August 7, 2020

The Board of Directors of the Society for Research on Nicotine & Tobacco (SRNT) would like to express their strong support for the proposed five-year NIDA strategic research plan.

SRNT supports all scientific endeavors that advance our understanding of the causes and consequences, as well as prevention and treatment of tobacco and nicotine addiction. We are encouraged that NIDA has chosen to focus their strategic priorities on reducing health disparities. SRNT provides a voice for a tobacco research community which has always had a strong focus on understanding disparities in tobacco and nicotine use behaviors and developing optimal interventions for disparate populations, including those who are underserved and marginalized.

Tobacco use remains one of the top public health problems in the US and worldwide. Combustible and smokeless tobacco use cause many diseases including, but not limited to cardiovascular and metabolic diseases, pulmonary diseases and 18 different cancers. Cigarette smoking is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths per year in the United States, including more than 41,000 deaths resulting from secondhand smoke exposure. Tobacco use has a profound impact on cancer incidence and mortality accounting for 30 percent of all cancer deaths.

Tobacco and nicotine related disparities have been highlighted by critical research conducted by many members and trainees of SRNT. We believe it is especially important to consider the disparities related to tobacco use during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 is a respiratory disease and could be even more detrimental in those whose respiratory systems are already compromised by combustible tobacco use. Therefore, it is imperative that we work together to prevent all tobacco use behaviors.

While we are glad to see that NIDA has chosen to focus on reducing youth vaping behaviors, we would like to encourage continued strong support for research focused on the prevention and treatment and recovery from combustible and oral tobacco use. Nicotine addiction is the root cause of tobacco use and dependence and treating nicotine addiction should continue to be a top strategic goal for NIDA. It would also be helpful for NIDA to continue to support the scaling up and integration of interventions that have already been developed for combustible and oral tobacco use; these interventions need to be easily accessible in medical care and other settings and integrated through the use of collaborative care models and novel technology. It would also
be important to consider research on the influence of existing tobacco control strategies in the US, as well as those that have been successfully implemented in other countries. Further, there are many remaining questions about the harm reduction potential of “newer” and emerging products like e-cigarettes, oral nicotine and heated tobacco products, that need to be examined through NIDA-supported research. It is important to remember that while research on these products is also supported by the FDA’s Center for Tobacco Products, FDA cannot support research on the neuroscience and treatment of tobacco product and nicotine addiction.

In summary, we encourage NIDA to: **Continue to prioritize research on understanding the neuroscience and behavior related to use of tobacco and nicotine products, the number one cause of preventable disease worldwide, and on developing and disseminating prevention and treatment strategies for all tobacco products including combustible, non-combustible and emerging tobacco products.**

We endeavored to make this letter and our comments brief. If you would like any additional context or research documents to back up our statements, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Respectfully,

SRNT Board of Directors