



**HEADACHE  
ON THE HILL**

# WHY NIH FUNDING FOR HEADACHE DISORDERS RESEARCH MATTERS

Headache disorders, including **migraine, cluster headache, orofacial pain disorders, spinal cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) leak, and New Daily Persistent Headache (NDPH)**, affect millions of Americans and are a leading cause of disability worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

Despite their significant public health and economic impact, research funding for migraine and other headache disorders remains disproportionately low compared to other neurological conditions. Migraine alone costs the U.S. economy more than \$78 billion annually in healthcare expenses and lost productivity.<sup>2</sup> **Continued, robust NIH funding is critical to advancing new non-opioid treatments, improving patient care, and understanding the complex mechanisms of these disorders.**

## AHDA ASK:

**Support robust NIH funding and oppose cuts** to the NIH budget including safeguarding the HEAL and BRAIN Initiatives, ensuring continued progress in migraine and other headache disorders research in FY26 appropriations.

**Expand women's health research funding** to include migraine and other headache disorders across the lifespan—from childhood through menopause and aging.

## THE NIH HEAL AND BRAIN INITIATIVES: PAVING THE WAY FOR FUTURE HEADACHE RESEARCH

**NIH HEAL Initiative:** The Helping to End Addiction Long-term® Initiative is an NIH-wide effort to accelerate scientific solutions to the opioid crisis and improve pain management. By funding over 1,800 research projects nationwide, the HEAL Initiative is advancing our understanding of pain mechanisms, which is essential for developing non-addictive treatments for headache disorders.<sup>3</sup>

**NIH BRAIN Initiative:** The Brain Research Through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies® Initiative aims to revolutionize our understanding of the human brain. By developing innovative neurotechnologies, the BRAIN Initiative is uncovering the neural circuits involved in chronic pain, offering insights that are crucial for identifying new non-opioid therapeutic targets for headache disorders.<sup>4</sup>

In FY2024, NIH received a total program level of \$47.311 billion, a decrease in its overall program level (–\$368 million, or –0.8%) for the first time since FY2013.<sup>5</sup> The BRAIN Initiative received a 40% cut in funding in FY24.<sup>6</sup> Further reductions in funding will be extremely detrimental to scientific advancements in headache research.

**Migraine and other headache disorders are a major public health issue — continued NIH investment is essential for improving care, reducing disability, and advancing scientific breakthroughs.**



## HEADACHE DISORDERS: A CRITICAL WOMEN'S HEALTH ISSUE

- **Migraine is three times more common in women** than in men and is a leading cause of disability among young women.<sup>7</sup>
- **Trigeminal neuralgia**, a severe orofacial pain disorder, is significantly more prevalent in women than men and presents with distinct clinical and radiological characteristics.<sup>8</sup>
- **Spontaneous spinal cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) leaks** also occur more frequently in women, with an estimated incidence of approximately 4 per 100,000 annually.<sup>9</sup>
- Headache disorders impact women through all life stages—from childhood and adolescence to pregnancy, postpartum, and menopause—yet headache remains largely overlooked in women's health research.
- **Increased NIH investment is needed to study hormonal influences, sex-based differences, and treatment disparities in headache disorders.**

## IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

- Headache disorders are common in children and adolescents, with studies indicating that approximately **17% of U.S. children** experience frequent or severe headaches annually.<sup>10</sup>
- **Chronic Absenteeism:** Frequent or severe headaches lead to significant school absenteeism, affecting academic performance and social development.<sup>11</sup>
- Recognizing and treating headache disorders in childhood and adolescence may prevent progression to chronic conditions, reducing long-term disability and improving quality of life.<sup>12</sup>

## NIH RESEARCH IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE:

NINDS-supported research has uncovered key neurological pathways, pain signaling mechanisms, and neuroinflammation's role in headache disorders. These insights have helped lead to Calcitonin Gene-Related Peptide-targeting migraine treatments.

**Continued NIH investment ensures scientific breakthroughs translate into real-world treatments, offering hope to millions of Americans.**

### Notes

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