

WSD CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING

World Sight Day 2017 Briefing Examines the Relationships Between Vision Impairment and Cognitive Decline

On October 4, recognizing *World Sight Day (WSD)* on October 12, VISION 2020 USA held a Congressional Briefing entitled *Vision Impairment and Cognitive Decline*. A panel of four researchers and clinicians, moderated by VISION 2020 USA Chair Jeff Todd, JD (Prevent Blindness), addressed how converging epidemiologic evidence links vision impairment to risk of cognitive decline and dementia. The speakers noted that the functional challenges imposed by vision impairment are more difficult to overcome when accompanied by cognitive impairments, and vice versa.

This public health challenge is just one of several identified in a report released in September 2016 by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM, formerly the Institute of Medicine, IOM) entitled *Making Eye Health a Population Health Imperative: Vision for Tomorrow*. The report made nine recommendations, including calling on the Secretary of DHHS and its Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), state and local health departments, the vision community, and stakeholders to raise national awareness and take action toward reducing the burden of vision impairment and eye disease. Through the report, NASEM wants to transform vision impairments from common to rare and eliminate correctable and avoidable vision impairments in the United States by year 2030.

The 2017 WSD Briefing follows a 2016 WSD Briefing in ensuring that Capitol Hill is aware of the NASEM report and the importance of the implementation of its recommendations. AEVR was proud to be an event sponsor (see list below), and NAEVR successfully submitted Report Language to the FY2018 Senate LHHS bill that requires DHHS to report on the status of implementation of the government-related NASEM recommendations in its FY2019 Congressional Justification.



Briefing faculty from left: Bhavani Iyer, OD, FAAO (University of Texas Health Science Center), Cynthia Owsley, PhD, MSPH (University of Alabama Birmingham), Heather Whitson, MD (Duke University) and Lylas Mogk, MD (Henry Ford Health System)

DEFENSE-RELATED VISION FUNDING

Vision Research Program Funding Scorecard

Since it was created by Congress in FY2009 in Defense appropriations through NAEVR advocacy, the Department of Defense's (DOD) Peer Reviewed Vision Research Program (VRP) within the Congressionally-directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) will have awarded 79 grants totaling \$68.4 million (including FY2015/2016 awards). Funded at \$15 million in FY2017—\$5 million greater than the \$10 million funding in each FY2013-2016—the CDMRP accepted full grant applications through October 25 (after a pre-proposal deadline of July 12) for two funding mechanisms: Clinical Trial Awards, with a maximum funding of \$5.25 million per award, and Technology and Therapeutic Development Awards, with a maximum funding of \$2.1 million per award.

The House has proposed VRP funding of \$15 million in its FY2018 DOD appropriations bill, while the Senate has not marked up its companion bill. Typically, the Senate bill does not contain detailed funding for most areas of research within Defense Health Programs, but instead accepts the House's numbers when the two bills are confereed.

VRP Has New Leadership

In late September, long-time Vision Program Manager Robert Read, who had managed the VRP since its creation in FY2009 appropriations, retired. NAEVR recognized Mr. Read for his service at its *Defense-Related Vision Research Opportunities* session at the 2017 ARVO Annual Meeting in Baltimore. Orazio (Ray) Santullo, OD (Colonel, U.S. Air Force, Retired) now manages the VRP, having served previously as the Program Manager for the Military Operational Medicine Research Program (MOMRP) in the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command (USAMRMC) at Ft. Detrick, Maryland. Col. Santullo had previously served as the Consultant to the Air Force Surgeon General for Optometry and participated on the VRP Program Committee, on which NAEVR's James Jorkasky and David Epstein previously served. Col. Santullo also was Chief of Optometry Services at Brooks Air Force Base in Texas.



On October 18, Col. Santullo, second right, met with NAEVR and ARVO to discuss his plans for management of the VRP. From left: James Jorkasky, ARVO Executive Director Iris Rush, and David Epstein.

About VISION 2020 USA

VISION 2020 USA has been organized to better coordinate the efforts of the many US organizations working in the field of blindness prevention, both nationally and internationally. VISION 2020 USA is committed to assuring the right to sight for all peoples both within the US and countries outside the US. Launched in 2009, nearly 40 organizations have come together under the VISION 2020 USA umbrella, which is the national entity within the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) and its VISION 2020: The Right To Sight initiative.

WSD Briefing Sponsors included:
Alliance for Eye and Vision Research
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Casey Eye Institute
Healthy Eyes Alliance
Himalayan Cataract Project
International Eye Foundation
Lighthouse Guild
Lions Clubs International Foundation
Optometry Giving Sight
Prevent Blindness
Vision Impact Institute
VisionServe Alliance

Visit the Defense-related Vision Research section of NAEVR's Web site at www.eyerresearch.org for details



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