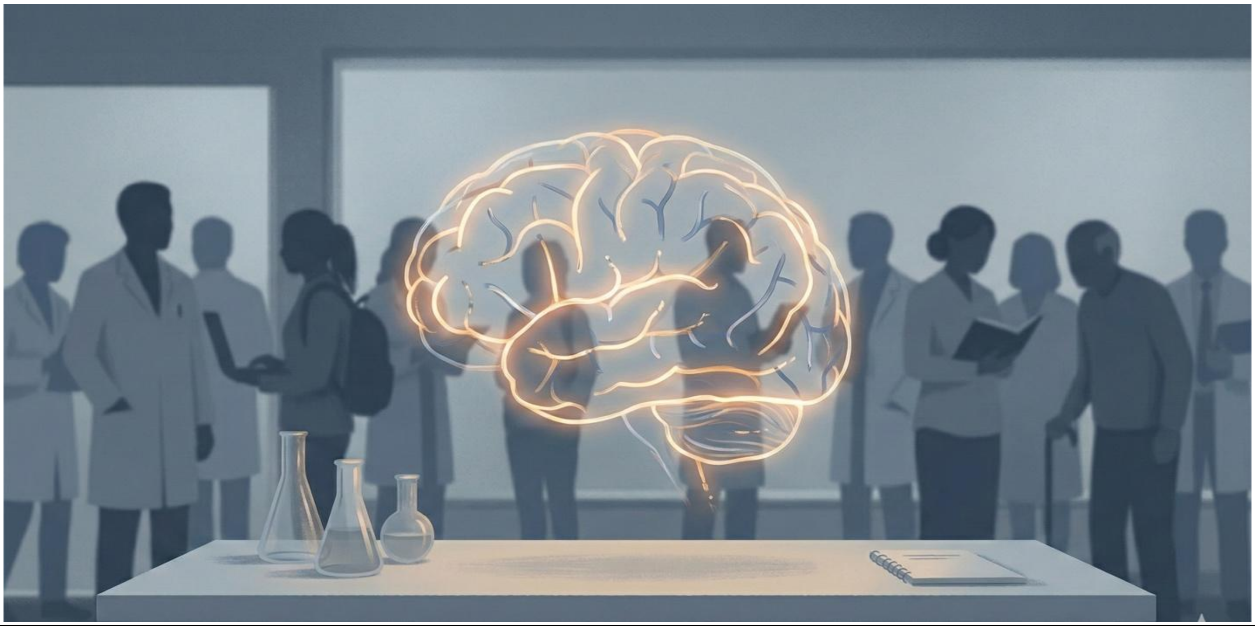


Voices of Impact: Lessons from a Research Funding Crisis

Why These Stories Still Matter

Link to share your story: **Share Your Story**

Summary (*Updated December 18, 2025*)

In 2025, a sudden suspension of federal research funding disrupted hundreds of scientific projects at UCLA, affecting faculty, trainees, staff, patients, and the broader California research ecosystem. This report, compiled by the UCLA Brain Research Institute, documents the human impact of that disruption through the voices of those directly affected. While federal funding has since resumed, the consequences of that interruption did not simply disappear.

This document preserves the voices of scientists, students, staff, and citizens who were directly impacted during that period. Their stories capture more than a moment of crisis — they reveal how fragile the research enterprise can be, how deeply science is intertwined with people's lives, and how long-term damage can occur even from short-term disruptions.

Behind every grant number are individuals: patients waiting for treatments, students building futures in science, families relying on stable employment, and communities depending on discovery to drive health and economic progress. Many contributors shared their experiences anonymously, reflecting the fear and uncertainty that accompanied the funding disruption.

In the aftermath of the freeze, momentum has grown around state-level efforts to better safeguard California's research infrastructure, including proposals for new public investment mechanisms such as a California Futures Fund. These conversations underscore a critical lesson highlighted by the stories below: **sustaining research requires proactive, stable, and resilient funding systems — not reactive crisis management**.

Although this report focuses on UCLA, the experiences documented here resonate far beyond a single institution. They serve as both a cautionary record and a call to reflect on how we value, protect, and invest in science — for the benefit of patients, communities, and future generations.

This collection reflects the perspectives of individual contributors and concerned citizens. It does not represent the official position of the University of California, the UCLA Brain Research Institute, or UCLA as a whole.

Editor's note: *This report was updated on September 02, 2025, to clarify that the $21.04 return figure refers to State of California investment in the UC system (2018-2019), not NIH investment.*

During the 2025 funding suspension, approximately **$500 million in NIH research grants at UCLA were temporarily frozen**, accompanied by significant financial penalties. Although federal funding has since resumed, this interruption revealed how quickly scientific, educational, and economic systems can be destabilized — not only at UCLA, but across California's research and higher-education landscape.

The question raised at the time — and still relevant today — is not only *what happened*, but *what such disruptions mean for the public now and in the future*.

Why Research Funding Matters for Californians?

In 2018–19, the University of California generated **$21.04 in economic output for every $1 invested by the State of California**[1]. This return reflects more than laboratory activity; it includes job creation, workforce training, technology development, health innovation, and regional economic growth.

Using that benchmark, a temporary loss of **$500 million in research activity** represents not just a pause in science, but a **multi-billion-dollar shock to California's economy**, with ripple effects that can take years — or decades — to fully recover. Scientific research is cumulative; when momentum is interrupted, discoveries, careers, and innovations cannot simply be restarted where they left off.

The funding disruption underscored a critical reality: **even short-term interruptions in research support can cause long-term damage** to the scientific workforce, patient pipelines, and economic engines that depend on sustained discovery.

Lessons for the Future

In response to the 2025 disruption, conversations accelerated around the need for **more resilient, diversified, and locally anchored mechanisms** to protect California's research enterprise. Proposals such as a California Futures Fund emerged from recognition that safeguarding science requires planning for continuity — not just emergency recovery. While specific policy solutions continue to evolve, the core lesson remains clear: Stable, predictable investment in research is essential infrastructure for California's health, economy, and global leadership.

The Human Dimension of the Funding Disruption

The sections that follow move beyond numbers and economic models to document the **human consequences** of the 2025 funding interruption — through the voices of faculty, trainees, staff, students, and community members.

These snapshots capture how stalled funding disrupted discoveries, careers, training pathways, and patient-focused research in real time. Full narratives appear in the subsequent section.

[1] *https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/ucla-2020-economic-impact-report-108000-jobs*

Snapshots of Impact

- Carlos Portera-Cailliau, MD, PhD (Neurology & Neurobiology)
  Autism and Fragile X research is halted; international postdocs and an MD-PhD student are face career-ending uncertainty. ***"I've brought in $ millions in funding to UCLA, published in top journals, built a reputation for research in brain circuit differences [underlying] autism and intellectual disability." Carlos' lab will not be able to continue without his two NIH R01s and a graduate student's F31 pre-doctoral Fellowship."***
- Elle Rathbun (PhD Student): **Research that could save lives and transform stroke treatment has been forced to a standstill.**
  https://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/neuroscience-researcher-presses-stroke-treatments-research-grants-suspended
- Ye Zhang, PhD; Anjie Zhen, PhD; Jennifer Fulcher, MD, PhD; Jing Wen, PhD; Koki Morizono, MD, PhD; Scott Kitchen, PhD
  Over $10M in NIH funding is suspended for Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, HIV, and brain tumor therapies—projects close to clinical trials are now frozen. ***"This suspension not only jeopardizes a beacon of hope for patients and their families but also poses a significant threat to the health of our residents and the economic vitality of our state."***
- Laura DeNardo, PhD (Physiology & Neurobiology)
  The entire lab studying early life adversity has stalled—NIH R01s and training fellowships for PhD students and postdocs are suspended, threatening discoveries in mental health and forcing trainees to question staying in science. ***"This will strip my lab of the flexibility these funds provided and will severely constrain the research program I have worked hard to build."***
- Avi Samelson, PhD (Neurology & Biochemistry)
  His new lab developing CRISPR therapies for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's cannot buy equipment or pay staff—$750K frozen. ***"If bridge funding is not implemented across UCLA in the next 2-4 weeks, there will be NO RESEARCH COMMUNITY AT UCLA ANYMORE. It will be impossible to do research without a significant re invigoration of research funding and personnel in the future."***

