

SRNT Input on OBSSR Strategic Plan

The Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco (SRNT) commends the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) on its efforts to revise and update its 2007 strategic plan. The behavioral and social sciences play a foundational and connecting role in advancing discoveries, in developing effective treatments for many of today's complex health problems, and in disseminating evidence into practice and policy. SRNT fully supports the functions and areas of emphasis in the 2007 plan, including fostering next generation basic science, promoting interdisciplinary research, advancing a systems thinking approach to health, and emphasizing investigations of population impact and problem-focused research.

In addition to these critical areas, we would like to suggest a greater emphasis on implementation science and research that advances our understanding of effective mechanisms and approaches for increasing the effective translation of basic research into practice and policy. Implementation science research often requires a variety of mixed method approaches, as well as opportunities for collaborative stakeholder participation. Thus, funding options that help to develop stakeholder collaborations and teams would be useful to advance capacity in this area.

Opportunities for more rapid turn-around funding and scientific investigations should be developed. Currently, much of our research lags well behind the rapidly changing environment of health behaviors, health care delivery, and systems development. We need to have more mechanisms that allow for rigorous, but timely and opportunistic studies that better capture the dynamic nature of the health-related environment today.

Initiatives that help to encourage and provide time for the development of interdisciplinary team building would be welcome. Ways of promoting collaborative efforts between basic scientists, for example, and more social scientists (such as geneticists and behavioral scientists or neuroscientists and epidemiologists and behavior scientists) would help to facilitate more creative integration of the behavioral sciences into other areas of research. Similarly, more emphasis on the importance of social science research in facilitating the use of medical treatments would further advance effective translation.

Social scientists can also contribute much to integrating a developmental, life span perspective into many of the pressing health concerns we face today, and initiatives that better highlight key life transition periods as risk or opportunities for health would be helpful. Emphasis on special populations and key life transitions would similarly be of benefit.

OBSSR can also be a helpful agent of change for promoting the incorporation of more flexible research methods into NIH funded studies. The field can move well beyond the traditional RCT model and can employ a variety of other design options (e.g., factorial designs, pragmatic trials, etc.), and OBSSR can help to advance the acceptability and adoption of these newer approaches. Similarly, OBSSR can provide impetus for designs that allow for maximizing data from small samples – such as opportunities to collaboratively combine data, harmonize across settings, and develop newer approaches for learning from small samples.

The major risk factors for morbidity and mortality in the US remain behavioral ones (e.g., tobacco use), and ones for which social and behavioral scientists are well qualified to help address. Thus, we encourage OBSSR to emphasize and support the integration of social and behavioral scientists in research addressing these major health problems.