

November 5, 2009

Mr. Norman Augustine (Chair)  
Retired Chairman and CEO  
Scientific Management Review Board, OD, NIH  
Building 1, Room 103  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Mr. Augustine,

I am writing to you with respect to the potential merger of the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Addiction. On behalf of TASC, a statewide nonprofit agency in Illinois that serves almost 30,000 clients a year, **I support this merger.**

Since 1976, TASC has helped people with alcohol and drug health conditions get the treatment and other services they need to begin sustained recovery. We conduct clinical assessments, place clients into community-based treatment programs, and case manage individuals referred to us by courts, prisons, and foster care. We rely on and advocate for science-based, research-based, and evidence-based practices in community treatment and in the public systems that interface with it.

The strongest rationale for my support of a NIDA/NIAAA merger is that thousands of people come to us each year with substance use histories that include both licit and illicit substances. This is the rule, not the exception. While it may have made sense at some point to separate dedicated research and funding to alcohol and drugs respectively, the reality faced by the criminal justice system today simply does not require or benefit from such a separation.

**The medical consequences of using drugs and alcohol are closely related.** While specific substances of abuse have some unique characteristics, their effects have enough in common that there is no basis in practice for separating them in research. Further, we know that alcohol use is a confounding factor for recovery from drug use, that drug use is a confounding factor in recovery from alcoholism, and that continued tobacco use is a confounding factor in all recovery.

**Similarly, there is no scientific basis for separating research on licit and illicit substances.** Public policy responses may be different because of a substance's legal status, but as the treatment field and justice system move toward research- and evidence-based practices, science and evidence should drive smart policy instead of the reverse.

**The issue for the justice system is having adequate research to articulate the effects of alcohol and other drugs on the brain, on judgment and therefore culpability,** on behavior and then on treatment, relapse and recovery. We need integrated research to drive our policy and practice decisions in these cases. These questions have real world implications for child safety and reunification, for prevention and recovery, and for reducing crime and recidivism.

The next generation of research in alcohol and drug abuse and recovery needs to help us understand why particular interventions work, when they work, and with whom they are effective. Combining NIDA and NIAAA would help pave the way for better and more appropriate services within a criminal justice context at a faster pace and to a greater degree. Merging the institutes will move addiction research forward by better facilitating focus on areas that currently represent gaps in our knowledge and understanding.

Like the impressive research each institute has undertaken separately, and like the contribution each institute has made toward understanding drug use and alcohol use separately, **merging NIDA and NIAAA has the potential to achieve quantum leaps in our understanding of substance abuse and addiction as they truly occur.** It will consolidate and synthesize what we know, and it will shine a light on the areas that have been neglected because they reside somewhere between or otherwise outside of each research institute and its mission.

**Finally, if this merger does take place, I strongly advocate that overall funding not be diminished.** The unification of these institutes should not be viewed as a means of streamlining to diminish dollars, but rather as a way to better invest and leverage them. Bringing an end to the artificial separation with adequate funding will bring more fruit to bear.

Thank you for allowing me to share my views in this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pamela F. Rodriguez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pamela F. Rodriguez  
President