



NAEVR

National Alliance For
Eye And Vision Research

Serving as Friends of the National Eye Institute

1801 Rockville Pike
Suite 400
Rockville MD 20852
240-221-2905; www.eyerresearch.org

**NAEVR URGES THAT FY2013 DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS
MAINTAIN THE “PEER REVIEWED VISION TRAUMA RESEARCH PROGRAM”
EXTRAMURAL RESEARCH LINE AND FUND IT AT \$10 MILLION**

The Peer Reviewed Vision Trauma Research Program (VTRP) in Defense Appropriations funds extramural vision research into immediate battlefield needs which is not conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), elsewhere within the Department of Defense (DOD), including the Joint DOD/VA Vision Center of Excellence, VCE), or the National Eye Institute (NEI) within NIH. **NAEVR urges Congress to fund the VTRP at \$10 million in FY2013.** Although former Secretary of Defense Gates identified Restoration of Sight and Eye-Care as one of four top priorities for deployment-related health research funding [with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Prosthetics], DOD has not yet established “core” funding to address all vision research gaps, so VTRP funding is needed.

- Traumatic eye injury from penetrating wounds and TBI-related visual disorders ranks second only to hearing loss as the most common injury among “active” military:
 - Traumatic eye injuries have accounted for upwards of 16 percent of all injuries in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).
 - Eye-injured soldiers have only a 20 percent return-to-duty rate as compared to an 80 percent rate for other battle trauma injuries.
 - The VA estimates that 46,000 enrolled OEF/OIF veterans have been diagnosed with eye conditions, while the VCE estimates 58,000 eye injuries in its data.
 - The VA also estimates that upwards of 75 percent of all TBI patients, about 200,000, experience short- or long-term visual disorders including double vision, sensitivity to light, inability to read print, and other cognitive impairments.
- Ground soldiers face numerous assaults that potentially impair visual function, including:
 - Eye injuries from chemical, biohazard, laser, and environmental exposure.
 - Corneal (front-of-eye) and retinal (back-of-eye) injuries that are often not evaluated until a soldier’s vital signs are first assessed and which, if not stabilized, lead to vision loss.
 - Direct blast injuries, as well as potential long-term ocular injuries from the blast wave.
- DOD-identified gaps in vision research include: diagnosis, treatment, and mitigation of TBI-related visual dysfunction; inadequate treatments for traumatic injuries (e.g., blasts, burns); inadequate vision restoration; inadequate epidemiological studies on sight-injured patients; inadequate ocular diagnostics; inadequate vision rehabilitation strategies; inadequate computational models of battlefield injuries; and vision care education/training.
- Since Congress first funded the dedicated VTRP line in FY2009, DOD’s Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC) has awarded twelve grants totaling \$11 million to researchers addressing penetrating eye injuries; corneal healing; retinal/corneal protection; TBI visual dysfunction; and the eye blast phenomenon.

Vision, the sense most critical for optimal military performance in battlefield and support positions, is most vulnerable to acute and chronic injury. Research to effectively treat acute eye damage can have long-term implications for an individual’s vision health, productivity, and quality of life for the remainder of military service and into civilian life.