection with updating of the Trans-NIH Medical Rehabilitation Research Plan. This policy ensures periodic review of the state of medical rehabilitation science and outreach to the research community in connection with revisions of the Research Plan.

- Improving Stature of Medical Rehabilitation Science. The bills specify that the coordinating committee includes the Director of the Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives in the Office of the Director of NIH and the coordinating committee is chaired by the Director of the Center, acting in the capacity of a designee of the Director of NIH. This policy is intended to maximize the likelihood that the trans-NIH nature of medical rehabilitation research is realized.
- Clarifies Funding Among NIH Agencies. The bills specify that the Director of the Center, in consultation with the Director of the Institute, the coordinating committee, and the advisory board, must develop guidelines governing the funding of medical rehabilitation research by the Center and other agencies of the NIH. These guidelines should ensure that funding initiatives reflect the purposes of the Center and are consistent with the Research Plan. This policy is intended to establish funding grant procedures that focus on a common understanding of medical rehabilitation research needs.
- Includes a Definition of Medical Rehabilitation Research. Because current law does not include a definition of the term “medical rehabilitation research,” the bills specify a definition of this term as: “The science of mechanisms and interventions that prevent, improve, restore, or replace lost, underdeveloped, or deteriorating function (defined at the level of impairment, activity, and participation according to the World Health Organization in the International Classification of Function, Disability, and Health (2001).” This definition is consistent with the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations and would facilitate a consistent understanding of medical rehabilitation science at NIH.