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Who got more? FAU, UF and UM among big winners in gold-standard NIH grants

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Posted Oct 10, 2019 at 10:47 AM

Updated Oct 10, 2019 at 12:05 PM

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Florida scientists raised nearly \$700 million from the National Institutes of Health this year, setting a new record.

The state's universities, nonprofit labs and for-profit startups netted \$693 million for the federal fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, eclipsing the previous record of \$650 million, set in 2017, according to a Palm Beach Post analysis of NIH data.

Florida's two biggest grant-getters set new high-water marks. The University of Florida won \$189 million in NIH awards, up from last year's haul of \$177 million. The University of Miami School of Medicine landed \$150 million, an increase from last year's \$133 million.

Jupiter-based Scripps Florida brought in \$43 million, down from the \$50 million in NIH grants it landed in fiscal 2018.

Florida's Top NIH Grant Getters

The University of Florida and the University of Miami medical school remained the most prolific winners of NIH funding. *Click "2018 Funding" and "Change " for more information.*

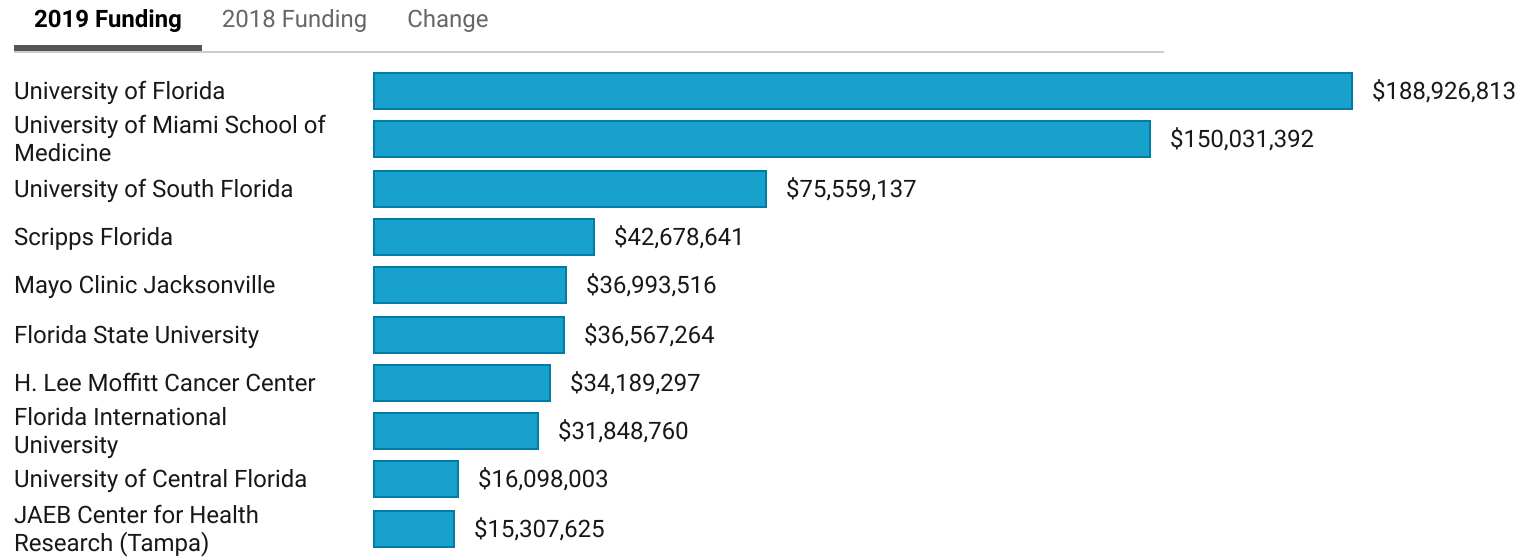


Chart: Jeff Ostrowski | Palm Beach Post • Source: National Institutes of Health, Palm Beach Post research

Another Jupiter institute, Max Planck Florida, also saw a decline in NIH grants. It brought in \$4 million this year, down from \$5.3 million last year.

NIH awards are considered the gold standard for scientific inquiry, and they're difficult to win.

Dr. David Nelson, a gastroenterologist and NIH-funded researcher who's president of UF Health, calls NIH grants "the premium currency" in medical research. As a result, UF vies with such research powerhouses as Johns Hopkins University, the University of California San Francisco and the University of Michigan for a limited pot of NIH money.

[>>READ ALSO: Scripps Florida scientists land flurry of NIH grants, fattening record haul](#)

Nelson acknowledges there's no lack of competition. As successful as UF has been at winning NIH grants, it ranks only 40th nationally.

