

# NAEVR ATTENDS AND PRESENTS SESSION AT ARVO ANNUAL MEETING

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At the 2023 ARVO Annual Meeting in New Orleans, the NAEVR Booth served as the “Town Hall” for vision research funding advocacy and education. NAEVR wishes to thank the many ARVO members who visited, including those who contacted Congress to express appreciation for the past years’ increases in National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Eye Institute (NEI) funding and requested continued robust increases in FY2024.

NAEVR answered questions from researchers about the Department of Defense’s (DOD) Vision Research Program (VRP) funding, which was the focus at NAEVR’s April 24 *Defense Related Vision Research Opportunities* session at which Vision Program Manager Q. Tian Wang, PhD was the primary speaker.



*NAEVR’s Dan Ignaszewski and David Epstein spoke with interested researchers about how to increase federal funding for the NEI.*

## DEFENSE RESEARCH SESSION AT ARVO

In addition to attending and exhibiting at ARVO, NAEVR presented on April 24 the *Defense-Related Vision Research Opportunities* session at the ARVO Annual Meeting. The session featured Department of Defense (DOD) Vision Research Program (VRP) Manager Q. Tian Wang, PhD, who spoke about the history and priorities of the VRP and the expected Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 VRP Program Announcement. Over 100 researchers attended the session, including National Eye Institute (NEI) Director Michael Chiang, MD.

The VRP is one of 38 medical research programs managed by the DOD’s Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP). Since its establishment by Congress in FY2009 and through FY2021, the VRP has funded 154 projects for a total of \$151 million, with FY2022 awards currently being negotiated with researchers whose projects have been selected for funding.

In her presentation, Dr. Wang emphasized that, unlike the National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant review process, CDMRP uses a two-tier review process—Peer Review first for scientific merit, and then Programmatic Review for military relevance. The Programmatic Review is especially interested in proposals that respond to DOD-identified research gaps identified in the Program Announcement.

Dr. Wang noted that the Pre-Announcement for the FY2023 VRP funding cycle was released on March 28 shortly before the ARVO Annual Meeting, and that a full Program Announcement was expected by late May. For FY2023, the VRP is funded at a level of \$20 million, the fifth year that the program is funded at that level. Per the Pre-Announcement, the VRP will employ five award mechanisms:

- the Investigator-Initiated Research Award (IIRA, with two funding levels),
- the Translational Research Award (TRA),
- the Focused Translational Team Science Award (FTTSA),
- the Clinical Trial Award (CT),
- and the Mentored Clinical Research Award (MCRA)



*Tian Wang, PhD, VRP Program Manager addresses the audience.*

Applications submitted to the FY23 VRP must address one or more of the following Research Focus Areas:

- Understanding and treatment of eye injury or visual dysfunction as related to military exposure.
- Diagnosis, stabilization, and treatment of eye injuries in austere environments and prolonged field care settings.
- Restoration of visual function after military exposure-related vision loss or severe visual impairment.

In addition to discussing the VRP, Dr. Wang discussed other DOD funding opportunities, such as the Joint Warfighter Program (JWP), which funds projects that have previously received DOD funding and would benefit from additional funds to further the research. She also highlighted the NEI-DOD Vision Research Collaborative (VRC), under which the NEI may provide additional funding opportunities for selected VRP proposals, enhance current NEI Program portfolios, expand the scope of research supported by the NEI, and provide support for high-quality projects addressing critical gaps in civilian and military vision research. The VRC was established in 2018 and was renewed in 2021 for 10 years. To date, the VRC has funded 6 projects for a total of \$4.65 million.



*Joe Ciolino, MD (Schepens Eye Research Institute/Mass Eye and Ear) and Kimberly Gokoffski, MD, PhD (University of Southern California) joined Dr. Wang on the panel.*

After Dr. Wang's presentation, two researchers who have received funding from the VRP participated in a panel discussion on their experiences with the program. Joe Ciolino, MD (Schepens Eye Research Institute/Mass Eye and Ear) and Kimberly Gokoffski, MD, PhD (University of Southern California) answered questions about how they first learned about research opportunities at the DOD and their experiences applying for funding.

NAEVR Director of Government Relations David Epstein emphasized to the audience that DOD funding opportunities are available to domestic and international researchers and that those who navigate the VRP are more likely to apply for funding from other DOD programs with keywords such as "sensory" and "rehabilitation" and for diseases with a vision impact. In addition to the VRP, eye and vision researchers have been extremely successful with other DOD research programs, receiving over \$286 million in funding from 17 separate programs.

In addition to her appearance at NAEVR's session, Dr. Wang, along with VRP Science Officer Colleen LaVinka, attended the ARVO Annual Meeting and met one-on-one with researchers from Sunday through Wednesday at a dedicated CDMRP booth. These meetings allowed researchers to discuss their ideas for projects and gauge the potential interest of the VRP.



*The standing-room-only crowd included NEI Director Michael Chiang, MD, who was interested in learning more about DOD research.*