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# COVID-19 Woes: Safety, Money Worries Concern Institutions; Researchers Fear Career Disruptions

By Theresa Defino

As the pandemic continues to not only drag on but intensify, the toll on institutions and staff is becoming more evident. To get a sense of what was happening, and how it could help, NIH conducted surveys this fall. The findings provide perhaps the first large-scale—albeit limited—look at the concerns organizations and researchers are wrestling with.

Increased expenses to ensure the safety of staff and students during COVID-19 are among the factors related to the pandemic that have most substantially affected institutions, according to nearly 70% of the more than 200 research administration leaders responding to the survey.[1] Close to 32% reported "institutional hiring freezes," and approximately 62% cited reduced access to labs as the factors "most negatively" affecting research functions.

Extramural researchers, asked to identify the biggest negatives hurting their work, responded in a similar vein. Nearly 55% cited "reduced access to colleagues due to virtual environment," approximately 49% identified reduced access to labs, and 41.1% called out reduced access to "core facilities."

Some 60% reported both "societal and/or political events" and "physical and/or social isolation" as the top two factors negatively affecting their mental health. But a third also listed "disruption of promotion or tenure timeline/next career steps." Approximately 45,000 investigators participated in the survey, which closed Nov. 13. NIH also surveyed intramural staff, who reported family concerns, among others.

Michael Lauer, NIH deputy director for extramural research, presented the data during a recent meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD).[2] He acknowledged the limited information he shared was a "teaser" and said more details would be released in the coming months.

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