

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 17, 2019

Anthony S. Fauci, M.D.  
Director  
National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases  
5601 Fishers Lane, MSC 9806  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Fauci,

We write to seek an update on universal flu vaccine research efforts supported by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). With the 2018-2019 flu season well underway, we are eager to work with your agency to collectively improve our response to this seasonal public health threat.

More than 80,000 Americans, including 185 children, lost their lives to the flu during the 2017-2018 flu season.<sup>1</sup> This unusually high mortality rate, coupled with the relatively low effectiveness of last season's vaccine, underscore the need for a universal flu vaccine that offers broader, longer-lasting coverage against multiple flu strains.

We were pleased to see NIAID enthusiastically pursue this goal by releasing its universal flu vaccine strategic plan in February 2018.<sup>2</sup> The tenets of your strategic plan — that a universal flu vaccine should (1) be at least 75 percent effective, (2) protect against multiple strains of the flu, (3) provide protection for at least one year, and (4) be appropriate for all age groups — set forth a feasible, 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to address a centuries-old scourge. In fact, in a recent *Stat* article, you stated that, in 2019, “we’ll see substantial progress in the quest for improved influenza vaccines that get us closer to the goal of a broadly protective, durable ‘universal vaccine.’”<sup>3</sup>

Up to 84,000 Americans have already been hospitalized this flu season.<sup>4</sup> The sooner we can achieve a universal vaccine, the sooner we can reduce the relentless burden the flu places on American families each year. Congress is committed to helping NIAID actualize that plan and achieve our mutual goal of putting a universal flu vaccine on the market as soon as possible. For fiscal years 2018 and 2019, Congress required NIAID to invest \$100 million and \$140 million, respectively, in universal flu vaccine research.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald G. McNeil Jr., *Over 80,000 Americans Died of Flu Last Winter, Highest Toll in Years*, New York Times (Oct. 1, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/01/health/flu-deaths-vaccine.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Press Release, NIAID, NIAID unveils strategic plan for developing a universal influenza vaccine (Feb. 28, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Stat Staff, *What will 2019 bring for science and medicine? We asked the experts*, Stat (Dec. 31, 2018), <https://www.statnews.com/2018/12/31/science-medicine-2019/>.

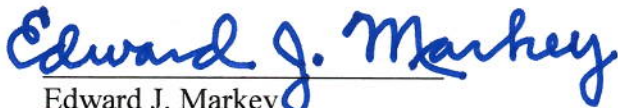
<sup>4</sup> Press Release, CDC, CDC Provides First In-Season Estimates of Flu Illnesses, Medical Visits, and Hospitalizations (Jan. 11, 2019).

To help us better understand the progress you are making towards developing a universal flu vaccine, please provide answers to the following questions by February 7, 2019:

1. Please describe how NIAID has used, and intends to use, the dedicated funding provided by Congress in fiscal years 2018 and 2019 to help develop a universal flu vaccine.
2. What are the tangible goals NIAID and your partners in this endeavor hope to achieve this year to demonstrate progress in developing a universal flu vaccine?
3. Does NIAID intend to modify its strategic plan based on research progress made in the last year or anticipated progress in 2019?

Thank you for your attention to our request. We look forward to continuing to work with you to mitigate the health and economic toll the flu places on American communities and families.

Sincerely,



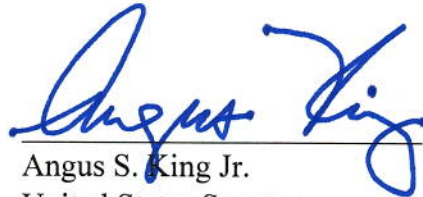
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



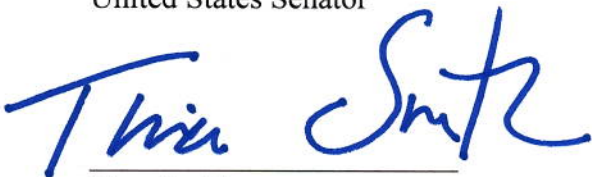
Angus S. King Jr.  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator