



## Purpose

Increased funding and enhanced osteopathic research opportunities for Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (COMs) across all Institutes and Centers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will strengthen research in the areas of primary care, community-based training and service, and address health disparities of rural and underserved populations.

## Background

Osteopathic medicine plays a vital role in the nation's healthcare system and is one of the fastest growing medical fields. **COMs educate more than 36,500 physicians—25% of all US medical students—at 66 medical school campuses.** However, COMs are severely underfunded and underrepresented across NIH. **Osteopathic medical schools receive only .1% of NIH funding (\$55.6 Million) compared to 42% for MD institutions (\$23.8 Billion).** This disparity in funding frustrates osteopathic medical research, undermines COMs and puts our medical students at a disadvantage in the residency selection process because they lack access to research opportunities.

The funding gap is exacerbated by the lack of osteopathic researchers on NIH advisory councils and study sections compared to our allopathic colleagues. **Doctors of osteopathic medicine (DOs) hold only 2 out of the 462 positions on NIH National Advisory Councils, whereas MDs account for 213 spots.** Additionally, **there are only 19 DOs across the 3,233 study section reviewers compared to 493 MDs.**

**Congress has addressed this issue in report language in the FY22, FY23, FY24, and FY25 appropriations bills.** Further, a bipartisan, bicameral group of 26 lawmakers submitted a July 2022 letter urging the NIH to implement a plan to expand funding opportunities for research in osteopathic medicine. Congress has stated more osteopath research is needed to bolster NIH's capacity to advance research in primary care, address health disparities in rural and underserved communities and expand nonpharmacological treatments. Despite these efforts, **the NIH has taken no concrete steps to increase research funding at COMs, expand osteopathic representation on NIH National Advisory Councils, or proactively engage with the osteopathic community.**

## Impact

This funding disparity and underrepresentation weakens research in areas where osteopathic medicine specializes, such as primary care and rural and underserved populations, and disadvantages osteopathic medical students, researchers and COMs. **The congressional letter urges NIH to develop a plan to address this disparity, which includes:**

1. A strategy and timeline outlining specific steps the NIH will take to increase osteopathic research funding and representation.
2. A designated NIH staff contact to the osteopathic community within the Office of the Director.
3. A list of NIH Institute and Center programs that can immediately incorporate osteopathic representation, including CARE for Health, which focuses on primary care.
4. A process for engagement with the OME community that includes a meeting between the Director and AACOM CEO, as well as regular communication between AACOM and leaders from across Institutes and Centers to discuss progress on the plan.
5. Guidance for how the osteopathic community can increase representation on NIH National Advisory Councils and study sections, as well as specific feedback on unselected nominees.
6. A briefing for Members of Congress on how NIH is responding to this letter and other congressional requests.

### AACOM Requests

- Members of Congress sign on to the congressional letter led by Senators Martin Heinrich (D-NM) and John Boozman (R-AR) and Representatives Julia Letlow (R-LA) and Susie Lee (D-NV) to NIH Director Monica M. Bertagnolli in support of osteopathic research at NIH.

### About AACOM

The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) leads and advocates for osteopathic medical education to improve the health of the public. Founded in 1898 by the nation's osteopathic medical schools, AACOM represents all 41 colleges of osteopathic medicine — educating more than 36,500 future physicians, 25 percent of all US medical students — at 66 medical school campuses, as well as osteopathic graduate medical education professionals and trainees at US medical centers, hospitals, clinics and health systems. **For more information, contact David Bergman, JD, SVP of Government Relations and Health Affairs, [dbergman@aacom.org](mailto:dbergman@aacom.org), (301) 968-4174.**