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## Capitol Connection

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### A look at the NIH sequestration policies

May 20, 2013 | Author: Summer Allen, Graduate and Postdoc, Brown University



On May 8<sup>th</sup>, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) [announced](#) how sequestration will impact the agency's fiscal policies. The NIH is now operating under a \$29.15 billion dollar budget, which is roughly five percent less than last fiscal year. While this cut was anticipated, it puts further stress on already financially starved labs and scientists.

How will the reduced NIH budget impact grant awards (the lifeblood of most biomedical scientists

across the country)? Here are the basics:

**Non-competing continuation awards:** Most continued grants won't be fully funded. This is a prolongation of a policy that is already in place. So far this year most continued grants have been funded at 90 percent of the level originally committed to the investigator (most likely due to the anticipation of these cuts).

**Competing awards:** The NIH announcement says the agency "will make an effort to keep the average size of competing awards constant at FY 2012 levels." But this is the kicker—they won't be able to fund as many grants as usual. According to [ScienceInsider](#), this means a drop of 703 grants that won't be funded.

**New investigators:** The NIH seems aware of the fear that these policies could unfairly impact new investigators who have less experience writing grants. The agency says it will continue to match the funding success rate of the new investigator pool with the established pool—a policy that was put into place originally in 2009.

**Other policies:** Salary limits, inflationary increases, and stipend levels for pre-doctoral and post-doctoral grants will be frozen for the rest of the fiscal year.

While a five percent cut to the NIH's budget may not seem like much to your average American—especially in light of all the other cuts imposed by sequestration—the potential fallout weighs heavily on the scientists who depend on grants from the NIH to do their work towards finding the causes and cures for disease. This became abundantly clear when scientists across the nation voiced their concerns on Twitter in response to a request by NIH director Francis Collins.

To read these tweets, check out the hashtag [#NIHSequesterImpact](#) (but be prepared to be depressed). It is clear that good science, probable treatments for disease, and a large number of science jobs are at risk due to the current state of NIH funding.

Perhaps if the concerns of these scientists reach a large enough audience, Congress will feel compelled to fund the [31.3 billion dollar NIH budget](#) that the White House has proposed for the fiscal year 2014 budget—we can only hope (and contact our representatives).

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