



American College of Neuropsychopharmacology



William A. Carlezon Jr, Ph.D. ACNP President, 2025

Dear Colleagues:

We officially live in interesting times. Many of us are planning for contingencies we never thought possible. We don't have answers to important questions. Now more ever, we need to band together to find the things that link us together and provide strength and resilience. I want to assure you that, in 2025, the ACNP will be a source of strength for our members and the broader scientific community, as we continue without interruption our mission of advancing clinical care, research, and education in ways that reduce stigma and improve mental health outcomes.

As described briefly in the Business Meeting, I have eight main goals for 2025—with the first two being recent, emergent additions.

Goal 1 is to update and formalize ACNP's plan to maintain full activities in the event of revenue disruption. It is important to note that ACNP has always had a plan to set aside reserves that sustain its activities in the event of crisis, so what is new here is that we will be formalizing the timeframe and preparing for a broader range of possibilities. Fortunately, the combination of careful stewardship by a long list of Treasurers (currently David Rubinow) and the savvy business instincts of ACNP/Parthenon leadership (Sarah Timm and her team) already has the organization in a very strong position.

Goal 2 is to promote efforts at an organizational and individual level to advocate for NIH. I believe that this goal reflects what our country's NIH Directors would ask of us if they were able. The NIH Directors who come to ACNP each year have worked tirelessly to devise strategies to improve human health, inform the membership of priorities, and get grant support to deserving investigators. ACNP comprises committees (including the Liaison Committee co-chaired in 2025 by Sahib Khalsa and Melissa Brotman) as well as individual voices that are well-positioned to help us determine how to most effectively advocate for a strong NIH. The need to advocate for NIH has transitioned from being something that someone else worries about to a process in which we must all become involved.

Goal 3 is to address the growing size of the annual meeting to ensure that ACNP's most precious attributes are maintained. Membership surveys tell us that attendees place great value on the small size of the meeting, primarily because that brings opportunities to participate and network with thought leaders. The ACNP membership has been watching the meeting-size issue take shape over the past few

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years, but it reached a crescendo this year when for the first time ever we reached our cap (2000 attendees). Members who did not make their personal invitations early in the process found themselves—often to their great surprise—unable to invite colleagues or trainees. The 2000-attendee threshold has always been critical, because exceeding it will make it necessary to use multiple hotels, hold program events at off-site convention centers, and travel on shuttle buses. Many members worry that this type of growth will result in the loss of things that represent the very essence of the ACNP Annual Meeting and differentiate it from others. Managing this issue will be a priority in 2025, but in some ways more information is needed, as external forces may exert downward pressure on the size of the annual meeting. At minimum, the ACNP will make the existence of the current cap, and the potential consequences of not making invitations soon after the process opens, clearer to our membership in advance. In parallel, we will be working closely with the Membership Committee (co-chaired in 2025 by Olu Ajilore and Aysenil Belger) in planning for the future and ensuring that we minimize the likelihood of an over-correction.

Goal 4 is to understand the factors that motivate established investigators to attend the annual meeting. The ACNP has been hugely successful in bringing more early-career investigators to the annual meeting. In this respect, the annual meeting is virtually unrecognizable when compared with the first time I attended, in 1996, as an invited trainee. Many of today's invited attendees tell us that they especially value the opportunity to present their work and network with peers as well as thought leaders who often represent their scientific heroes. It can be tempting to feel like these thought leaders are at the annual meeting for us, to *teach* and be ever-gracious recipients of networking efforts. However, we mustn't forget that they also come to *learn*, and to bring home new ideas that keep their programs on the cutting-edge. I have been seeing some of my contemporaries and scientific heroes make a conscious choice to come to ACNP less frequently. Since the presence of established investigators is an essential part of what is so unique and special about ACNP, we need to better understand the factors that contribute to their decision to come to the annual meeting and, where possible, create incentives that ensure their continued participation.

Goal 5 is to devise a sustained (career-spanning) mentorship program. ACNP already has a variety of mentorship programs that match an early-career attendee with a mentor while providing a foundation for meaningful interactions. These matches are made via the thoughtful efforts of the Education & Committee (co-chaired in 2025 by Joshua Roffman and Debra Bangasser), but there is no formal mechanism to ensure that they extend beyond one annual meeting cycle. What would make this new program different is that mentee and mentor will select each other in advance, and commit to a sustained relationship that extends beyond a single meeting. As

envisioned, it would provide both mentee and mentor with support to travel to the annual meeting over several consecutive years and resources to ensure that a formal update occurs with minimal distraction. This goal may also help to offer a unique opportunity that incentivizes meeting attendance for established investigators. I look forward to working with Council to explore the feasibility of this type of mentorship program—ensuring that it complements our existing programs while filling a meaningful gap, and that resources are available to support it, as the number of simultaneously active awards accumulates with time.

Goal 6 is to establish ACNP’s leadership in outreach programs that reduce stigma and enhance participation in the scientific endeavor. Our membership includes independently-functioning groups who, across the globe, bring creative approaches to their local communities that provide education about the brain and how medical research occurs. The most effective programs both teach and listen, actively encouraging conversations that enable deeper insight into the perceptions that perpetuate the stigma of mental illness and create barriers to selecting science as a career or participating in research studies. ACNP will seek to be a go-to resource for groups that participate in these types of activities, by helping to identify the strategies that are most effective, sharing lived experiences from approaches that have succeeded or failed, and devising methods to offer our insights to others who wish to participate in these efforts.

Goal 7 is to include program elements that focus on factors outside the brain that influence mental health and the use of digital-based approaches to study, diagnose, treat, and prevent psychiatric illness. As we make great strides in understanding the molecular and circuit mechanisms that regulate brain function and behavior, we need to also embrace the fact that processes occurring elsewhere in the body play crucial roles. A deeper understanding of the myriad ways in which these processes affect, and are affected by, the brain will hasten the development of new treatments that are truly revolutionary and transformative. Rapid advances in digital technologies will continue to offer unprecedented opportunities to collect data and identify relationships among these processes that are too complex for the human eye to see, while creating new challenges that require careful management. I look forward to working with the 2025 Program Committee co-chairs (Staci Bilbo and Tallie Z. Baram) to ensure that selections for our marquee Presidential Lecture events are complemented by the type of well-rounded program that ACNP attendees have come to expect.

Finally, Goal 8 is a “stretch goal”: to explore the possibility of an ACNP “Grand Challenge” award. The purpose of this award would be highly-targeted support of a new therapeutic approach that needs a final push toward the finish line. Given all of

the uncertainties we suddenly face as an organization and a field, it is perfectly clear that the timing of this goal may not be optimal. However, the question of whether ACNP could participate in this type of endeavor has been the subject of grassroots curiosity in the poster halls for many years. A key element of any program of this type would be the ability to devise a type of payback agreement in the event of success, making the award more of an investment than a “give-away”. As formulated, this goal can be accomplished by simply opening discussions and getting a better understanding what this type of program would need to look like in order to have a meaningful impact, with decisions on how to proceed left to a time when the future is clearer.

I recognize that it is both a great honor and a great responsibility to be entrusted with the role of ACNP President. I look forward to benefitting from the wisdom and experience of ACNP Council (which includes Past Presidents Helen Mayberg, Kerry Ressler, and David Rubinow, as well as President-Elect Deanna Barch), the passion and creativity of the ACNP membership, and an extraordinarily capable ACNP Staff (led by Erin Shearon and Sarah Timm) as we set a course that keeps us as strong as we can be.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "w.a. Carlezon Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

William A. Carlezon Jr.
ACNP President