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Cherry blossoms both around the world and here in the Washington, D.C. metro area vibrantly mark the start of spring. At RLA, this process of annual renewal and spring transition is also reflected in our work—we are launching new projects, bringing stakeholders together at in-person, hybrid, and virtual meetings, and celebrating the scientific knowledge borne of longstanding collaborations.

Moving science forward in spring 2022

RLA's support of new initiatives and ongoing projects is helping to improve health outcomes; promote access to appropriate health care and inclusion of scholars from underrepresented populations; and enhance scientific understanding of mechanisms that drive both health and disease. Among the projects keeping us busy this spring:

- Coordination of the application and review process for the [a2 Pilot Awards](#), a national competition for pilot projects that harness artificial intelligence and technology to improve the care and health outcomes of older Americans. We received an impressive number of promising applications and are excited to announce awardees by May!
- [Publication](#) in the April 2022 issue of *Demography* of research by RLA Senior Economist James P. Smith and colleagues from Peking University (supported by a National Institute on Aging [NIA] R01 grant) showing beneficial impact from adult children's education on prevalence of older parents' chronic illnesses in China. Other manuscripts in progress focus on the status of healthy aging in China, including understanding the effects of widowhood on health, and consequences of job loss on health over two decades.
- Facilitation of three federal advisory committees, including public meetings of the National Vaccine Advisory Committee, the Presidential Advisory Council on Combating Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria, and the Tick-Borne Disease Working Group.
- Completion of the NIA National Advisory Council on Aging review of the Division of Aging Biology.
- Logistics and writing support of meetings and workshops for NIA, the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, and the National Institute of Mental Health's Office of Autism Research Coordination.
- Administration of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Office of Diversity and Health Disparities (ODHD) Summer Research Internship Program, expanding our ongoing logistical support of NIDA ODHD and programs such as the NIDA Diversity Scholars Network.

Supporting efforts to detect and treat rare diseases

Every February, patients and advocates participate in Rare Disease Day, a global effort to promote awareness of more than 7,000 rare diseases that impact more than 300 million people. This year, Rare Disease Day events held by the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration featured stories of people living with a rare disease, including [Yalina Lopez](#), whose journey to being diagnosed with Emery-Dreifuss Muscular Dystrophy began at 3 years old. Yalina's experience highlights important patterns and needs in the study and treatment of rare diseases—72% of rare diseases are genetic, and 70% of genetic rare diseases begin in childhood. RLA is proud to provide ongoing support to rare disease research projects with the potential to help millions of people—from the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs facilitated by Leidos on hereditary angioedema and Huntington's disease; to workshops on precision medicine in genetic diseases convened by the University of Southern California Leonard D. Schaeffer Center for Health Policy & Economics; to collaborations to advance the detection and treatment of rare genetic diseases led by the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health (FNIH). This Rare Disease Day, the FNIH Biomarkers Consortium [announced the launch](#) of a project to identify blood tests that can help predict genetic risk of familial frontotemporal degeneration, a rare neurodegenerative disease, and the FNIH Accelerating Medicines Partnership® Bespoke Gene Therapy Consortium continues to expand its work to generate and pilot methods of developing gene therapies for rare genetic diseases.



300
MILLION PEOPLE
WORLDWIDE
LIVING WITH A RARE DISEASE

#RAREDISEASEDAY
28 FEBRUARY 2022
RAREDISEASEDAY.ORG

Celebrating women in science and supporting science for women



As a woman-owned business devoted to moving science forward, RLA was pleased to mark Women's History Month in March by celebrating women's accomplishments in health and science. Throughout the month, organizations across varied sectors highlighted leading women in the field, including Dr. Julie Gerberding, whom FNIH [announced on March 1](#) will serve as its next chief executive officer. Dr. Gerberding brings a wealth of experience from her prior work as Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—where she made history as the first woman to hold the position—and Executive Vice President of Population Health and Sustainability at Merck. Set to assume full

duties in May, Dr. Gerberding highlighted FNIH's "pioneering work to bring together the public and private sectors to improve health outcomes" as a source of her excitement to lead FNIH in advancing biomedical research. RLA has been providing FNIH with science writing support since 2015 and we look forward to working with Dr. Gerberding in her new role!

Women's impactful contributions, both foundational and recent, illustrate how varied perspectives can enrich scientific conversations. We're excited to support continued conversations that center women's voices and health this spring in a series of virtual and in-person Office of Regional Health Operations events on improving maternal health. These events will focus on maternal outcomes in distinct regions of the United States and will include discussion of topics such as reducing disparities for women of color and interventions to improve both maternal and infant health.

Continued growth and change at RLA

As the number of clients and projects RLA supports continues to grow, we are excited to expand both our team and facilities in the coming months. We are seeking Research Analysts, Meeting and Project Coordinators, Science Writers, and others to support our work, and will soon transition to a new office space in Chevy Chase, Maryland, that gives us more room to collaborate. See RLA's current [job openings](#) on our website and look for the announcement of our new location in our next newsletter.

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