

NIH associate director for prevention outlines strategic plan

By Eddy Ball

David Murray, Ph.D., director of the NIH Office of Disease Prevention (ODP) and associate director for prevention, engaged a supportive audience of policy and program leadership Aug. 20 at NIEHS, during a presentation that was also webcast. Hosted by NIEHS and NTP Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., [Murray](https://prevention.nih.gov/about/odp-staff/dr-david-murray) (<https://prevention.nih.gov/about/odp-staff/dr-david-murray>) outlined his challenges and accomplishments to date, in a talk on "Developing a Strategic Plan for the NIH Office of Disease Prevention."

As the head of a trans-NIH programmatic [office](https://prevention.nih.gov/), (<https://prevention.nih.gov/>)

Murray is responsible for assessing, facilitating, and stimulating research on disease prevention and health promotion, and disseminating results of the research to improve public health. The goal of ODP is to further raise the visibility of such research throughout NIH, and collaborate with NIH and other public and private partners to achieve the office's mission and goals.

Murray assumed office in September 2012 with a small permanent staff and budget, along with the Herculean task of redirecting business as usual among many levels of activity at NIH. Needs ranged from developing the metrics and taxonomy for monitoring investments and making refinements in training, to setting future directions by identifying best practices in programming and prevention research, as well as experts who can serve on related grant review panels.

Murray understood the importance of engaging directors and leaders at the NIH Institutes and Centers (ICs), along with nonprofit and partner agency stakeholders, about [prevention research](https://prevention.nih.gov/prevention-research) (<https://prevention.nih.gov/prevention-research>) and its place in the scientific culture at NIH. "I realized early on that we needed to develop a strategic plan," he noted with modest understatement, to frame the increase in staff, technology, and sheer activity required to accomplish the ODP mission.

Charting the course

"I was naive," Murray said of his early weeks in office. But nearly two years later, he can point to significant progress toward meeting the first three of six priorities outlined in the ODP [strategic plan](https://prevention.nih.gov/docs/about/ODP_StrategicPlan2014-2018.pdf) (https://prevention.nih.gov/docs/about/ODP_StrategicPlan2014-2018.pdf) for fiscal years 2014-2018, as he ramps up work on the last three priorities (see [text box](#)).

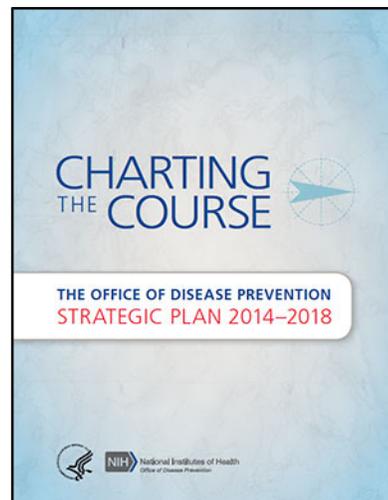
"We'll increase our staff by 50 percent in the next six months," Murray told the audience. "We're optimistic that this can work," he said of efforts to develop machine-learning tools for portfolio analysis and the experts database. "It's infinitely expandable," he said of the database. "It will be Web-based."

Not surprisingly, a lively question and answer session followed Murray's talk, which included policy and planning leaders from the NIEHS divisions of the National Toxicology Program (NTP); Extramural Research and Training (DERT); and Intramural Research (DIR), as well as the Office of the Director (OD).

Birnbaum moderated the session, but let other members of leadership dominate the conversation. She and Murray had enjoyed a breakfast meeting, and there were other opportunities for conversation during his daylong visit to NIEHS.

ODP is one of nine offices in the NIH [Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives \(DPCPSI\)](http://dpcpsi.nih.gov/index.aspx), (<http://dpcpsi.nih.gov/index.aspx>)

which is directed by James Anderson, M.D., Ph.D. The division works to identify emerging scientific opportunities, rising public health challenges, and knowledge gaps that merit further research or deserve special emphasis.



Along with his experience sitting on review panels for several ICs, Murray served as the first chair of the NIH Community-Level Health Promotion Study Section. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Birnbaum, right, introduced Murray, and described the extensive experience in prevention research and methodology that made him a natural choice to lead ODP. She also monitored questions from the audience. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Intrigued by plans for a database of experts, NTP Deputy Division Director for Policy Mary Wolfe, Ph.D., wondered about using what Murray called an electronic Rolodex of experts to help find members for NTP expert panels. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



DETR Director Gwen Collman, Ph.D., who had participated in developing the ODP strategic plan, asked about the integration of basic research into the ODP vision. "Prevention research can operate at several levels," she said. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



OD Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation Director Sheila Newton, Ph.D., asked about dissemination of ODP Tobacco Regulatory Science Program research and translation into public policy. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

Priorities of the ODP strategic plan

- Systematically monitor NIH investments in prevention research and assess the progress and results of that research.
- Identify prevention research areas for investment or expanded effort by NIH.
- Promote the use of the best available methods in prevention research and support the development of better methods.
- Promote collaborative prevention research projects and facilitate coordination of such projects across NIH and with other public and private entities.
- Identify and promote the use of evidence-based interventions and promote the conduct of implementation and dissemination research in prevention.
- Increase the visibility of prevention research at NIH and across the country.

Those interested in progress on the six priorities can receive notifications about ODP programs and activities, by signing up for the [ODP mailing list](http://prevention.nih.gov/subscribe). (<http://prevention.nih.gov/subscribe>)

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