- Bruce Teter, PhD (Medicine)
  Alzheimer's drug discovery is paused and senior faculty are forced to leave academia after $400K loss. ***"It is demoralizing and depressing that my sacrifices for academic freedom and for developing a preventative cure for Alzheimer's disease came to this end. My academic career is over - I am moving to biotech or pharma."***
- Felix Schweizer, PhD (Neurobiology)
  Balance system research has stopped, his R21 grant is frozen and staff are leaving. ***"Research is not something that can be suspended and then resumed. During the suspension, equipment is not serviced, researchers don't practice their skills, reagents run out of shelf-life etc. People leave their jobs to go to other states and other countries (both are very active in recruiting talent from UC). With people leave ideas and skills."***
- Carrie Bearden, PhD (Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences & Psychology)
  Our $2.6 million Neurogenetics training grant has been suspended. This program supports ~10 graduate students and postdoctoral fellows working on cutting-edge science on the causes of - and developing new therapies for autism, Huntington's disease, schizophrenia, and a host of other brain diseases. These trainees will need to look for jobs and careers elsewhere if funding is not restored soon, a devastating loss: https://spectrumnews1.com/ca/southern-california/education/2025/08/13/ucla-research-funding-freeze-trump
- Gina Poe, PhD (Integrative Biology and Physiology Professor and Director of the Brain Research Institute)
  162 neuroscience grants were suspended at UCLA, affecting a least 90 different laboratories including trainees (undergraduates, graduate students, and postdoctoral scholars) and staff, as well as all the people who support the life-saving basic science research. My MARC grant of 27 years was frozen, preventing me from training 40 of our smartest, most motivated undergraduates to be successful in a biomedical PhD program. ***I am afraid these best minds with all of their bright ideas that fuel our health and our economy will be wasted, leaving biology shrouded in mystery and missing the chance to cure and improve ourselves.***
- Douglas Vormstein-Schneider (Graduate Student)
  His thesis work is endangered with ~$1M frozen and postdocs on visas fear deportation. ***The hamstringing of momentum in this realm will not only slow research progress in the near-term, but will damage the momentum of the field for years to come by stifling collaborations, ending careers and limiting the influx of talented young scientists. Personally, my own grant has been terminated, putting me at financial risk. The impact on my thesis and resulting publications means that my long-term career is in great jeopardy.***
- Zachary Zeider, PhD (Postdoc)
  Five years of memory research is at risk of being wasted—funding is frozen just as he prepares to launch his own lab. "***This setback comes at the same moment as I prepare to launch my own career as a professor. I am so close to realizing the dream I've chased for more than a decade, and I now face the possibility of being forced to stop just short of the finish line. I have an infant son at home, and like many young families we are stretched thin by rising costs. I cannot afford to go without pay, and I cannot afford to wait. I want to move forward, carry this work to completion, and secure stability for my family before I'm forced to hang up the lab coat for good."***

- Undergraduate Students: Capstone projects, graduate school applications, and training pipelines are disrupted; many question a future in research. "***This affects not only the completion of my capstone for which I've received a $10,000 tuition scholarship, but also my applications to graduate schools this year. Without the ability to take any steps forward at this crucial time, the scope, feasibility, and success of this project is on the line for our labs as well as my future in graduate school.***
- Staff & Related Research Support Personnel:
  Job security is threatened as labs shut down. Custodial staff, building managers, facilities workers, etc. fear layoffs***.***
  "I've been here 8 years and really like it here at UCLA. As a single parent mom, a layoff would be really bad. There is too much greed going on. Give everybody a chance to make it." **Toshann Jones, Custodian**
  "I was laid off in the economic downturn of 2008 and worked on and off for a temp agency and was, on and off unemployment for 9 years until I got this job at UCLA as Building Manager. It was rough when I was unemployed, very rough. I would not want to face that again. I am proud of the work I do, keeping this research building functioning. I'd hate to see it all fall apart and face unemployment again." – Porfirio Herrera, Building Manager
- Beau Alward, PhD (Integrative Biology and Physiology)
  If the pause continues, I will have to start laying people off, which utterly derails their dream of pursuing science, a future I told them they can envision having—one where they can channel their passion for discovery to improve the human condition while balancing family life. A lost generation of scientists means catastrophic loss in the pursuit of discoveries, cures, and understanding how the world works.
- *Vidya Saravanapandian, PhD (Brain Research Institute)*
  "My PhD research, supported by NIH training grants including the Neurobehavioral Genetics Training Grant (now frozen), led to the discovery of a promising biomarker now being tested in clinical trials for a rare genetic disorder…If bridge funding is not immediately established, many labs may not recover. When the research ecosystem collapses, it is not only science that suffers, but communities, economies, and patients everywhere."
- *Aparna Bhaduri*, PhD (Biological Chemistry)
  "My grant on human brain development was cut, impacting our momentum and progress on understanding how these stem cells make decisions. Not only is the research stopped, but the career development of students and postdocs pursuing these questions has been halted. We are at the most exciting, enigmatic, and impactful frontier of finally being able to understand the human brain in health and disease; but with these suspensions progress for science and patients will not be realized."
- *Dr. Stephanie Leal, PhD (Integrative Biology & Physiology*
  Almost 10 years ago, my grandmother passed away from Alzheimer's disease. I have devoted my career to finding out how we can stop or slow Alzheimer's disease. I do research for the sole purpose of helping others and gaining knowledge that can make an impact on society. The tools we have available to examine this disease have directly come from NIH funding that is essential for research progress.
- *Mark Mobilia (Former Senior Accounts Manager, Zeiss Microscopy)*
  After 30 years of advancing scientific innovation, Mark, along with his colleagues was laid off due to funding cuts.***"…*****as someone who has dedicated the last 30 years of my life to advancing scientific research and innovation through my work at Zeiss Microscopy LLC.**

Unfortunately, due to the recent NIH funding freeze that has hit UCLA and other institutions across the country, I—along with 54 of my colleagues—was laid off. This freeze has devastated the research community."

Full Stories from the Front Lines of Research

The following pages include full narratives from those mentioned above, as well as many other faculty, staff, postdoctoral scholars, graduate students, and undergraduates affected by the freeze.

Carlos Portera Cailliau, MD/PhD
Professor, Department of Neurology and Neurobiology.
(Funding impact: 2 RO1 and F31 grants totaling ~$1.2M/year)

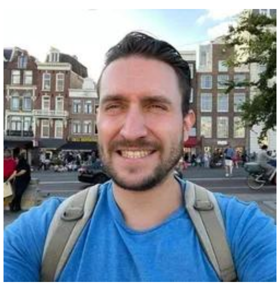
"My name is Carlos Portera-Cailliau, I am a professor in the depts. of Neurology and Neurobiology at UCLA, where I run a lab that investigates brain circuit differences in mouse models of autism. My two NIH R01s and my grad student's F30 pre-doctoral Fellowship have all been suspended. I don't have other sources of funding from federal agencies or private foundations. I wanted to share with you what losing funding means, on a personal level:

This is **Michelle Wu**. She is a brilliant MD-PhD student pursing her PhD in my lab. Last year, she secured her own funding through an F30 NRSA pre-doc fellowship from the NIH, a very competitive mechanism. Michelle is in the final year of her PhD thesis project, which investigates the causes of a fundamental transition in network activity in the cerebral cortex that takes place during development. She wrote a review last year on this process in the journal *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*. Delays in this transition are thought to contribute to neurodevelopmental disorders. Combining in vivo recordings and RNA-sequencing Michelle has identified potential molecular mechanisms that drive the desynchronization of neuronal activity. She worries she will not be able to finish this project, which will delay her return to the final 2 years of medical school. Sadly, she was asking me last week if it's worth staying in research considering the NIH funding issues, and whether it makes more sense for her to go into private practice eventually.

This is **Anand Suresh, PhD**, a post-doc in my lab. He came to the U.S. from India to pursue a PhD and then joined my lab 6 years ago. Anand's research identified a novel potential therapeutic target for Fragile X Syndrome, the leading single gene cause of autism and intellectual disability. In preclinical studies in a mouse model of Fragile X he found that inhibiting that particular signaling pathway restored network dysfunction in the brain and completely rescued the behavioral deficits of fragile X model mice. For the last 3 months he has been working 12 hours a day to revise his main manuscript, which received positive comments from the journal *Neuron* (one of the top 2 neuroscience journals in the world). Anand has also helped me submit grants to the DOD and private foundations to conduct

additional drug discovery studies that may eventually lead to new treatments for people living with fragile X. He and I are in the process of submitting a patent through the Technology Development Group at UCLA. This year has been very challenging for Anand because he lost his father to cancer, and now he wonders if he will even be able to finish revisions for his manuscript, without which he may not get a job in academia to start his own lab.

