Americans Want Congress To Expand Medical Research

America Speaks, volume 13, is a compilation of public opinion polls commissioned by Research!America and features data about Americans' views on issues related to biomedical and health research. A majority of Americans (72 percent) say the new Congress and the President should take action to expand medical research within the first 100 days of the 113th Congress. Public support for increased government spending on medical research holds particular relevance as Congress considers whether to further delay, eliminate or permit "sequestration," a budget cutting process that - if it moves forward - would mean drastic cuts in funding for medical research.

"Americans will be looking closely at the actions of the new Congress to see whether lawmakers support policies that will accelerate research and scientific discovery," said Research!America Chair John Edward Porter. "We're on the brink of finding new treatments and cures for many deadly and debilitating illnesses. Congress must act to ensure that funding for research is sufficient to address current and emerging health threats."

Most Americans believe accelerated investments in medical research should be a priority, yet nearly 60 percent say elected officials in Washington are not paying close attention to combating the many deadly diseases that afflict Americans. An overwhelming majority of Americans (83 percent) also believe that investing in medical innovation has a role in creating jobs and fueling the economy. When asked about stagnant federal funding levels for research and the impact to science and technology, a wide majority (85 percent) said they were concerned.

Americans also expressed concerns about U.S. global competitiveness in the near future. Less than half (41 percent) believe the U.S. will be the world leader in science and technology in the year 2020. In addition, almost half (48 percent) do not believe the U.S. has the best healthcare system in the world. "Consistently, our polls have shown that Americans value research and believe it's part of the solution to what ails us," said Research!America President and CEO Mary Woolley. "The return on investment is demonstrated in medical breakthroughs that have made diseases that were considered a death sentence into treatable conditions."

Twenty years ago, AIDS ranked as the number-one health concern among Americans. Since then, research has saved countless lives and continues to drive progress. The number one health concern in 2012 was the cost of healthcare. Other notable highlights include:

- 78 percent of Americans believe that it is important that the U.S. work to improve health globally through research and innovation.

- 70 percent of Americans believe that the government should encourage science, technology, mathematics and engineering (STEM) careers.
- Nearly half (48 percent) believe government investment in health research for military veterans and service members is not enough.
- 66 percent of Americans are willing to share personal health information to advance medical research if appropriate privacy protections were used.
- 75 percent say it's important to conduct research to eliminate health disparities.

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