FRIENDS OF VA MEDICAL CARE AND HEALTH RESEARCH

A BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR FY 2020
About FOVA

Over thirty years ago, the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA) coalition was founded to ensure that America’s veterans receive high-quality health care.

Today, FOVA is a diverse coalition representing nearly 90 national academic, medical, and scientific societies; voluntary health and patient advocacy groups; and veteran-focused associations.

FOVA organizations work in concert with the Independent Budget veterans service organizations to advocate for continued, necessary funding for the research and health programs that serve the nation’s veterans.

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Why Do Veterans Need a VA-Based Research Program?

VA research improves veterans’ health care

Investigating a Veteran-Centric Comprehensive Research Portfolio
Research at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) focuses on veteran-unique conditions in four main areas: biomedical, clinical science, health services, and rehabilitation. All research proposals must affect veterans’ health.

Collaborating with Partners to Leverage Taxpayers’ Investment
The VA has established nationwide partnerships with the NIH and other federal research agencies, for-profit medical industry companies, nonprofit organizations, and academic affiliates to maximize and augment its research capabilities.

Supporting the Next Generation of Veterans’ Health Researchers
By offering mentored research opportunities, the VA attracts, develops, and retains talented postdoctoral researchers in clinical, translational, and basic science disciplines.

Recruiting and Retaining Clinicians to Care for Veterans
Because the VA awards grants only to VA employees, the VA uses a dedicated funding source to attract high-quality physicians and clinical investigators to the VA health care system and retain them.

Fostering Excellence in Veterans’ Health Research
VA researchers have received three Nobel Prizes in physiology or medicine, seven Albert Lasker Medical Research Awards (“America’s Nobels”), and numerous other distinctions that drive innovations in VA health care.

Helping Veterans: Bench to Bedside
Seventy percent of VA researchers are clinicians who also provide direct care to veterans and, as a result, have developed a cultural competency for the unique needs of veteran patients.
FOVA FY 2020 Recommendation:
VA Medical and Prosthetic Research

$840 million

Funding for VA research must be predictable and sustained to meet ongoing commitments while allowing for innovative scientific growth to address critical emerging needs in the veteran community.

Addressing Growing Health Care Needs While Supporting Long-Term Investments

In line with past budget requests and report language, FOVA believes that Congress should appropriate additional funding in fiscal year (FY) 2020 for expanded research on both emerging and chronic conditions, as well as for groundbreaking research programs at the forefront of personalized medicine.

The VA is uniquely positioned to advance genomic medicine through the Million Veteran Program (MVP):

- It is currently the world’s largest genomic database connected to one health care system. When completed, it will offer tremendous potential to study and enhance the health of all veterans.
- This effort seeks to collect biological samples and general health information from 1 million veterans by 2021. To date, more than 750,000 veterans have enrolled in MVP.
- Although MVP has tremendous translational and clinical potential, funding for the program should not detract from other critical VA research priorities.

Additional funding will help the VA support its new research priority areas, including:

- Postdeployment mental health concerns, such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, and suicide.
- New engineering and technological methods to improve the lives of veterans with prosthetic systems or to activate paralyzed nerves, muscles, and limbs.
- Chronic pain abatement through alternatives to opioids such as new, safer medications and nonprescription strategies.

FOVA believes that other critically underfunded areas should be maintained to expand research in areas affecting the entire, diverse veteran community, including:

- The gender-specific health care needs of the VA’s growing population of women veterans.
- Studies dedicated to understanding chronic multisymptom illnesses among Gulf War veterans and the long-term health effects of exposures to potentially hazardous substances.
- Innovative health services strategies, such as telehealth and self-directed care, that lead to accessible, high-quality, cost-effective care for all veterans.

Sustaining Investments in Veteran Research — The Toll of Biomedical Inflation

Despite numerous successes in research and innovation, appropriated funding for VA research and development has lagged behind biomedical research inflation since FY 2010, resulting in stagnant VA purchasing power. The Biomedical Research and Development Price Index (BRDPI), as projected by the Department of Commerce and the National Institutes of Health, estimates that the Medical and Prosthetic Research appropriation should be increased in FY 2020 by 2.8% over the FY 2019 baseline — about $22 million — for VA research simply to maintain current research levels. FOVA recommends meaningful growth above inflation for FY 2020 in order to build on momentum of recent years and to allow the VA to support promising research proposals in all disciplines to better the health of all veterans.