This is **Irma Tello-García**, **PhD**. Born and raised in Oaxaca, Mexico, she is a first-generation university student raised by a single mother. She came to UCLA to pursue a post-doc in my lab, eager to experience the cutting-edge techniques that only labs like mine at UCLA could offer. Her project has uncovered new circuit phenotypes related to visual perception deficits in Fragile X syndrome. Irma is also one of only a handful of people at UCLA using a novel technology of miniaturized 2-photon microscopy that allows her to record neuronal activity in freely moving mice as they engage in a difficult visual discrimination task. In 2022, she was a finalist for the UC President's Post-Doctoral Award. She is one of the most resilient and creative scientists I've ever met. She asked me last Friday if she will be laid off because of the grants being suspended. She is worried that if it happens suddenly, she won't have enough time to look for other post-doc elsewhere in the U.S. and will have to return to Mexico.



This is **Carlos Sanchez-León, PhD**. He is a post-doc in my lab. He comes from a small family of modest means in Extremadura, Spain. His project investigates predictive coding in the brain, that is, how neuronal circuits are constantly comparing new incoming sensory information to internal models that have been built over years of sensory experience, to inform decision making. Carlos designed a very innovative experimental paradigm using whisker stimulation in mice and records neuronal responses to both repetitive whisker deflections (predicted) and to rare, unexpected deviant stimuli. He has identified a truly remarkable and unanticipated model of prediction whereby circuits can not only detect the presence of a deviant stimulus but can distinguish between deviant whisker deflections of different amplitudes or directions. This could really transform how we think about intracortical processing. Carlos is also assessing predictive coding in three different genetic mouse models of autism, to test the hypothesis that alterations in prediction could explain autistic symptoms such as sensory hypersensitivity or insistence of sameness. I'm not sure how to explain to him that his project may need to end in the coming weeks, because I will need to terminate his position due to my lack of funding.

And then there is me. I have been at UCLA for nearly 21 years, and I'm proud of all the service I've done for the university. I served as a member of the academic senate for 3 years (CPB), as director of the UCLA-Caltech Medical Scientist Training Program for 8 years, in countless committees for faculty recruitment, selection of department chairs, reviewing internal grants, raised money to establish a new undergraduate summer research fellowship program, mentored dozens of undergrads... I've brought in $ millions in funding to UCLA, published in top journals, built a reputation for research into Fragile X Syndrome. I never once considered leaving UCLA (despite receiving requests from other universities). They say faculty like me, who give it all for service, should know that "the university never loves you back." I don't need love. All I need is for UCLA to tell me and the trainees in my lab that we are valued and that the school will do whatever it takes to maintain these funded research projects, that no one will be laid off.

I keep some unrestricted funds that I diligently saved over many years by being extremely frugal. I use these funds every few years to buy new equipment (which is not possible though NIH R01 grants), to pay for the stipend/tuition shortfalls of NIH fellowships to students, or for other expenses not covered by Federal grants. If I spend them all on trainee salaries and animal costs, I will run out in less than 2 months and I will lose the flexibility that these unrestricted funds afforded my research program.

Thank you for your efforts to remedy this terrible situation. I am confident that you will be able to raise the funds necessary to support this important research. Please let me know of there is anything I can do to help you."

Zachary Zeider, PhD:
"My name is Zachary Zeider. I completed my PhD in 2020 and came to UCLA shortly thereafter to pursue postdoctoral training. My dream, which I have devoted the last 15 years of my professional life to, is to run my own research lab studying the neural mechanisms of memory and how to treat memory disorders.

At UCLA, my research uncovered a cellular logic that guides how memories move around the brain across time, which may open new therapeutic avenues for conditions like PTSD. I secured independent NIH funding to pursue this project, which is now in its final stages as I complete revision experiments for a manuscript. But my funding has been frozen, jeopardizing my ability to finish. Normally, gaps in my own support would be bridged by my lab's grants. Instead, every single NIH grant to my lab has also been frozen, leaving both my work and that of my colleagues in jeopardy. If I cannot run these final experiments, I cannot publish this research, and five years of work, along with substantial resources and research animal lives, will be wasted. This setback comes at the same moment as I prepare to launch my own career as a professor. I am so close to realizing the dream I've chased for more than a decade, and I now face the possibility of being forced to stop just short of the finish line. I have an infant son at home, and like many young families we are stretched thin by rising costs. I cannot afford to go without pay, and I cannot afford to wait. I want to move forward, carry this work to completion, and secure stability for my family before I'm forced to hang up the lab coat for good."

Felix E. Schweizer, Ph.D.
Professor, Neurobiology; Chair, Graduate Interdepartmental Program for Neuroscience
(Funding impact: A year 2 R21 Frozen)

"Our research project crucially depends on the purchase of research animals. Animals that we already have need to be cared for and new animals can no longer be purchased. After next week, we are done. A staff person quit on their own terms. We now don't have support staff anymore. With upcoming teaching responsibilities, it will be hard to carry the project forward. An R21 provides funding for a promising pilot project. The ultimate goal of the approach is to understand how the balance system keeps us upright. The work could help in developing a 'balance aid,' in understanding motion sickness and providing novel approaches for the training of air force pilots and astronauts on how to react to changes in the balance environment. Basic research provides training opportunities in evidence-based approaches to life. It is hard to predict how results from basic research impact life. But developing a 'balance aid' would create opportunities for start-up companies. I had a year 2 R21 frozen. ***Research is not something that can be suspended and then resumed. During the suspension, equipment is not serviced, researchers don't practice their skills, reagents run out of shelf-life etc. People leave their jobs to go to other states and other countries (both are very active in recruiting talent from UC). With people leave ideas and skills. The target of the freeze, evidence-based knowledge, scares me. The August 7 executive order represents a broad disrespect for basic research and for evidence-based knowledge.*** Even if funding is unfrozen this round, the funded grants will have a very different direction. Hopefully, by reaching out to the legislature, we can make that point clear."

Undergraduate Student (anonymous):

"I am an undergraduate researcher coming into my fourth and final year at UCLA. With this university being such a large and respected research institution, known for leading work in my field of neuroscience, I have been eagerly finding ways that I can get involved. Throughout the last few years of volunteering in neuroscience labs, I have gained the experience, mentorship, and insight I needed to decided that I want a future career in research and academia. This coming year, my sleep lab had partnered with another leading lab in the field of behavioral and cognitive neuroscience for a unique project that focuses on interdisciplinary collaboration. This project will be my major's capstone and cumulative accomplishment of these last four years. Unfortunately, with funding freezes and troubles as of late, it is unclear if my experiment will be able to continue without proper financial support. **This affects not only the completion of my capstone for which I've received a $10,000 tuition scholarship for, but also my applications in applying to graduate schools this year. Without the ability to take any steps forward at this crucial time, the scope, feasibility, and success of this project is on the line for both of our labs as well as my future in graduate school."**

Avi Samelson, PhD
Assistant Professor, Department of Neurology, Department of Biological Chemistry
(Funding lost: $250 K/year for three years)

"I started my lab at UCLA in January 2025 in the Departments of Neurology and Biochemistry. We use CRISPR to tackle some of the most devastating brain diseases, like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. A big part of my mission is to train the next generation of scientists so they can keep pushing forward toward cures for these devastating illnesses.

My lab manager, Sandra Rached, was the very first person I hired. She builds new tools that let us switch specific genes on or off in human brain cells, an essential step for recreating and studying complex brain diseases in the lab. My first graduate student, Manasi Movva, joined in June. In my earlier research, I discovered a new way that cells send the protein tau, a key player in

Alzheimer’s Disease, into the cell’s “garbage disposal” system, called the proteasome. Manasi is now building on that work to lower tau levels, with the goal of creating new treatments for Alzheimer’s and other brain disorders. The newest member of our team is postdoctoral researcher Shraddha KC, who joined in July. She is studying exactly how tau changes shape in harmful ways, so we can design therapies that keep it harmless and stop Alzheimer’s before it starts.

I received a career transition grant in 2022 to launch my lab. We were finally able to start using our grant funds—only for them to be frozen two weeks later. Without access to that money, I cannot buy critical equipment or hire the staff needed to keep our research moving. Every delay means that potential life-saving treatments for brain diseases affecting over 60% of people over age 80 are delayed. And this problem is not just mine. My colleagues at the Easton Center, the Neurology Department, and across UCLA are facing the same funding freeze. Science works as a team effort, fueled by curiosity, risk-taking, and a shared drive to uncover the truth. Science is a team sport. Without the resources to play, progress stops. And when progress stops, cures are delayed, and lives are lost.

If bridge funding is not implemented across UCLA in the next 2-4 weeks, there will be NO RESEARCH COMMUNITY AT UCLA ANYMORE. It will be impossible to do research without a significant re invigoration of research funding and personnel in the future.”

