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Scientists hope Trump won't decrease the flow of federal research dollars



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By [Priyanka Dayal McCluskey](#) and [Robert Weisman](#) | GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 20, 2016

Massachusetts is a powerhouse of life sciences research, bolstered by billions of dollars in federal money. But the state's big biomedical research institutions, the engines of its thriving life sciences sector, could face an era of uncertainty around the future of federal research funding.

Heavily Democratic Massachusetts is expected to lose some of its Washington influence in January when the White House, in addition to both houses of Congress, will be controlled by Republicans.

The state depends on grants from agencies such as the National Institutes of Health, which support labs in Boston, Cambridge, and other communities. Research leaders say they are prepared to be more vocal with members of Congress and other officials in Washington to make sure Massachusetts doesn't lose out under Donald Trump's administration.

"We are going to have to stand up as scientists and talk about the importance of science and the importance of research," said Dr. Michael F. Collins, chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester.

James T. Brett, president of The New England Council, a group that promotes economic growth, said it will take a "herculean effort" to protect the New England states from funding cuts. "We know it's going to be a battle," he said. "It's a battle every year to secure adequate NIH funding."

Research leaders said it's difficult to predict what will happen under a Trump administration because his presidential campaign was short on specifics about many policies, including where he stands on biomedical research funding.

The president-elect's transition website says his administration will work with

Congress to “advance” medical research. A Trump surrogate, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, last year called for [doubling the NIH budget](#), but it's unclear if he will encourage Trump to do so.

Executives at the state's big research centers said federal funding for the kind of work they do historically has enjoyed bipartisan support.

President Obama's administration supported medical science through initiatives in precision medicine and cancer research. And the Republican-led Senate has proposed a \$2 billion increase to the \$32 billion NIH budget next year. Research leaders are encouraged by the plan but note that NIH funding over the past several years hasn't kept pace with inflation.

Massachusetts receives more NIH funding than any other state per capita, a fact touted by research leaders and politicians here but protested by those in other states.

Dr. David C. Page, director of the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research in Cambridge, acknowledged the longstanding tension between researchers in biomedical hubs like Boston and Cambridge that draw a disproportionate share of federal funds, and those in less populated regions who draw far less. Under the new administration, he said, there could be an effort to expand a small percentage of NIH money now set aside for underrepresented states.

Under Trump and the Republican Congress, red states could try to gain more federal funding at the expense of blue ones like Massachusetts.

Researchers in rural states are eager to attract more federal funding under the new administration, said Carolyn Hovde Bohach, a microbiologist at the University of Idaho who leads a group of researchers advocating for more funding for 23

underserved states and Puerto Rico.

The NIH earmarks about 1 percent of its budget to research programs in those states, though they can also apply for other grants.

Dr. Anne Klibanski, chief academic officer at Partners HealthCare in Boston, is counting on grant distribution to still be based on a rigorous peer review process that she says has generally been free of politics. There's a lot riding on it — Partners' two biggest research hospitals, Massachusetts General and Brigham and Women's, each received more than \$300 million in NIH funding last year.

Senator Susan Collins, a Maine Republican on the Senate Committee on Appropriations, said she talked to Trump before the election about increasing the NIH budget.

“He seemed very interested,” she said. “There's clearly widespread bipartisan support for increasing biomedical research. This is an issue that affects every American family and there are jobs behind it, also.”

Collins said she supports more federal research money for rural states like Maine, but that any increase won't come at the expense of research centers like Boston.

A spokesman for Senator Thad Cochran, the Mississippi Republican who chairs the Appropriations Committee, was more guarded about how funds might be distributed, saying, “The senator will carefully review the new administration's budget request for the NIH and work to ensure sufficient and responsible funding for public health research.”

Research leaders said it's especially important for Trump and lawmakers to continue

supporting research at a time when China is heavily investing in it.

“They are a sleeping tiger that has woken up,” said Dr. Laurie H. Glimcher, chief executive of Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. “I don’t think anybody in America would like to see us overshadowed by China.” That argument may resonate with Trump, who has talked tough about China.

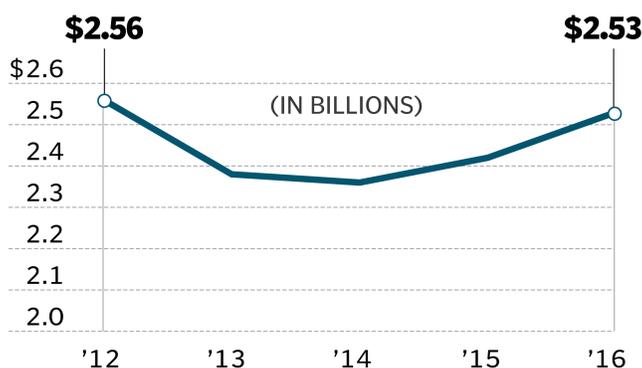
Dr. George Q. Daley, incoming dean of Harvard Medical School, said he’s “cautiously hopeful” that research dollars will keep flowing to Massachusetts institutions. But Daley, a stem cell scientist, said he’ll be watching for potential cuts to stem cell research under a Republican administration.

“It’s important that the clock not be turned back,” he said. “There are clinical trials under way and more anticipated that involve products from human embryonic stem cells.”

Massachusetts federal research funding

Total funding

Total NIH funding to Mass institutions and companies.



Mass General receives most funding

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