



AAAS NEWS & NOTES

AAAS EPI Center launch brings evidence to policy-makers

Communication will be key in sharing reliable scientific information, says center director

By **Becky Ham**

The Center for Scientific Evidence in Public Issues at the American Association for the Advancement of Science began work on 24 September to share scientific and technical evidence with policy-makers working at all levels of government in the United States.

The EPI Center, led by director Michael Fernandez, is a new initiative by the association to make nonpartisan information available to decision-makers as they act on issues from clean water to the opioid crisis. Instead of lobbying for a particular law or offering a years-long exhaustive study of an issue, the center hopes instead to create timely, well-communicated evidence narratives—what scientists know about a topic, how they know it, what the evidence means, and how it relates to other public policy issues.

“We want to have an impact on policy and policy-making, not by advocating for certain policies but ensuring that when decisions are being made, the evidence is being appropriately considered and evaluated,” said Fernandez.

The center’s launch was driven in part by the desire of AAAS members to have another outlet for shaping public policy and sharing their work in ways that bear on larger societal challenges, he said. “Our members are an amazing resource of expertise and commitment, and they will be the center’s best ambassadors.”

“At a time when decision-makers too often ignore, misunderstand, or misuse relevant evidence, we need new ways to commu-

nicate policy-relevant scientific evidence to decision-makers and influencers in all areas of government and society,” said Rush Holt, chief executive officer at AAAS. “The AAAS Center for Scientific Evidence in Public Issues will connect scientific expertise to the decisions and policies that affect our lives.”

Holt, a former congressman from New Jersey, has long supported the idea of such a center as one way to fill in the gap left by the 1995 elimination of the congressional Office of Technology Assessment, said Kei Koizumi, a senior science policy adviser at AAAS who guided the EPI Center’s development.

“We know it is not automatic for decision-makers to be able to access information,” said Koizumi, who served in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy from 2009 to 2017. “But with AAAS as the world’s largest general scientific society, we have the opportunity with our community to give policy-makers the access they need.”

Fernandez’s new role at AAAS is something of a homecoming, he said, since he first came to Washington, D.C., as a 1991–1992 Congressional Science & Engineering Fellow sponsored by the American Society of Plant Physiologists working in the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry. Since then, he has worked in the federal government at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Agriculture, on the nonprofit Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology project, and in the private sector at Mars, Inc.

With the guidance of an advisory board that is still being assembled, Fernandez and the EPI Center staff will analyze issues that are already at the heart of public policy

discussions or are likely to become the focus of policy in the near term. “One of the first things I’m going to do is go out and ask people about the issues they are facing as governor, or as mayoral associations, or as congressional committees,” said Fernandez. “We need to be in listening mode.”

The science policy ecosystem is crowded and diverse, he said, noting that one of his goals as director will be to ensure that the EPI Center’s work gets noticed. “The idea of narrating the evidence is a different approach than anyone else I know is taking,” he said. “Our goal is not to commission a bunch of white papers and release them to an audience where they sit on someone’s shelf. This will be more nimble, more dynamic, and more interactive.”

The narratives will be crafted with specific audiences and specific delivery tools in mind, Fernandez said. For instance, an evidence narrative about self-driving cars could be aimed at state regulators as well as congressional staff and might be best delivered to those audiences through local workshops.

Fernandez’s daughter worked this summer as an intern in the office of the mayor of Boston, reminding him of the need to “be outside the Beltway as much as we can,” he said. “If you want to have a big policy-making impact, you can’t ignore the federal government, but frankly there is a bigger need for support and help in understanding what the evidence is and the narrative around evidence

that regulators and policy-makers are grappling with.”

During his leadership of the Pew initiative, Fernandez and his colleagues partnered with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture in small workshops to discuss biotechnology in animal agriculture. The center may look for similar opportunities to share its findings, he said. “I find that kind of participatory and interactive event to be a good way of helping to inform a policy-maker audience. Reports can be enormously influential, but I think that you can’t underestimate the value of face-to-face interactions.”

The center may also use interactive media and multimedia to communicate its narratives, he said. “From my work in the private sector, we saw how social media and other kinds of communication tools have really changed the landscape in the policy-making arena, and I think that we will absolutely need to understand how to leverage those tools to reach a broader audience.”