"Most of the preeminent universities are striving to become top research universities," Nelson said.

Meanwhile, UF is following the lead of other states by cooperating with rival schools to land large awards. In one example, UF and Florida State University announced in July they would share a \$29 million award from NIH's Clinical and Translational Science Awards program, a project that aims to speed the delivery of medical advances to patients.

"A lot of the big grants Florida is missing require collaboration," Nelson said.

Florida Atlantic University also set a new record this year, bringing in \$8.7 million in NIH grants. Last year, FAU won \$7.3 million from NIH. The increase is a payoff from FAU's focus on pursuing NIH money.

"We're growing and maturing, and that's reflected in our NIH funding," said Daniel Flynn, FAU's vice president for research.

An upward trend

Florida scientists received a record haul of grants from the National Institutes of Health in 2019.

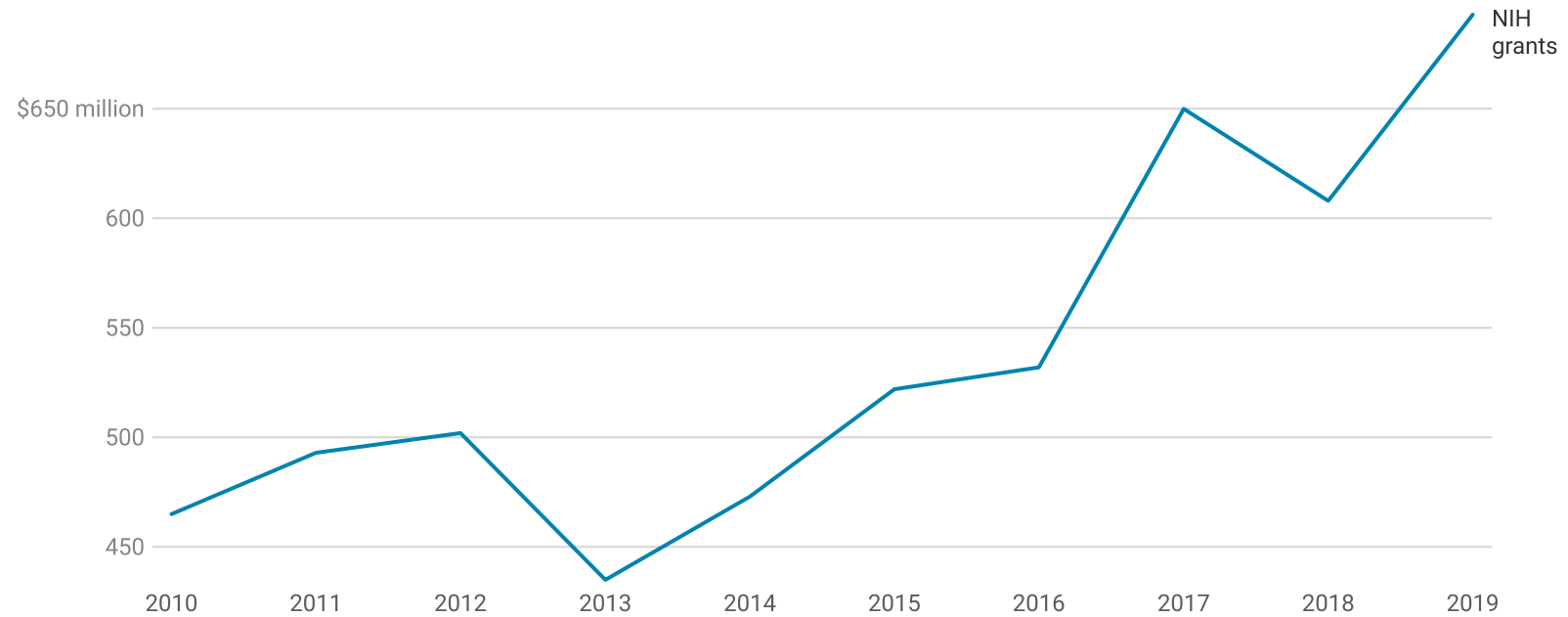


Chart: Jeff Ostrowski | Palm Beach Post • Source: National Institutes of Health • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

At Scripps Florida, one of the most prolific grant getters is HIV researcher Michael Farzan.

Through Scripps Florida, he landed three NIH grants totaling \$2.8 million. And the startup he cofounded, Emmune of Juno Beach, raised an additional \$1.3 million from NIH.

Emmune is developing an HIV treatment that's a "biologic" delivered by injection rather than in pill form.

"It turns your muscle cells into a factory to make this biologic we've developed," Farzan said. "Now you are better protected than for any vaccine up to this point."