Daniel Kaufman, PhD.
Professor, Molecular and Medical Pharmacology,

“Daniel Kaufman’s laboratory has paused studies focused on advancing therapeutics for brain cancer and long-COVID:

<u>Brain cancer studies</u>: One exploratory study sought to understand why glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer, is so difficult for the immune system to recognize and destroy. In unpublished studies, we identified a molecule that helps glioblastoma tumors hide from the body’s natural defenses. Unfortunately, funding for this vital work was suspended. Understanding and targeting this molecule could pave the way for new, more powerful cancer treatments. Progress in this area has the potential to save lives and offer renewed hope for patients facing this devastating disease.

<u>Long-COVID studies.</u> Another project was inspired by our earlier studies in which a natural compound called “homotaurine” was found to reduce harmful autoimmune activity in the brains of mice with multiple sclerosis. We received NIH exploratory funding to test whether homotaurine could also reduce brain inflammation associated with long-COVID—a condition responsible for “brain fog” that currently lacks any effective treatment. Advancing this research could help bring relief and better brain health to the many people struggling with lingering symptoms after COVID-19.

Both of these projects address serious gaps in treatment options and carry real promise for improving public health. Continued support for this research is essential to turning scientific discoveries into life-changing medical advances.”

Bruce Teter, PhD
Associate Professor, Medicine
(Funding impacted: $400,000.00)

"Project to develop a drug for Alzheimer's disease is stalled. My job as Associate Professor is threatened, so I am applying for jobs in biotech. It is demoralizing and depressing that my sacrifices for academic freedom came to this end. All lab members are demoralized, and some are seeking positions in biotech and pharma. Loss of trained personnel will take 6-12 moths to refill and train up to speed. Most importantly, medical treatments for deadly diseases will be delayed, indirectly causing the death of many patients. Students and postdocs will consider other states, reducing California leadership position in science and medicine. **It is demoralizing and depressing that my sacrifices for academic freedom and for developing a preventative cure for Alzheimer's disease came to this end. My academic career is over - I am moving to biotech or pharma."**

Gina Poe, PhD
Professor, Integrative Biology and Physiology, Psychiatry, and Neurobiology Departments
Director of the UCLA Brain Research Institute
(Funding impacted $1M)

"Over 160 grants in the field of neuroscience were suspended at UCLA. In my own tally of $1M, both our MARC grant, which prepares the best and most motivated undergraduate students for PhD programs in the biomedical sciences, and my graduate student's T32 training grant preparing her and others to be the best in discovering the roots of and finding cures for substance use disorders - have been suspended. What people don't seem to realize it that these grants are not free handouts to do nothing. They are highly competitive, rigorously peer-reviewed proposals to do specific, highly specialized and difficult science. To get one of these NIH grants, you have to train for years and prove you are the best person in the world to do this research. Then when you get the grant, you have to actually do the work and publish papers about it and give presentations to others showing how it worked out and what your controls were and where it all led and what comes next. And if you don't do all that, you won't be able to get any further grants or advance in your career. Our students who win spots on training grants are competing against other top students. They have to do well in their graduate classes and pass specialized exams and write proposals for the research they want to do. They must plan how they will use the training grant slot to become the best trained person for that field and be the brilliant scientist who will discover the next great thing in the field. And the thing is, they do! **They work so hard and study so much and become these experts that the whole world turns to** in order to solve, for example, how to improve sleep in those who have a substance use disorder so these folks can beat it and not have to suffer needlessly and can become contributing members of society and live their best lives again. **Without this, we will lose these best and brightest motivated problem solvers to other careers and the mysteries will remain mysteries and the disorders will remain incurable.**"

Douglas Vormstein-Schneider (PhD Student)
Funding impact: Roughly $1M

"My project is largely fully formed and able to proceed, however there are two main ways I am impacted: 1) There is no safety net of funding. Should any physical component required by the project fail, I am unable to acquire a replacement and the project will be in limbo. 2) Limited availability of subjects. I use transgenic mice in my study, and in order to cut costs the colony is now very small. This limits the availability of shared mouse lines in the lab, potentially delaying certain experiments. Many post docs are concerned about their career positions and if their projects will be able to continue if they will be paid. Some postdocs on visas are concerned that without proof of payment employment their visas will be void and they will be forced to leave the country. The implications for Californians are expansive. The UC system is one of the largest employers in the country, and decimating its financial foundation will inevitably result in the losses of many jobs. This is merely the first domino, as families without income will incur debt and other incalculable financial downstream costs. Additionally, the stresses that come with these unpredictable shifts will impact the health of many employees of the UC system. Furthermore, the health of all Californians (and world citizens) will be impacted by the stunting of biomedical research. **The hamstringing of momentum in this realm will not only slow research progress in the near-term, but will damage the momentum of the field for years to come by stifling collaborations, ending careers and limiting the influx of talented young scientists. Personally, my own grant has been terminated, putting me at financial risk. The impact on my thesis and resulting publications means that my long-term career is in great jeopardy. This is deeply frustrating as I have spent my life dreaming of how I could contribute to a happier, healthier world. I have pursued this tirelessly, sometimes to the detriment of my health, a massive amount of my sense of identity being comprised of this drive and the resulting effort. Now I face the likelihood of my efforts being meaningless, and the detriment to my health coming from the stresses of failure by suppression. I may never know my true potential to make a difference."**

Toshann Jones, Custodian

"If I had to be laid off because the labs I clean closed it would be bad. I need this job. It would be devastating to all of us custodians, my colleagues here. I've been here 8 years. It would be real bad. I raised my daughter as a single parent, working hard. **I really like it here at UCLA and I want to be treated fairly. There is too much greed going on. Give everybody a chance to make it."**

Undergraduate Student (anonymous):

"My Teaching Assistant's and professor's research is halted. This is life changing. Their psychology and medical research has a major patient and community impact on the world. This affects our team with financial stress on research projects. **This will have broader implications: patients will not be able to receive cutting edge new treatments and technologies. Global competitiveness of the US will fall behind other countries and we will be unable to provide life-saving research."**

Stephanie White, PhD
Professor, Integrative Biology and Physiology

"I and my trainees are discovering how the brains of babies and birds progress from crying and cooing to speaking and singing. Lee Atkinson is **hoping to solve a part of this mystery and earn her doctoral degree so she can become an advocate for babies who have trouble learning to talk due to developmental mis-wiring of their brains. She was just awarded a slot on a prestigious training grant that would have partially supported her for this work. That grant was suspended immediately with no notice**. Meanwhile Lee's husband, who works on preventing cancer in the medical school at UCLA, is on the list of staff to be cut due to frozen funding. This is particularly heartbreaking given that they are expecting their own first child, a baby girl."

Research Technician (anonymous):

"I'm currently a research technician with a UCLA lab that studies the neural circuits that guide learning and decision-making processes, through the use of rodent models. Our work studies the brain mechanisms that, when disrupted, can lead to conditions such as substance use disorder and OCD. Work like ours is essential for understanding the basic brain circuitry that others then jump off of to develop new therapeutic targets at a clinical level.

My lab relies on our R01 grants from the NIH to cover salaries for all 10 of us full-time employees, as well as ensuring adequate care for our research animals, and purchasing equipment and supplies. As of July 31st, 3 of our 4 R01 grants have been frozen.

This has all happened with essentially zero information from the administration beyond the order that all our expenses stop. All of us have been under an incredible amount of stress, not just wondering how—or if— we can continue our projects, but how long our lab's very limited supply of nonfederal funds can let us keep our positions. And with the chaos surrounding these funding changes, we don't even know if our paychecks will come on time. Department budgets are being stretched thin to fill some of the many gaps in salaries that the funding cuts have left.

A postdoctoral scholar in our lab is working on an exciting project concerning stress and its effects on learning and behavior. She is researching neural mechanisms that can potentiallyreverse the negative effects that stress has on learning. With the funding freeze, her project in a state of suspension, and the termination of her position would force her to leave the country, as she is in the U.S. on a work visa. Many other international scientists are in a similar situation— this is not only a stressful experience for the individual researcher, but it's major loss for our university and broader scientific community that cannot be overstated.

And this is only compounding existing funding shortages—with more labs having less resources, there are fewer and fewer places for early-career researchers to gain training and mentorship.

In my time with this lab—almost 4 years now— I have seen over a dozen undergraduate researchers thrive and develop here, conducting independent projects and some even attending conferences to present their research. Since graduating, many have since gone on to pursue PhDs and medical degrees. But we cannot continue to support the next generation of scientists when we can't afford gloves and animal feed.

This funding crisis has far-reaching effects that go beyond just us full-time employees, impacting the scientific community and all of UCLA, one of the largest employers in LA County."

