



## NIH Awards Grants to 9 Consortia, Marking Shift Toward Interdisciplinary Research

The National Institutes of Health announced on Thursday that it had awarded \$210-million in grants meant to foster interdisciplinary research, in a move that officials say represents a “fundamental change” in the agency’s research culture.

The grants will be distributed over five years to nine consortia in an attempt to deal with health challenges that scientists using traditional research methods have struggled to overcome. The research covers a broad spectrum of topics, such as developing new approaches to discovering new drugs and understanding the relationship between self-control and addictive behavior.

The grants, part of an NIH program known as the Roadmap for Medical Research, are not the institutes’ first interdisciplinary research effort, but do mark a shift away from the agency’s traditional model of supporting single-discipline research through its individual institutes and centers.

Under the Roadmap plan, the NIH is seeking to become a more collaborative entity that bridges the gaps between individual areas of research. The Roadmap is structured on the belief that as health research becomes increasingly complex, many 21<sup>st</sup>-century advances will be likely to occur where scientific intersect, and research that combines aspects of multiple disciplines will become the norm.

The consortia receiving the grants will not only conduct new research but also experiment with strategies for eliminating departmental boundaries within institutions and managing research projects with a broad interdisciplinary scope. It is hoped that those strategies will lead to new methods for conducting future research.

“These programs are designed to encourage and enable change in academic research culture to make interdisciplinary research easier to conduct for scientists who wish to collaborate in unconventional ways,” the NIH’s director, Elias A. Zerhouni, said in a written statement.

Each consortium consists of multiple research projects with multiple principal investigators and research facilities, with an overall principal investigator coordinating the efforts. The research integrates disciplines including genomics, stem-cell biology, mechanical engineering, and behavioral research.

The consortia, and their overall principal investigators, are as follows:

- Consortium for Neuropsychiatric Phenomics-Coordinating Center, Robert M. Bilder, a professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences at the University of California at Los Angeles.
- Interdisciplinary Research Consortium in Geroscience, Dale E. Bredesen, director and chief executive of the Buck Institute for Age Research, in Novato, Calif.
- NeuroTherapeutics Research Institute, Paul Hagerman, a professor of biochemistry and molecular medicine at the University of California at Davis.
- Taskforce for Obesity Research at Southwestern, Jay D. Horton, an associate professor of internal medicine at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.



- SysCODE: Systems-Based Consortium for Organ Design and Engineering, Richard Mass, a professor of medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital, an affiliate of Harvard Medical School.
- Northwest Genome Engineering Consortium, Andrew M. Scharenberg, an associate professor of pediatrics and an adjunct associate professor of immunology at the University of Washington.
- Genomic Based Drug Discovery, Edward Scolnick, director of the Psychiatric Disease Initiative at the Broad Institute, a joint venture of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University.
- Interdisciplinary Research Consortium on Stress, Self-Control, and Addiction, Rajita Sinha, a professor of psychiatry at Yale University.
- The Oncofertility Consortium: Fertility Preservation for Women, Teresa K. Woodruff, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Northwestern University.