While the drug in its current form must be injected monthly, Farzan said Emmune is working on a version that would require just one shot every 10 years. The drug is still being tested in animals, but Farzan ultimately hopes to sell it to a large pharmaceutical company -- an outcome that would be a coup for Florida's budding biotech sector.

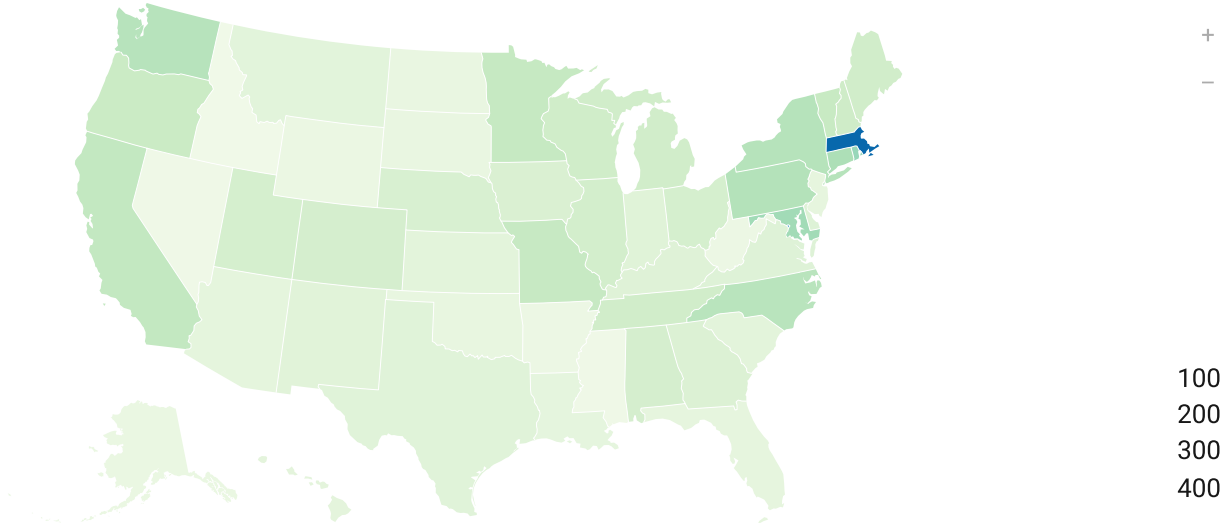
Florida's total NIH funding jumped 14 percent from 2018, outpacing the national increase of 4 percent.

Florida again ranked 12th among U.S. states in the amount of grants awarded, trailing biotech hubs California (\$4.5 billion), Massachusetts (\$3 billion), New York (\$2.8 billion) and Pennsylvania (\$1.9 billion) by a wide margin.

UF's Nelson acknowledged that the nation's third-largest state continues to punch below its weight in terms of winning NIH awards. Adjust for population, and Florida falls to the back of the national pack. While Massachusetts brought in a nation-leading \$429 per resident in NIH grants in 2018, Florida's \$33 per person ranked 41st.

For Florida, a record year for NIH grants, but still lagging

Florida's \$693 million in NIH grants in 2019 ranked 12th nationally. But its \$33 per person in grants rated 41st. *Click on a state for details.*



Bringing more NIH money into the state was one of the goals cited by then-Gov. Jeb Bush when he wooed Scripps with a \$310 million state grant. Palm Beach County chipped in an additional \$269 million in subsidies.

That deal, announced in 2003, kicked off a billion-dollar bet on biotech that Bush said would transform Florida's notoriously low-wage economy.

The state and Palm Beach County later recruited Max Planck, the renowned German institute, to Jupiter with \$188 million in subsidies.

Results have been mixed. The Burnham Institute, which received \$311 million in state and local money to expand to Orlando, pulled out. VGTI Florida, a lab lured to Port St. Lucie with \$120 million from the state and city, failed in 2015. And the Charles Stark Draper Laboratory, recruited to St. Petersburg with \$30 million in taxpayer money, has left the state.

Meanwhile, the nonprofit labs attracted by Bush's subsidies landed a dwindling fraction of the overall NIH grants coming into the state. Scripps Florida, Max Planck Florida and Scripps spinoff Emmune combined to bring in just 7 percent of the state's total take of NIH grants.

Last year, Scripps Florida, Max Planck Florida, Emmune and the Torrey Pines Institute in Port St. Lucie combined to bring in 9 percent of the state's overall haul. The Torrey Pines Institute landed no NIH grants this year.

Most of the money coming into Florida researchers landed at state schools, private universities and labs that were here long before Scripps and Max Planck arrived.

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