Undergraduate student (anonymous):

"Some of the unspoken requirements for graduate residency programs for neurosurgery would be a risk for me, as I wouldn't be able to get the hours in time and would have to take another year during my third or second year of medical school. Others would be uncertain in their career as they wouldn't have a secure way of getting publications for their graduate program requirements. Man, honestly, I think researchers understand the fundamental basics of what all innovation is based on. I mean, you can't really build a new machine without understanding the fundamental principles of what makes that 'thing' actually work. **Being a premed student, I think that Californians would suffer the most from not having some cure or therapy for an obscure illness earlier. That every funding dollar reduced would mean another day that goes by, a patient dies from an unknown, obscure illness.** Or that doctors have to fight with healthcare insurance companies over overpriced medicine that inevitably could've been produced at a cheaper price. To adversely affected impoverished communities, I think those people are affected the most. Some of the work-study opportunities given by the school to pay for tuition would also be heavily affected by the lack of funding given to research. With the law limiting how much research gets funded, we prevent the number of students who can participate in one research group in any given semester. This ultimately slows down the pace of innovation and understanding in that specific research subject. Coupled with the fact that tuition rates are rising, it'll give less of a reason for students to join, unless it's for their requirements for graduate or residency programs after college. Personally, I think research is most fundamental for checking if articles that have already been published in well-known journals are correct or not. I remember there was an instance in psychology where we repeated most of the experiments and compared the results to those already present. And saw that, ~70% or more of the replicated experiments gave results far from the median present in the original article. But the problem here isn't that most of the experiments in the well-known journal weren't replicable as described. The problem was that because these journals are highly publicized for being correct and true, they would create false information that would be put into textbooks that these little kids would learn, but wouldn't be incorrect. So to me, research is more about having correct and true information, not just cutting corners and cost just so you can get publicized. Because eventually, all the information and data we gather in research will eventually be taught in a classroom."

Undergraduate student (anonymous):

"I am international student who came to the US as I really wanted to participate in research, even at an undergrad level, which isn't possible in my home country. For me, UCLA is a dream come true. From freshman year only, I tried to join a lab and was able to do so winter quarter of my freshman year. I have had an amazing experience in a lab and it's been magical. Back home, I have seen how diseases like addiction have ravaged my country and how they continue to harm large populations in LA. Working in my lab to understand addiction better and how we can combat it has been amazing. I also get to work so closely with the brain, and learn more about neurodegeneration, which has affected many family members and loved ones. Hence to be able to make such an impact via research has been everything to me. My personal project on addiction stalled and lab funding cut for larger work on neurodegeneration. I am stressed about going into research & career uncertainty. Broad implications: not enough medical care; lack of new discoveries; jobs lost; patents decreases. less research happening - less people wanting to come to California - decrease in quality of education and not known by me but we are majorly funded by the NIH. We are funded a little by the NSF, which we got back, but our funding is still majorly suspended. I have come to the US to make my impact via research. **To be impeded like this not only means that my dreams are naught but that millions of people who benefit from life-saving research at UCLA will be impacted. Jobs will be lost and qualified people will not want to come to UCLA and LA, decreasing the quality of medical care severely."**

Beau Alward, PhD (Assistant Professor, Neuroendocrinology and Behavior Lab)

"I'm an assistant professor in the Integrative Biology and Physiology Department at UCLA. I have three children: a 4-year-old and two 1-year-old twin boys. My wife is a scientist at UCLA as well. We're so lucky we have an income based on a passion: science to improve the lives of humans!

But the next generation of scientists may not be so lucky. *The grant pause means I cannot use my NIH funds.* **If the pause continues, I will have to start laying people off, which utterly derails their dream of pursuing science, a future I told them they can envision having—one where they can channel their passion for discovery to improve the human condition while balancing family life.** A lost generation of scientists means catastrophic loss in the pursuit of discoveries, cures, and understanding how the world works.

NIH funds are also unique in that they support salaries of all types of staff at UCLA—fund managers, custodial workers, electricians, etc. They also support local businesses—scientists need to eat and drink coffee. What better place to do this than a short walk to restaurants in Westwood?

The media have been asking the following question: In this new funding climate, can we afford to fund the NIH? This is the wrong question. The right question is: Can we afford NOT to fund the NIH? Until NIH funding is stable, we need to bridge the gap to avoid losing progress and the next generation of scientists. We must show the world that science is too big to fail."

Aparna Bhaduri, PhD Assistant Professor
"My lab studies human brain development and brain cancer. Glioblastoma is the most common and most aggressive form of adult brain cancer, and almost every week I meet someone who has a loved one who has succumbed to this devastating disease. Famous people like John McCain and Ted Kennedy have died from it – there are no effective treatments. While human brain development might seem unrelated, we have learned that certain powerful stem cells that uniquely make our human brain develop for the first time, and disappear by birth, re-emerge decades later in a much more vicious context in brain cancer. One of the reasons we have no treatments for brain cancer is because these stem cells are in humans and not in the common models used to study cancer such as mice, making it hard to find relevant treatments. Recently, stem cell derived models in a dish called organoids have enabled us to really study these special human brain stem cells. By studying how these cells work both in development and cancer, we are starting to identify new ways to treat these patients. **My grant on human brain development was cut, impacting our momentum and progress on understanding how these stem cells make decisions. Not only is the research stopped, but the career development of students and postdocs pursuing these questions has been halted. We are at the most exciting, enigmatic, and impactful frontier of finally being able to understand the human brain in health and disease; but with these suspensions progress for science and patients will not be realized."**

Elissa Hallem, PhD
Professor, Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics
"Our lab studies skin-penetrating threadworms and hookworms, which are gastrointestinal parasites that infect over half a billion people worldwide. Infections can cause chronic gastrointestinal distress, stunted growth and long-term cognitive impairment in children, and death in immunosuppressed individuals. Our research focuses on how skin-penetrating worms use human-associated sensory cues like body odor and body heat to locate humans to infect. We also study how these worms burrow into skin to establish an infection. Our goal is to harness knowledge of gene and cell function in skin-penetrating worms to develop new strategies for preventing these debilitating and sometimes lifelong infections. **Our research was funded entirely by NIH, and all grants to our lab have been suspended, leaving us without any research funding or salary support for lab members. We cannot continue this research without funding. Thus, the effect of these grant suspensions has been devastating."**

John, J. Sakon, PhD

Project Scientist, Neurosurgery
Funding Impacted: 6 figures

“I am a project scientist working with Dr. Itzhak Fried in UCLA Neurosurgery, where we have the rare opportunity to record brain signals directly from human patients to understand the fundamental principles underpinning human memory, and then use these findings to develop techniques to ameliorate memory dysfunction. Our work will help overcome memory deficits experienced by millions of Americans suffering from Alzheimer’s, traumatic brain injury, dementia, and other cognitive disorders. We are wholly funded by NIH grants. Our lab was promised grant funding that was subsequently withheld, and since the slowdowns at NIH caused by this administration and DOGE, have yet to be reimbursed by the government for money we already spent.

We had to let go of two individuals and significantly reduce the hours of a third. Even then, our lab remains in arrears, and we can only hope to receive promised funding when the next fiscal year of our grant begins. Funding cuts are likely to make several of us leave the state and abandon this promising line of research. Myself, our software/hardware engineer, and our postdoc all came to California (from Pennsylvania, Texas, and the UK) to participate in our research understanding memory and ameliorating its dysfunction at UCLA. We also work with several undergraduates at UCLA, training them on research methods and scientific principles. These training opportunities would be lost. I decided to take a research position at UCLA and move to California—having never lived on the west coast—because of my interest in working with patients and helping restore human memory in affected individuals. Instead of pursuing a faculty job at a different university, I risked coming here and working off grant money to do this work. Now with the NIH under attack I am finding it increasingly unlikely we can receive future grant funding to continue this work. I have trained in science for almost two decades. NIH funding has allowed me to become a productive scientist that substantially contributes to research aims in the national interest. Capriciously cutting funding for ideological reasons will waste this investment in me to perform future research in the public interest.”

Aldons Jake Lusis, PhD
Professor, Medicine, Microbiology, Immunology, & Molecular Genetics, and Human Genetics

“My lab studies a common form of heart failure that affects more than three million US citizens. Over half of those individuals will die within the next 5 years. This form is characterized by the inability of the heart to relax, necessary for the blood to flow into the chambers of the organ. Our research, funded by two NIH grants, has identified 3 promising approaches that could block the progression of the disease.

First, we discovered a gut microbial product, indole propionic acid, that can help restore function in patients as well as mouse models. We are now trying to develop a long lasting form of the molecule to deliver to patients.

