AAU COMMENTS ON NEW NIH CONFLICT OF INTEREST RULE

Following is a statement by the Association of American Universities on the conflict of interest regulation issued today by the National Institutes of Health. AAU has worked for the past 10 years to assist its member institutions to identify and appropriately manage conflicts of interest—including the association’s 2001 report on individual and institutional conflicts of interest and its 2008 report on managing conflicts of interest published with the Association of American Medical Colleges. In collaboration with other associations, AAU also provided comments on the proposed changes in NIH conflict of interest rules on June 10, 2009 and on August 17, 2010.

While we are still reviewing and analyzing the final conflict of interest (COI) rule published today by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), it is clear that the process has been thoughtful and that the agency has taken considerable time and effort to respond to the views and concerns of the biomedical research community.

Although the final rule has not incorporated all the recommendations AAU made in our comments, we greatly appreciate the process of consultation on this important set of regulations. We are particularly pleased that the NIH regulations provide institutional flexibility in public disclosure of financial conflicts of interests. We will continue to work with the agency and our institutions to develop and refine practices that enhance public trust in the research enterprise by providing appropriate and accurate information in a useful context.

AAU believes that minimizing, and when necessary, managing financial conflicts of interest are important obligations of institutions receiving federal funds and contribute to ensuring that research and the research record remain objective and unbiased. As our institutions work with NIH in implementing the new rule, we will encourage the agency to further examine the proper balance between disclosure and reporting and the need both to minimize unnecessary regulatory burdens and to foster and promote the university-industry partnerships that are critical to translating new ideas into the drugs, diagnostics, and cures needed to advance the public health.

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The Association of American Universities is an association of 59 U.S. and two Canadian research universities organized to develop and implement effective national and institutional policies supporting research and scholarship, graduate and professional education, undergraduate education, and public service in research universities.