
Spinal Cord Injury Model Systems (SCIMS) Program: Preventing a Lapse in Critical SCI Research and Rehabilitation Infrastructure

THE ISSUE

The Spinal Cord Injury Model Systems (SCIMS) Program, a federally funded network of 18 specialized centers that has operated since 1970, faces an imminent, preventable funding lapse. The current funding cycle concludes **August 31, 2026**. The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the next cycle (2026–2031), forecasted for release February 24, 2026, has not been issued. Without congressional action, all 18 centers, the SCIMS National Data and Statistical Center, and the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (MSKTC) will lose funding, disrupting services, research, and 50+ years of longitudinal data collection. We are asking for one year of continuation to prevent a lapse in funding and give the opportunity for the NOFO to be released.

BACKGROUND

SCIMS centers, administered by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), provide multidisciplinary rehabilitation care, conduct research, and disseminate evidence-based practices to improve outcomes for people living with spinal cord injury (SCI). The program maintains the **world's largest prospective, longitudinal database on SCI outcomes**, tracking health, employment, and community integration over decades. SCIMS centers serve individuals with SCI and their families directly, while also supporting local healthcare systems and regional economies.

WHAT IS AT STAKE

A funding lapse would cause a cascade of negative effects on local healthcare systems, rehabilitation networks, and regional economies, including but not limited to:

- Immediate and direct adverse impacts on people living with SCI who depend on SCIMS-affiliated programs, services, and community resources;
- Interruption of 50+ years of longitudinal data collection — a scientific resource that cannot be reconstructed if broken;
- Loss of highly specialized clinical and research personnel across all 18 centers, who already face severe challenges in staff retention and recruitment;
- Delays in translating research findings into clinical practice and community-level implementation

PRECEDENT FOR ACTION

This situation has precedent. In 2005, NIDILRR (then NIDRR) provided one year of continuation funding to SCIMS centers when a NOFO was delayed due to revised programmatic criteria. This was accomplished through two formal Federal Register notices:

Notice of Proposed Extension: Federal Register, Vol. 70, No. 78, pp. 21188–89, April 25, 2005

Notice of Final Extension: Federal Register, Vol. 70, No. 118, pp. 3655–56, June 21, 2005

A similar administrative action, one year of continuation funding extended to August 31, 2027 would protect this essential national infrastructure while allowing NIDILRR to finalize funding priorities and enabling applicant institutions to develop the strongest possible proposals.

REQUEST TO MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND APPROPRIATORS:

We respectfully urge Congress and appropriators to direct OMB and NIDILRR to issue **one year of continuation funding for all 18 SCIMS Centers, the SCIMS National Data and Statistical Center, and the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center**, extending the current funding cycle through **August 31, 2027**. NIDILRR is part of the Administration for Community Living in the Department of Health and Human Services. The funds for the SCIMS have already been allocated, as such we are not requesting an increase in funding. Swift action will prevent an avoidable disruption to 50 years of SCI research, protect thousands of people living with SCI who depend on SCIMS-affiliated services, and ensure that federal investments in rehabilitation science continue without interruption.