Second, we recently discovered that a protein made by liver, coagulation factor 11, has very positive effects on heart function in a mouse models of heart failure. After our study was published in Science, a large epidemiological study of thousands of heart failure patients

validated our findings in humans. Together with Dr. Feng Gao in Biochemistry, we are developing a novel method to up-regulate the production of Factor 11, involving an anti-sense RNA. Our results in cells are very promising and we hope to move to human trials in the near future.

Third, and possibly most exciting, are studies by Dylan Sarver in or lab, suggesting that an abnormal circadian rhythm contributes to the disease. In ongoing work, Dylan has shown that he can normalize the circadian rhythm and improve heart function in a mouse model of the disease by giving the mice a moderate "time restricted" diet. By restricting eating to about 6 hours a day, the circadian rhythm is normalized and heart function is greatly improved. Together with physicians in the Division of Cardiology, we would now like to perform a human clinical trial.

I am very excited about the possibility of having our basic work help rescue many thousands of people affected with this deadly disease. The fact that our funds for these studies are now being cut off is a tragedy."

Vidya Saravanapandian, PhD
Postdoctoral Researcher, Neurology

I came to the United States from South India as a first-generation student with a dream: to understand the brain, and to make science a bridge between discovery and the communities too often left behind. That dream took me to UCLA, where I earned my PhD and now serve as a postdoctoral scholar studying sleep physiology in children with neurodevelopmental disorders like Dup15q syndrome and Rett syndrome.

I've seen firsthand how NIH support changes lives—not only for families desperate for answers, but also for students like me, who depended on training grants, fellowships, and mentors to find a path in science. **My PhD research, supported by NIH training grants including the Neurobehavioral Genetics Grant, helped me identify a promising biomarker now being tested as an outcome measure in clinical trials for a rare genetic disorder.** This biomarker also provides a window into understanding sleep—a critical but fragile process tied to learning, memory, and healthy brain development.

Building on that work, I transitioned into basic research to investigate animal models that can help us uncover the biology behind brain activity changes during sleep, and how these changes might be targeted to treat neurological disorders. This is the type of fundamental research that forms the foundation for future therapies—yet it is precisely this kind of work that is being most heavily undermined by the federal funding freeze.

The freeze has slammed doors shut. Promising studies—including projects in my own field that could transform care for children with epilepsy and developmental disorders—are stalled. Trainees who should be charting the future of neuroscience are instead questioning whether they have one. Faculty who have built labs over decades are watching them collapse in weeks. This is not just a loss of dollars—it is a loss of knowledge, of hope, of human potential.

Science is not an abstract pursuit. **If bridge funding is not immediately established, many labs may not recover. Every fellowship is a lifeline for the next generation of scientists. Every grant sustains not only discovery, but also jobs across California and beyond—technicians, custodians, fund managers, vendors, and small businesses that rely on the research ecosystem. When that ecosystem collapses, communities and economies everywhere suffer.** To halt this work is devastating, and to those of us who built our lives around the promise of discovery and service, it is heartbreaking. I am deeply worried for what will be lost if action is not taken. Restoring funding is not just about protecting research—it is about protecting people, opportunity, economic vitality, and the very future of science and healthcare

---

Dr. Laura DeNardo, PhD
Associate Professor, Physiology & Neurobiology

My name is Laura DeNardo, and I am an Associate Professor in the departments of Physiology and Neurobiology at UCLA. I am writing about how the federal grants suspensions have impacted my ability to carry out UCLA's academic mission. I'm sharing this information with you in hopes you can help advocate for the many UCLA researchers in my position.

I direct a research lab that investigates how early life adversity—one of the strongest risk factors for developing mental health disorders—shapes brain circuit development. All of my federal funding has been suspended, including my two R01s, my grad students' F30, F31 and T32 predoctoral fellowships, and my postdoc's F32 fellowship. Together this represents 100% of my lab's federal support. We currently have one small foundation grant, and I have carefully saved some unrestricted funds through years of effort to secure extramural support. I use these funds to cover the stipend and tuition shortfalls of NIH fellowships, and for other essential costs not supported by federal grants, such as equipment. If I redirect all of these unrestricted funds to trainee salaries and animal costs, they will be depleted within several months. This will strip my lab of the flexibility these funds provided and will severely constrain the research program I have worked hard to build.

I have been at UCLA for nearly seven years, and I am proud of the ways I have upheld UCLA's academic mission during that time. Since 2022, I have served as the Vice Chair for Community for the Physiology Department. I have also served on admissions committees for the NSIDP and MSTP programs, on multiple faculty recruitment committees, and as a reviewer for internal grants and undergraduate fellowships. I also teach courses for the neuroscience graduate program.

Mentorship has been one of my highest priorities. I have mentored dozens of undergrads who have won major research awards, including the Scheibel Award, a MARC fellowship (before the program was cancelled), and the Dean's Prize for Undergraduate Research. Many of my undergraduate mentees have gone onto top programs such as Columbia Medical School, UCSF Medical School, UCSF Neuroscience PhD, and the University of Pennsylvania Neuroscience PhD program. In my lab, I have graduated three PhD students and currently mentor five more, three of whom are nearing degree completion. I engaged in public outreach, mentoring high school students in my lab over multiple years, and participating in the LA Brain Bee as a keynote speaker. For these contributions, I have received three nominations for graduate and postdoctoral mentoring awards, and I was twice recognized as a finalist, placing among the top eight mentors on campus.

Beyond mentoring, I have brought in millions of dollars in research funding to UCLA—most of which supports the training of students and postdocs—and published in top journals. I have built a strong reputation for my research into neural circuits and behavior, and how they are impacted by disease risk factors. With the suspension of federal funding, my ability to sustain these activities, especially teaching and mentoring in the lab, is now in jeopardy.

In this time of crisis, I hope that UCLA and the state will do everything possible to sustain these funded research projects and protect our trainees. Morale among them is especially low. One of the greatest risks we face is that the brilliant students and postdocs we have invested in decide to leave science altogether. That would dim the future of research. Ensuring they feel supported by the university will pay dividends for the future of science. I wanted to share with you what losing funding means for UCLA trainees, on a personal level.

A brilliant MD-PhD student in my lab is in the final year of their PhD thesis project, which investigates the circuit mechanisms underlying the therapeutic effects of transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS). TMS is a highly effective treatment for depression. Understanding how TMS modulates specific cell types in the brain could help physicians develop even more precise treatment protocols. A first-author manuscript describing this work is currently under revision at the top journal *Cell*. They have made substantial contributions to many other major lab projects that revealed how changes in neural circuit development shape behaviors related to anxiety and mood disorders. They have published this work in top journals including *Nature Neuroscience*, *Journal of Neuroscience*, *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory*, with additional manuscripts in revision. Until now, they have been single-minded in pursuit of a career as a physician-scientist. They secured their own funding, first through a UCLA T32 (now suspended), and then through a highly competitive F30 NRSA predoctoral fellowship from the NIH (also now suspended). Following these suspensions, they asked if they should abandon their projects and return to medical school early, since continuing in research no longer seems like a viable career plan.
A brilliant MD-PhD student in my lab has an exciting project looking at how early life stress affects microglia, an understudied non-neuronal cell type in the brain. Microglia are highly sensitive to external factors like stress, but we are only beginning to understand how they sculpt developing neural circuits and behaviors. They published a fantastic review article on this topic in *Frontiers in Molecular Neuroscience.* For the past two years, they have been working tirelessly to collect enough samples to run a large-scale RNA sequencing study. This process has taken considerable time because the design compares multiple groups – males and females, four different developmental stages, and two rearing conditions (standard vs. early life stress). By uncovering how early life stress impacts the molecular development of microglia, their work lays the foundation for new targeted therapies to prevent or treat mental health disorders. They are just about to collect the final sample, but with the recent loss of funding, it is unclear whether we will be able to pay for sequencing. This experiment was meant to be the cornerstone of their PhD thesis research, and the resulting dataset would have fueled discoveries in the lab for years to come.

A stellar graduate student in my lab studies how early life stress shapes the development of the limbic system, the brain regions that regulate our emotions. Since joining my lab, they have

already published high impact papers in *Nature Neuroscience*, *Neuropsychopharmacology*, and *eLife*. They have been invited to give talks at prestigious conferences worldwide, and recently won the Samuel Eiduson Award, given annually to the top neuroscience graduate student at UCLA. Their training has been supported by a highly competitive NSF Graduate Research Fellowship (GRFP) and an NIH F31 fellowship. This F31, now suspended, was intended to fund their final year in the lab. They are currently writing a manuscript describing their final project in my lab. They discovered a previously unknown cell type in the brain that drives anxiety-like behaviors in adolescents with a history of early life stress. Without federal funding support, it is unclear if they will be able to complete their study. This disruption will compromise their dissertation and hinder her ability to compete for top postdoctoral fellowships.

