Collaboration pushes medical grants
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH FUNDING COMES AFTER RESEARCHERS JOIN FORCES

BY ANGELA GONZALES
agonzales@bizjournals.com,
602-308-6521, @PhxBizAGonzales

Although Arizona ranks in the middle of the pack in funding from the National Institutes of Health, it is making headway.

When the Flinn Foundation started tracking growth of the bioscience community in 2002, Arizona had $135 million in total NIH funding. By 2013, funding increased to $182 million, a 35 percent growth, compared with the U.S. average of 27 percent and the top 10 funded NIH states’ average of 31 percent, according to Flinn Foundation.

“Before the Arizona Roadmap was launched, Arizona was losing ground to other states,” said Brad Halverson, executive vice president of Flinn Foundation. “NIH funding was growing less quickly than the nation as a whole. One of the goals of the roadmap was for Arizona’s NIH growth to outpace the U.S. average and that of the top 10 funded states.”

It may be Arizona’s collaborative gene is what’s helping the Grand Canyon state improve its NIH funding at a time when NIH has made an effort to give money to collaborative research projects among competing institutions. Many scientists recruited to Arizona from the East Coast have said they are impressed by the state’s collaborative spirit.

Collaboration among competing institutions really began with the creation of the Arizona Alzheimer’s Consortium in 1998. Dr. Eric Reiman, the consortium’s director as well as executive director of Banner Alzheimer’s Institute, organized a group of researchers from competing institutions to work together on Alzheimer’s research projects.

“We’ve been able to leverage some of those relationships over the years,” he said.

Since that time, researchers among those organizations and others have worked together, garnering NIH grants to fund research projects. As Mayo Medical School works with Arizona State University to establish a branch campus of Mayo Clinic Hospital is collaborating with several competing institutions across the Valley.

Sethuraman Panchanathan, senior vice president for knowledge enterprise development at Arizona State University, said collaborative efforts impact the health and well-being of the state and region.

“That is why partnerships are crucial for us,” he said.

Kimberly Espy, UA’s senior vice president for research, said research growth requires investment and infrastructure, which is why UA is investing so heavily in the Phoenix Biomedical Campus with research, education and clinical facilities.

“The more researchers, partnerships, and access to clinical partners we have, the more we can attract more funding,” she said.