

DEFENSE-RELATED VISION FUNDING

Vision Research Program Funding

Since it was created by Congress in FY2009 in Defense appropriations through NAEVR advocacy, the DOD's 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).

FY2017: Program Announcement Awaiting Congressional Action

As with FY2017 NIH/NEI funding, FY2017 DOD funding has not been finalized. On February 2, the Defense Health Research Consortium (DHRC), to which NAEVR belongs, sent a letter to Congressional leaders in the House and Senate urging that Congress finalize FY2017 DOD appropriations with proposed funding for DOD Defense Health Programs, including the VRP. The letter, citing the negative impact on soldiers and veterans from the delay, was signed by more than 60 groups. On March 8, the House passed its bill, while the Senate has not yet acted. The House bill includes \$15 million for the VRP—\$5 million greater than in FY2016, and the first time at that increased level after it had been funded at \$10 million in each FY2013-2016.

Although an FY2017 VRP Program Announcement cannot be released until appropriations are finalized, on March 3 the CDMRP released a Pre-Announcement which details the funding mechanisms and grant funding limits that the VRP expects to include in the Program Announcement. For FY2017, the VRP expects to again fund 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 Clinical Trials funding maximum is higher than the previous year due to feedback that the previous maximum was too low to properly conduct a clinical trial.

CDMRP Vision Program Manager Robert Read will speak at NAEVR's May 8 *Defense Vision Funding Opportunities* session at the ARVO Annual Meeting in Baltimore (see front page box).

FY2018: NAEVR Requests FY2018 VRP Funding at \$15 M

Even without final FY2017 appropriations, NAEVR has been advocating on Capitol Hill for FY2018 VRP funding at \$15 million, coordinating its advocacy efforts with BVA, the American Academy of Ophthalmology,

and the American Optometric Association. NAEVR has filed Programmatic Requests with Congressional offices that have served as "champions" in previous years. NAEVR and its allies have also taken additional steps, including:

NAEVR Sponsoring VSO/MSO Independent Budget

On February 6, a coalition of Veterans Service Organizations and Military Service Organizations (VSOs/MSOs) released the *Independent Budget (IB)*, a set of recommendations regarding a full range of issues faced by military veterans. As in past years, NAEVR, an *IB* co-sponsor, worked with BVA to ensure that the recommendations included FY2018 VRP funding at \$15 M. The report cites NAEVR's 2012 *Cost of Military Eye Injury and Blindness* study to support the request.

BVA Sends VRP Funding Letter to Congress, Testifies

On March 7, BVA sent a letter to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees leaders requesting FY2018 VRP funding at \$15 million. The letter was co-signed by nine VSOs/MSOs, including Paralyzed Veterans of America, Military Order of the Purple Heart USA, Inc., Disabled American Veterans, Jewish War Veterans of the USA, Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America, the Veterans Health Council, the American Council of the Blind, Vietnam Veterans of America, and the Military Officers Association of America. On March 22, BVA National President Dale Stamper testified before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees.

NAEVR Co-Authors *Optometry and Vision Science* Article on Military Eye Trauma

The January 2017 edition of *Optometry and Vision Science* featured a guest editorial co-written by NAEVR's James Jorkasky and Greg Goodrich, Ph.D., formerly with the Palo Alto Veterans VA System and currently a guest editor for the *Journal*. Entitled *Expanding Advocacy for Head Trauma Vision Research Funding*, the article describes how the increased awareness of the similarities between trauma that results from military service and the range of TBI-related symptoms suffered by athletes can enhance advocacy efforts.

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

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6th Military Vision Symposium on Ocular & Vision Injury

NAEVR was pleased to participate in and speak at this event, held in Boston on March 30-31 and sponsored by the Schepens Eye Research Institute of Massachusetts Eye and Ear, the joint DOD/VA Vision Center of Excellence, and the U.S. Army Medical Research & Materiel Command, in which the CDMRP is located. The symposium brings together military leaders, clinicians, and scientists with the goal of propelling innovative research that will lead to improved treatment and prevention strategies for combat-related eye injuries. Several of the research speakers and attendees have spoken in past *AEVR Defense Related Vision Research* Congressional Briefings that support NAEVR's advocacy request.



Glenn Cockerham, M.D., National Program Director for the VA Ophthalmology Service and Associate Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology and Pathology, Stanford University Medical Center



Ray Santullo, O.D. (Colonel, U.S. Army, Retired) with Vision Research Program Manager Robert Read. Dr. Santullo will assume responsibility for VRP management when Mr. Read retires in September.



From left: ARVO Trustee Steven Fliesler, Ph.D. (SUNY-Buffalo/VA Medical Center-Buffalo), a VA Merit Award recipient, and Michael Iuvone, Ph.D. (Emory Eye Center), a VRP award recipient