An incredible postdoctoral researcher in my lab studies how the brain encodes long-lasting (remote) fearful memories. This work is critical because most prior research focused on newly formed memories, but remote fear memories are more resistant to treatment in disorders such as PTSD. Since joining my lab, they have published high-impact papers and a book chapter on this topic in *Current Biology (x2), eLife*, and a book on memory, *Engrams*. They have been supported by a UCLA T32 (now suspended) and a highly competitive NIH F32 postdoctoral fellowship (also suspended). Recently, their K99/R00 proposal received constructive feedback at NIH study section, and they were preparing a resubmission. The K99/R00 is a transformative award that provides nearly $1 million to help outstanding postdocs launch independent labs. However, it is now unclear whether they will have the opportunity to reapply. They also have a manuscript in revision at *Nature Neuroscience* describing their final project in my lab. In this study, they discovered a novel circuit mechanism underlying memory consolidation and identified the behavioral functions of an unstudied pathway in the mammalian neocortex. Without federal funding support, they may not be able to complete the revision experiments needed for acceptance. If the loss of funding impedes publication of this major high-impact paper and blocks the path to K99/R00 support, they are deeply concerned about their ability to compete on the academic job market this fall.

An outstanding graduate student studies how dopamine signaling in the prefrontal cortex drives aversive learning. Prefrontal dopamine is a major target of many pharmacological treatments for mood and anxiety disorders, yet we still only have a limited understanding of how dopamine influences prefrontal circuit function. Their work aims to provide this foundation, which can help clarify how current treatments act on the brain and point toward the development of more effective therapies for mental health disorders. Since joining my lab, they have made major progress on his dissertation project, and major contributions to an ongoing project that we are preparing to resubmit to *Cell Reports*. They were awarded a UCLA T32 fellowship, which is now suspended. Like other lab members, they have been discouraged by the loss of federal funding. They had planned to apply for an NIH F31 this year, but it is now unclear whether this opportunity remains available. As they are just entering the third year of his PhD, it is also uncertain how we will secure the funds needed to support the remainder of their dissertation research.

Another stellar graduate student in my lab focuses on the neural basis of infantile amnesia– wherein we cannot remember experiences from early childhood. Early life stress accelerates the closure of this developmental window and can increase vulnerability to a wide range of mental health disorders. This suggests that infantile amnesia may protect against developing behavioral disorders. However, because studying neural circuits in the developing brain is technically challenging, little is known about the underlying mechanisms. Since joining my lab, they have made major contributions to two ongoing projects, one focused on infantile amnesia, another on memory consolidation in adults, and both under review at top journals. They also published a review article on these topics in *Hippocampus*. They were awarded an ARCS Fellowship, and NSF GRFP. Their NSF funding is supposed to start in September, but given the current circumstances, its status is uncertain. Like other lab members, they have been discouraged by the loss of federal funding. It is difficult to reassure young graduate students who are still finding their path that everything will be okay, and that research remains a viable and rewarding career.

Thank you for your efforts to remedy this terrible situation. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help.

Ye Zhang, PhD
Associate Professor, Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences

Anjie Zhen, PhD
Associate Professor, Hematology & Oncology

Jennifer Fulcher, MD, PhD
Associate Professor, Infectious Diseases

Jing Wen, PhD
Assistant Professor, Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics

Koki Morizono, MD, PhD
Professor, Hematology/Oncology

Scott G. Kitchen, PhD
Professor of Medicine; Hematology/Oncology; Director, UCLA Humanized Mouse Core Laboratory

We, a dedicated team of scientists at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), are writing to you today with a profound sense of urgency and concern. A sudden and unexpected suspension of federal funding has forced the suspension of our pioneering research, a project with the potential to revolutionize the development of treatments for devastating neurological disorders that affect hundreds of thousands of Californians. This suspension not only jeopardizes a beacon of hope for patients and their families but also poses a significant threat to the health of our residents and the economic vitality of our state.

Our team of scientists and physicians, with diverse expertise, has forged strong collaborations and developed innovative therapies while uncovering hidden disease mechanisms in some of the most difficult-to-treat conditions affecting Californians, including HIV infection, substance misuse, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and brain tumors. Through decades of hard work, we have secured more than $10 million in NIH funding across multiple disciplines, including support from NIAID, NIDA, NCI, and NIMH. We have developed innovative gene and cell therapy aimed at curing HIV and treating neurocognitive disorders; we have developed novel nanotechnologies for

more effective and safer drug delivery, we have developed novel mouse models that faithfully reflects the pathogenesis of human brain diseases, providing a platform for mechanistic discoveries and testing novel drugs in a clinically relevant setting. We have also incorporated avant-garde multimeric technologies into human cohort studies and ground our efforts in development of therapies designed to benefit the greatest number of people. Our work has resulted not only in high-profile discoveries and publications, but therapies in the pipeline towards clinical trial, and clinical data that have informed public health guidelines. Just as importantly, we have trained the next generation of scientists and physicians, many of whom are now recognized leaders in their fields.

The sudden withdrawal of federal funding has brought this vital research to a screeching halt. The consequences of this for the people of California are dire. Consider the following:

A Looming Public Health Crisis: Over 720,000 Californians aged 65 and older are currently living with Alzheimer's disease, with the number projected to grow significantly as our population ages. The cost of Alzheimer's to our state's Medicaid program is already a staggering $5.6 billion annually. Parkinson's disease adds to this burden, with an estimated economic impact of over $50 billion nationally. Every day we lose in the search for effective treatments is a day that more Californians are diagnosed, and more families are forced to bear the emotional and financial weight of these diseases.

A Threat to California's Economic Engine: The biotechnology and life sciences industry is a cornerstone of California's economy, generating over $370 billion in economic output and supporting more than 1.15 million jobs. Our state is a global leader in biomedical innovation, attracting billions in investment and fostering a vibrant ecosystem of research and development. Halting promising research like ours sends a chilling message to the scientific and investment communities, threatening to erode our competitive edge. The potential loss of intellectual property and the skilled researchers who may be forced to leave California for other opportunities represents a significant blow to our state's economic future.

A Threat to Training the Next Generation of Leaders**:** Perhaps most urgently, the suspension disrupts the pipeline of highly skilled young scientists and physicians who are being trained in our laboratories. These individuals represent the future of biomedical innovation and patient care in California. Without sustained support, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and early-career faculty may be forced to abandon their projects or leave the state in search of opportunities elsewhere. The result will be a brain drain at the very moment when California needs to cultivate the next generation of leaders who will tackle our most pressing health challenges.

We are at a critical juncture. The suspension of our research is not just a setback for a single project; it is a blow to the hopes of countless Californians and a threat to our state's leadership in an industry of the future.

We implore you to consider the devastating impact of this funding suspension. We respectfully request the California Legislature provide the necessary funding to allow this critical research to continue. This is not simply an expenditure; it is an investment in the health and well-being of your constituents and the continued prosperity of our great state. By supporting our work, you will be sending a clear message that California remains committed to scientific innovation and to finding cures for the diseases that touch so many of our lives.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this urgent matter. We look forward to the possibility of working with you to ensure that this promising research is not lost.

Mark Mobilia, *Former* Senior Account Manager (July 1995-April 2025), Zeiss Microscopy

"My name is Mark Mobilia, and I'm here today not just as a concerned citizen, but **as someone who has dedicated the last 30 years of my life to advancing scientific research and innovation through my work at Zeiss Microscopy LLC. Unfortunately, due to the recent NIH funding freeze that has hit UCLA and other institutions across the country, I—along with 54 of my colleagues—was laid off.**

This freeze has devastated the research community. Labs are closing, promising studies are being halted, and talented professionals like myself are being forced out of the industry we helped build. I never imagined I'd have to leave research behind, but without funding, there simply is no work.

We are urging the State of California to step in with emergency bridge funding to sustain our struggling research labs. Our future—in healthcare, technology, and innovation—depends on the discoveries made in these institutions. Please don't let this freeze permanently dismantle decades of progress."