One of the biggest challenges “is to be as unbiased and neutral as possible” and to avoid any notion that the center is advocating for scientists as “just another special interest group,” said Fernandez.

Positioning the center as a source of trustworthy information, he

said, is important in light of “the erosion of trust in science and scientific evidence in policy-making broadly, which is particularly critical at a moment in time when so many of the issues that we’re addressing have a strong scientific and evidence-based component to them.”

While there are some decision-makers who willfully disregard or undermine scientific evidence, Fernandez said, “I think there’s lots of reasons evidence is underappreciated, undervalued, underutilized in policymaking that are not just people ignoring it.” Some policymakers may not fully consider the evidence because it’s not being presented or provided in a way that is compelling or relevant to them and their districts and their constituents, he said.

“There is a real hunger for this kind of thing among the community,” he said. “As long as we can establish ourselves in a way that will be taken seriously and trusted, we will have an opportunity to do something that will make a difference.”

The center is funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore, Rockefeller, Alfred P. Sloan, David and Lucile Packard, and Rita Allen Foundations; the Hellman family; the Carnegie Corporation of New York; and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.

Golden Goose prize recognizes serendipitous discoveries

Roots of the immune system, cell communication, and implicit bias are honored in the 2018 awards

By **Becky Ham**

A chance encounter with a gland located in the rear end of a goose was the start of something big for Bruce Glick, a lifelong bird watcher who turned his interests toward poultry science after serving in World War II. Glick was curious about the purpose of the gland, known since the early 17th century as the bursa of Fabricius, named after Italian anatomist Hieronymus Fabricius.

“Good question,” said George Jaap, his Ph.D. adviser at Ohio State University, when Glick asked about the bursa. “You find the answer.”

The answer came when Glick and fellow graduate student Timothy Chang discovered by accident that geese missing their bursa glands were unable to produce antibodies. As the experiments piled up over the years, it became clear that Glick had uncovered the fundamental division of labor between B and T cells in the immune system. The finding underlies much of what scientists know about diseases from leukemia to AIDS and has transformed the produc-

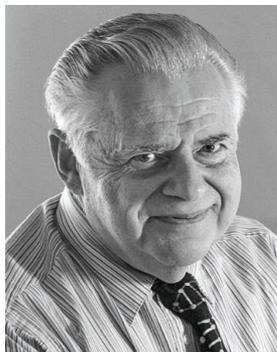
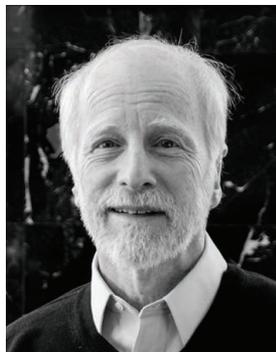
tion of vaccines and monoclonal antibody drugs to treat arthritis, multiple sclerosis, and several cancers.

Fittingly for a man with a lifelong love of birds, the late researcher was honored with one of three 2018 Golden Goose Awards, presented each year by science and higher education organizations led by the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a bipartisan group of congressional supporters. The award, established in 2012, recognizes scientists whose federally funded work may have been considered odd or obscure at first but has resulted in significant benefits to society.

AAAS has a long tradition of supporting federal funding of basic research. Long before the Golden Goose award, President Dwight D. Eisenhower underscored the necessity at a 1959 New York City symposium held by AAAS and the National Academy of Sciences.

“Government’s role in research and its responsibility for advancing science must be large and there must be persistent partnership between government effort and private effort,” said Eisenhower at the event. “Our science and technology are the cornerstone of American security, American welfare, and our program for a just peace. For the government to neglect this would be folly.”

Glick, who was on the faculty at Mississippi State University and Clemson University, is “one of these amazing agricultural scientists who toil away and no one recognizes what they’ve done,” said Sonny Ramaswamy, president of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, who nominated Glick for the award. “But his work, in multiple disciplines, has really been the kind of seminal



Golden Goose recipients Bruce Glick, Anthony Greenwald, Mahzarin Banaji, Brian Nosek, and Stanley Cohen.

Science

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