

April 3, 2025

Dr. Matthew J. Memoli
Acting Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Memoli,

On behalf of orthopaedic surgeons and trainees represented by the undersigned organizations, we write to express our opposition to the recently announced policy imposing a 15% cap on indirect cost recovery for NIH grants. We respectfully ask NIH to rescind this policy. If implemented, the collateral damage caused by this policy will undermine the integrity of federal scientific research, reshape the future of scientific progress, and risk ceding our global advantage in the biomedical sciences to adversarial nations.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine noted in a 2020 study that musculoskeletal conditions are some of the most disabling and costly in the United States.ⁱ The NIH is an important funder of research that may ultimately lead to better treatments for musculoskeletal patients, improving their lives and reducing the cost burdens of these diseases to communities. In FY2023, the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) supported almost 961 extramural research program grants, 315 extramural principal investigations, 34 early-stage investigator awards and 329 extramural full-time trainee positions. Joint, muscle and bone projects received 52% of NIAMS' total budget.ⁱⁱ

NIH is renowned for its investments in basic research – the study of fundamental biological processes that form the foundation of future discoveries, but do not in and of themselves result in products for commercialization. Scientists have discovered the existence of about 10,000 diseases, 7,000 of which are rare (defined as affecting fewer than 200,000 people in the U.S.) and only about 500 of which have treatments. Through public-private partnerships, NIH basic research gets transformed into incredible products to diagnose, treat and cure diseases. Capping indirect cost recovery at 15% would throw this research ecosystem off balance as the research universities at its core would no longer be able to sustain these operations. These labs come with significant costs that cannot be easily altered. As with many enterprises, the greatest expense is personnel, and inevitably, universities would be forced to eliminate positions for doctoral students and post-doctoral fellows, our next generation of life-changing innovators. Restructuring to comply with the new 15% cap will diminish the ability of research institutions and the scientists they support to drive biomedical progress for patients.

As physicians and the leading experts in treatment of musculoskeletal conditions, we are committed to providing the best care possible for our patients. This means supporting the discovery of new treatments and cures to allow patients to live healthier lives every day. We cannot accomplish this goal if the NIH grant funding structure at the core of the research ecosystem is disrupted. Thank you for considering our concerns. We stand ready to collaborate with you to ensure the United States continues to lead the world in biomedical research. Should you wish to speak further, please contact Lori Shoaf, JD, MA, AAOS Office of Government Relations at shoaf@aaos.org.

Sincerely,

American Association for Hand Surgery
American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American Orthopaedic Foot & Ankle Society

American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine
American Shoulder and Elbow Surgeons
American Society for Surgery of the Hand Professional Organization
Arthroscopy Association of North America
Cervical Spine Research Society
Limb Lengthening and Reconstruction Society
Musculoskeletal Infection Society
Musculoskeletal Tumor Society
North American Spine Society/National Association of Spine Specialists
Orthopaedic Rehabilitation Association
Orthopaedic Research Society
Orthopaedic Trauma Association
Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America
Ruth Jackson Orthopaedic Society
The American Orthopaedic Association
The Gladden Society
The Hip Society
The Knee Society

ⁱ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559512/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.niams.nih.gov/about/budget/fy-2025-congressional-justification>