Undergraduate Student (anonymous)

"The consequences of cutting research and healthcare funding in California extend far beyond the lab. Our citizens, from every tax bracket and every zip code, will feel the impact. Without adequate investment, medical treatments stall, innovation slows, and more individuals face devastating illnesses without hope for timely care or breakthrough therapies. Lives will be lost, not because science failed, but because we failed to fund it. California is a global leader in biotechnology, public health, and medical innovation. When we cut funding, we don't just jeopardize patient outcomes, we risk losing patents, discoveries, and economic growth that stem from our research institutions. Fewer grants mean fewer jobs in STEM, fewer startups emerging from university labs, and fewer solutions for chronic diseases that disproportionately affect our most vulnerable communities. This isn't just a healthcare issue, it's a moral one, an economic one, and a generational one.

The suspicion of grants affects me personally as I begin my medical journey. As an incoming freshman with aspirations of becoming an emergency room neurologist, gaining research and lab experience isn't just a stepping stone, it's foundational to my education and my ability to serve others. These opportunities shape not only how I learn, but how I lead, how I innovate, and how I give back to communities like the one I come from. When funding is cut, it doesn't just stall a student's progress, it sends a message that our potential isn't worth investing in. It disproportionately affects students from underrepresented backgrounds, who rely on these grants to access hands-on learning, mentorship, and the chance to contribute meaningfully to science and medicine. The ripple effect is generational. Fewer trained researchers means fewer breakthroughs. Fewer doctors means longer wait times, underserved communities, and lives lost that could have been saved. Policymakers must understand that restoring funding is not a luxury, it's a lifeline. It's an investment in the future of public health, in the resilience of our healthcare system, and in the dreams of students like me who are ready to rise, if only given the chance."

Oren Morgan

Undergraduate Student

I wasn't sure if I'd ever go to college, let alone graduate from UCLA. Before I became a neuroscience graduate, I served as an infantryman in the U.S. Army Special Forces for nine years. During that time, I was deployed to Afghanistan. After leaving the military, I quietly enrolled in community college. I took the same work ethic I had in the Army and applied it to my schoolwork, which led to good grades in my advanced STEM courses. I started tutoring and eventually mentoring other student veterans in STEM subjects. Eventually, I transferred to UCLA as a neuroscience major. I came to UCLA, not just for myself, but also for the people at the VA, certain individuals I served with that didn't have the opportunity to come home. They didn't get to use their G.I. bill to go to college. A unique class I took at UCLA called Neurobiology of Sleep changed my understanding of science and shaped the rest of my time as an undergraduate. In lower-level science classes, we learn about theories that were accepted 200 years ago, but many of the theories on sleep are still being tested at the forefront of science. Theories are evolving every day. In this class, one researcher would present evidence for a conclusion, then another would present evidence for a very different one. Most people don't get to see this evolving part of science. As a student in this UCLA course guided by cutting-edge scientists, I got to see how science works. I eventually got the chance to do research with one of my professors, Dr. Gina Poe, on PTSD. I continued working with her after I graduated two years ago. **I know that what I'm doing now will be part of a future solution to help people I know who are suffering. I came to UCLA as a neuroscience student so I could learn and help my friends and family who have PTSD. There's no cure, and they seem forgotten. Working with leading researchers like Dr. Poe and the people in her lab has allowed me to advance my career to help find better solutions for the health of society, especially for veterans. Now I'm a first-year medical student at Stanford.** I recently completed Stanford School of Medicine's leadership program in health disparities and am currently doing research on lifestyle interventions to improve treatment for children with a severe chronic liver disease. I'm also shadowing an orthopedic trauma surgeon and taking on a project to understand one of the most common orthopedic injuries associated with military service. My future goal is to work as an orthopedic surgeon within Veteran Affairs and be affiliated with an academic institution where I can conduct research to address pervasive medical issues within the veteran community. Without the research experience I gained in Dr. Poe's lab at UCLA, I wouldn't have the knowledge and connections I needed to get where I am today. **I believe students require a lot of assistance to conduct research, and without the support of researchers, like Dr. Poe and her graduate students, student veterans and military-connected**

students won't get to participate in research to help veterans with the mental and physical disorders they sustained during their military service.

Stephanie Leal, PhD
Assistant Professor, Integrative Biology & Physiology

"I am a researcher at UCLA. I am a mom of one-year old twins and a four-year-old just starting TK. I am a daughter of a teacher and a lawyer, and the first in my family to get a PhD. I come from a family of hard workers who fought to build our family roots in California. My grandparents were immigrants to this country and achieved the American dream.

Almost 10 years ago, my grandmother passed away from Alzheimer's disease. I have devoted my career to finding out how we can stop or slow Alzheimer's disease. I do research for the sole purpose of helping others and gaining knowledge that can make an impact on society. The tools we have available to examine this disease have directly come from NIH funding that is essential for research progress.

During my research training, I received an NIH grant that helped me get to where I am today. It was not an easy path by any means - NIH grants take years to acquire and are not given out easily. I was lucky to receive one then, and it is unimaginable that students and faculty who have put their blood, sweat, and tears into getting funding for their projects be taken away in the blink of an eye, leading to years of wasted resources and knowledge.

If the new administration wants to change priorities in funding moving forward - fine. But already awarded grants should never be taken away, as they have already been *granted* and deemed important by the NIH and leading scientists in their fields from across the country. They are not handouts to universities - they are awarded to *individual researchers* or teams of researchers who continue to fight for the work they believe in.

Grant suspensions hurt everyone. Grants are for the people, by the people, and stopping them in their tracks is only hurting our country. Every faculty member at UCLA and more broadly in this country has their story of why they do the research they do. It is never for a selfish reason, or an elitist reason, or for no real purpose - it is always driven by the pursuit of knowledge, which can never be taken away."

Shulamite Green, PhD
Assistant Professor In-Residence, Jane and Terry Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior

For over 30 years, UCLA's Psychology Department has run the PROPS program - a yearlong mentoring and research training pipeline that provided disadvantaged undergraduate students with placements in research labs, workshops, and teaching assistant opportunities. The program was a cornerstone for student advancement: undergraduates gained critical experience, and graduate students received vital mentoring and teaching opportunities.

One of my amazing graduate students, who had been given this opportunity to serve as a TA, learned just last week that the program was abruptly canceled. The loss means undergraduates will no longer have access to these transformative research experiences, and graduate students will lose both funding and professional development opportunities. This decision did not stem from NIH suspensions, but rather from UC legal concerns, tightening departmental budgets, and fears tied to ongoing legal settlements around diversity programs.

The impact goes far beyond one program. Internal departmental grants — the discretionary funds that sustained faculty salaries and collaborations — are being withdrawn. **The atmosphere now feels like one of fear and scarcity: colleagues are worried, labs are in debt, and everyone fears more cuts are coming. Across campus, students are losing opportunities, programs are vanishing, and faculty face deep uncertainty. The fear is real — not only about what has already been lost, but about how much worse it may get.**

Justine Wuebold
Researcher,

I was a staff researcher for the UCLA/Getty Conservation Program, working with faculty to build sustainable practices components into their teaching and syllabi. This project was funded for 4 years by the National Endowment for the Humanities in two grant phases. The Chair of our program was the Primary Investigator and remains focused on driving sustainable practice into curriculum for cultural heritage conservation graduate education. We are now disseminating our research on a volunteer basis because it means so much to the conservation field that we lead with education. Our funding was cut by the Federal Administration when they gutted the National Endowment for the Humanities, which funds research, collections care and interpretation and other museum operations. It is a critical funding agency to keep cultural heritage jobs and projects afloat. We received news that a lawsuit was successful and we would have our grant funds returned. However, **the Social Sciences department at UCLA had legitimate concerns about the Federal Government appealing and reducing our funds again, so they could not offer me my contract from which I was laid off at the end of June**.

This Federal funding cut cost me my job and livelihood and we need a safety net like the California Futures Fund to keep science and humanities research that is vital to graduate education at the University of California. This is just one of many similar stories and many non-career employees lost their jobs same-day. I am grateful to our UPTE unions for making certain that union employees receive rights when they are laid off through crises such as these. The UC can do better and address the funding crisis we are dealing with in mass.

I moved to Southern California for this research and have built my career on its continued success. While we will look for other funding sources, we have results we are not able to share broadly due to the restrictions on dissemination funds. Research only has an impact if you can properly share it broadly and make networking connections with others inside and adjacent to our research. Californian jobs are at stake and the UC and CA State government owe their taxpayers security in their jobs through funding safeguards. We will continue to fight this unlawful action in the part of the federal government which has affected so many lives. My career can only flourish if I can accomplish the goals of my research and community-based work.

Share Your Story

This collection reflects a moment in time, but its impacts continue to unfold.
If you were affected by research funding disruptions and would like to contribute your experience to this archive, you may do so voluntarily using the link below.

Submissions may be shared in future updates to this collection and may be edited for clarity and length. Identifying details will be removed upon request.

Link: Share your experience