

Federal research funding cuts interrupt vital, lifesaving work



Pictured are researchers in the Pacific Northwest Research Institute lab in Seattle.

PNRI

BY JACK FARIS AND AIMÉE DUDLEY – SPECIAL TO THE SEATTLE TIMES

Biomedical research isn't just about data — it's about people. The mother searching for a diagnosis for her child's rare disease. The Alzheimer's patient struggling to hold onto memories. The family of a child with type 1 diabetes bracing for dangerous drops in blood sugar.

The young scientist with the dream of curing their father's cancer. Federal funding for biomedical research is a partnership with the American people — an investment in a future where diseases are understood, treated and

ultimately prevented. Health is a bipartisan issue that affects everyone. Freezing, delaying and cutting federal funding doesn't just slow scientific progress; it threatens the lives that depend on discoveries made possible by this support.

On Feb. 7, the National Institutes of Health announced a drastic reduction in indirect cost reimbursement for research grants, slashing it to 15%. This comes after two weeks of upheaval within federal health agencies with funding freezes, lawsuits and communication blackouts. The damage has been done. While the government debates whether grants should pay for electricity, facilities and safety, scientific institutes have been scrambling to catch up with the rules that change by the hour.

And who is caught in the crossfire? People everywhere — of all political parties — who want a cure for diseases that take away their loved ones too soon. Real lives are at risk while people pontificate on what is an “indirect cost” and research funding is thrown into chaos.

We stand on the brink of transformative breakthroughs, where cancer treatments are becoming more precise, gene therapies for fatal diseases are entering clinical trials and new tools are emerging to prevent disease before it takes hold.

But none of these discoveries happen overnight. The astonishing new therapies of tomorrow are based on years of research, often by hundreds of scientists and their support teams. Everyone is important — even the person who washes the beakers.

Science is a long, interconnected process, where each experiment builds on the last. As scientists share their findings, a breakthrough experiment in Alabama can lead to a new medication developed in Seattle. When funding is frozen, delayed or cut, clinical trials stop, labs go dark and young scientists — the future of innovation — are forced to choose other careers. The ripple effects aren't theoretical; they're brutal and immediate, delaying the development of treatments that could save lives.

At Pacific Northwest Research Institute, we know firsthand how deeply

these cuts affect the entire research ecosystem. Smaller, independent institutes like PNRI lack the financial buffers of large universities, making them vulnerable to abrupt funding shifts. The administration's actions revealed how fragile the system is — the stroke of a pen can jeopardize years of lifesaving progress.

Even today as we exhale knowing that indirect cost levels are restored for now, we brace ourselves for the next onslaught. We cannot afford to lurch from crisis to crisis, hoping that funding disruptions are only temporary. Disease does not recognize political parties.

Tomorrow, you, or someone you love, could receive a life-threatening diagnosis. We all deserve to live a healthy life with the people we cherish, and it will take all of us to fight for the science that advances our health. We urge policymakers to enact policies to prevent future disruptions to federal research funding.

We also call on individuals to champion the medical breakthroughs of tomorrow. Small institutes like PNRI rely on those who believe in the power of science. Visionary donors can help sustain scientific progress, allowing researchers to focus on discovery rather than funding gaps.

And we call on you to stay vigilant and fight for science alongside us. The stakes are high. We must ensure that science — the science that has achieved extraordinary improvements in health — moves forward, uninterrupted, unwavering and unstoppable. Our future health depends on it.

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