

## Concept Clearance: **Time-Sensitive Opportunities for Health Research**

### **Background**

The purpose of this concept is to establish a rapid turnaround funding opportunity to support rigorous and novel research to understand biological or behavioral outcomes related to an unexpected and/or time-sensitive event (i.e., federal, state or local policies; natural events/disasters; changes to the built environment). This concept – *Time-Sensitive Opportunities for Health Research* – builds on lessons learned from past Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOA), and is intended to be a broad, cross-cutting funding opportunity that supports time-sensitive research at multiple ICs. It also aligns with OBSSR’s broader scientific priority to facilitate the adoption of behavioral and social sciences research findings into health research and practice. The NIH has supported specific time-sensitive research opportunities for several decades, addressing topics that include obesity policy and program evaluation ([PAR-18-854](#)), drug and alcohol abuse research ([PAR-19-064](#)), and natural or environmental disasters ([RFA-ES-19-011](#), [RFA-MD-18-006](#)). More recently, active time-sensitive FOAs have also supported COVID-related research in several topic areas. This work would have been impossible to conduct without an expedited funding mechanism yet to date, these opportunities have been primarily focused on a few specific topics of interest for administering ICs.

### **Time-sensitive research**

A “time-sensitive event” is defined as a change in a program, policy, or infrastructure that unexpectedly arises in a particular community/population. The defining features of research falling within this designation include: (1) the unpredictable and unanticipated nature of the research opportunity, (2) the clear scientific value and feasibility of proposed study, and (3) a potential missed opportunity for data collection (particularly baseline/pre-implementation data) to be able to answer key research questions should the process not be accelerated. Time-sensitive research also includes the prospective evaluation of a new policy or program that would impact health-related outcomes in a given population. It is expected that proposed studies should demonstrate the ability to inform the understanding of the impact of a program or policy in the near-term and that findings should be generalizable at a state or national level. This type of empirical study is unlikely to occur without expedited review and funding, necessitating a substantially shorter process than the typical NIH grant review/award cycle. The time from submission to award of most of these past grants occurred within 4-5 months (much shorter than the average 9-10 months of a typical review/award timeline).

### **FOA Development**

OBSSR convened a cross-NIH workgroup in January 2021 in response to ad hoc inquiries to coordinate a NIH-wide time-sensitive mechanism, as well as interest garnered during informational “listening sessions” with various ICOs over the previous year. The concept has been well-received based on successes of past projects, with workgroup membership quickly expanding to include representatives from 12 ICOs (NCI, NIA, NIAAA, NIAID, NIAMS, NICHD, NIDA, NIDDK, NIEHS, NINR, ODP, OBSSR). This group is comprised of program officers who oversaw past FOAs, Scientific Review Officers (SROs) who played key roles for the review of these grants, and other interested program staff from additional ICOs. The group is developing a NIH-wide PAR for time-sensitive research, while ensuring that proposed research is compelling, rigorous, feasible, and appropriately meets the criteria for being time-sensitive. The funding for this PAR will be based on each participating IC’s funding process for PARs (e.g., set-aside, payline, special emphasis). OBSSR will also prioritize this FOA for co-funding support. The potential impact from this type of research will help build a critical evidence base to inform healthcare, public health, and policy-related decision makers about the health effects and population-specific needs that may arise through variations in policy or programmatic impact and/or implementation.