Congressionally Directed VA Research

Both FOVA and the Independent Budget veterans service organizations strongly believe that all decisions regarding the selection of individual research projects and their funding should be made through the VA peer-review process. Therefore, funding for any potential congressionally mandated VA research is not included in the Independent Budget or FOVA recommendations. FOVA believes that any such directed research, if so desired by Congress, warrants a separate appropriation.
FOVA FY 2020 Recommendation: VA Research Facilities Improvement

$225 million

Major construction: $50 million
Nonrecurring maintenance and minor construction: $175 million

Addressing Shortfalls in VA Research Infrastructure Funding

State-of-the-art research requires an investment not only in state-of-the-art technology and equipment, but also in facilities. For decades, VA construction and maintenance appropriations have failed to provide the resources the VA needs to replace, maintain, or upgrade its aging research facilities. The impact of this funding shortage was observed in a congressionally mandated report published in 2012 that found a clear need for research infrastructure improvements systemwide. The VA recently completed Phase II of the assessment, and preliminary findings show that not all projects identified in the 2012 report have received funding, that few facilities have seen significant improvement, and that renovations can lead to significant benefits, including increased collaborations and potential to increase research funding.

The Phase II report indicates that the process to apply for and receive funding for construction projects has focused more on clinical spaces and is transitioning to reside under the purview of the Veterans Health Administration through individual Veterans Integrated Services Networks (VISNs). FOVA believes that designating funds for specific VA research facilities is the only way to bring VA research up to standard. For capital infrastructure, renovations, and maintenance, FOVA recommends at least $50 million for up to five major construction projects in VA research facilities and $175 million in nonrecurring maintenance and minor construction funding to address deficiencies identified in the congressionally requested report on the status of VA research facilities (H.R. Rep. No. 109-95, H.R. Rep. No. 111-559). FOVA encourages Congress to request information about the updated report from the VA to guide its funding decisions. A copy of the VA’s 2012 report is available at aamc.org/varpt.

Improving Veterans’ Lives Through Innovation and Discovery

For more than 90 years, the VA Research & Development Program has been improving veterans’ lives through innovation and discovery that has led to advances in health care for veterans and all Americans.

1925
Launch of the VA Research & Development Program with the first hospital-based research study

1960
Invented the implantable cardiac pacemaker

1961
Established concepts leading to the development of the CAT scan

1967
Conducted first successful liver transplant; developed methods to prevent rejection of transplanted organs

1984
Developed the nicotine patch and other smoking cessation therapies

1991
Developed functional electronic stimulation to aid in moving paralyzed limbs

1994
Linked aspirin to a reduced rate of heart attacks

2007
Revealed the first powered ankle-foot prosthesis, which propels users forward

2010
Collaborated with U.S. Army to study suicide prevention in active service members and veterans

2015
Invented a “standing” wheelchair that provides greater independence

2019
Enrolled 750,000th volunteer in the Million Veteran Program
Organizations Endorsing the FOVA FY 2020 Recommendations

American Association of Directors of Psychiatric Residency Training
AcademyHealth
American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine
Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine
American Academy of Neurology
American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Pain Medicine
American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases
American Association of Chairs of Departments of Psychiatry
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association of Neuromuscular & Electrodiagnostic Medicine
American Brain Coalition
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Physicians
American Dental Education Association
American Gastroenterological Association
American Geriatrics Society
American Heart Association
American Liver Foundation
American Organization of Nurse Executives
American Osteopathic Association
American Pain Society
American Physical Therapy Association
American Physiological Society
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Society for Bone and Mineral Research
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
American Society of Nephrology
American Thoracic Society
American Tinnitus Association
AMVETS
Arthritis Foundation
American Spinal Injury Association
Association for Clinical and Translational Science
Association for Prevention Teaching and Research
Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology
Association for Surgical Education
Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries
Association of Academic Physiatrists
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of Departments of Family Medicine
Association of Minority Health Professions Schools
Association of University Anesthesiologists
Association of University Professors of Neurology
Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology
Blinded Veterans Association
Catholic War Veterans of the United States of America
Clinical Research Forum
Coalition for Clinical and Translational Science
Digestive Disease National Coalition
Disabled American Veterans
Dystonia Advocacy Network
Dystonia Medical Research Foundation
Endocrine Society
Epilepsy Foundation
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
GBS/CIDP Foundation International
International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders
Interstitial Cystitis Association
LUNGevity Foundation
Lymphatic Education & Research Network
Military Order of the Purple Heart
NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research
National Alopecia Areata Foundation
National Association for the Advancement of Orthotics and Prosthetics
National Association for Biomedical Research
National Association of VA Dermatologists
National Association of Veterans’ Research and Education Foundations
NephCure Kidney International
North American Primary Care Research Group
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Polish Legion of American Veterans
Pulmonary Hypertension Association
Scleroderma Foundation
Sleep Research Society
Society of Academic Associations of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine
Society of General Internal Medicine
Society of Teachers of Family Medicine
University of Minnesota
Veterans of Foreign Wars
VeteransAgainstAlzheimer’s