



February 20, 2026

The Honorable Mike Johnson

Speaker

U. S. House of Representatives

521 Cannon House Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries

Minority Leader

U.S. House of Representatives

2267 Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Thune

Majority Leader

U.S. Senate

511 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer

Minority Leader

U.S. Senate

322 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Johnson, Minority Leader Jeffries, Majority Leader Thune, and Minority Leader Schumer,

The American College of Rheumatology (ACR), the Rheumatology Research Foundation (RRF), and the Arthritis Foundation write to express deep concern with the sudden removal of Dr. Lindsey Criswell as Director of the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS). The non-renewal of Dr. Criswell's five-year leadership appointment on February 13, 2026, marks 16 out of 27 NIH Institutes now operating without a permanent director. We urge Congress to ensure that the NIH swiftly identifies and installs the next director of NIAMS.

Arthritis has a profound physical, social and financial impact on every state and Congressional district in the country. One in four adults – 60 million people – have doctor-diagnosed arthritis and an estimated 78 million Americans will live with the disease in the next two decades.¹ As such, arthritis is America's leading cause of disability and imposes more than \$300 billion annually in direct medical costs and indirect costs, such as lost productivity in the workforce.²

NIAMS serves as the nation's leading institution dedicated to arthritis research, supporting a

¹ Rath, L. More Americans Report Arthritis-Related Limitations Than 15 Years Ago. Arthritis Foundation.
<https://www.arthritis.org/news/arthritis-disability-limitations-increase-cdc-repo>

² Theis, Kristina A., et al. (2021, October 8). Prevalence of Arthritis and Arthritis-Attributable Activity Limitation — United States, 2016–2018. Centers for Disease Control.
<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7040a2.htm>

portfolio that spans basic, translational and clinical studies across a wide range of arthritic and rheumatic conditions. The Institute invests more than 85 percent of its extramural budget (over \$500 million annually) into roughly 1,500 research grants nationwide.^{3,4} These grants include major scientific programs focused on rheumatoid arthritis, juvenile arthritis, osteoarthritis and other rheumatic diseases, making NIAMS the central driver of federally supported arthritis research in the United States.

Removing a well-qualified director further disrupts an institute that has already suffered from cuts and drastic changes. Coupled with the severe cuts to the CDC Arthritis Program, these changes threaten to slow scientific progress and weaken the nation's long-term capacity to respond to rising arthritis prevalence and the growing burden of chronic pain and disability.

We urge Congress to take steps to ensure that the NIH installs the next director of NIAMS in a timely manner. We also urge Congress to utilize its oversight and appropriations responsibilities to ensure continuity, transparency, and accountability across the NIH Institutes, safeguarding the nation's biomedical research infrastructure that millions of Americans rely upon.

Sincerely,



Steve Taylor
Chief Executive Officer, Arthritis Foundation



William F. Harvey, MD, MSc, FACR
President, American College of Rheumatology



Bryce A. Binstadt, M.D., Ph.D.
President, Rheumatology Research Foundation

cc: The Honorable Bill Cassidy, The Honorable Bernie Sanders, The Honorable Brett Guthrie,
The Honorable Frank Pallone

³ See: <https://www.niams.nih.gov/grants-funding>

⁴ See: <https://www.niams.nih.gov/grants-funding/funding-opportunities/supported-scientific-areas>