

DEFENSE-RELATED VISION FUNDING

Since it was created by Congress in FY2009 Defense appropriations by NAEVR advocacy and through FY2021, the Vision Research Program (VRP) within the Department of Defense's (DOD) Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP) has been funded by Congress at \$144 million and has made 118 awards for a total of \$116 million, with decisions pending on the FY2020 awards.

FY2022: House Appropriations Committee Funds VRP at \$20 Million

On July 13, the House Appropriations Committee approved the FY2022 Defense appropriations bill with VRP funding at \$20 million for the fourth year, following the Defense Subcommittee's June 28 markup. NAEVR and its advocacy allies, including Blinded Veterans Association, ARVO, the American Academy of Ophthalmology, and the American Optometric Association, had requested that Congress fund the VRP at \$30 million, a \$10 million increase over the \$20 million funding level in each FY2019, 2020, and 2021. NAEVR justifies this increase by citing the results from AEVR's 2018 update of the *Cost of Military Eye Injury* study, published in the May/June 2019 edition of the journal *Military Medicine*, that estimated total cost from the 2000-2017 timeframe at \$41.5 billion, with \$40.2 billion of that cost reflecting the present value of a lifetime of long-term benefits, lost wages, and family care.

NAEVR and ARVO Host Defense Research Funding Webinar



CDMRP Vision Program Manager
Tian Wang, PhD

On June 2 NAEVR and ARVO jointly held a special *Defense Research Funding Opportunities* Webinar hosted by NAEVR Executive Director James Jorkasky. Featuring Q. Tian Wang, PhD, Program Manager for the DOD's VRP, this was the second year of this virtual event usually held at the on-site ARVO Annual Meeting. The VRP is one of 35 medical research programs managed by DOD's CDMRP.

Dr. Wang emphasized the need for better diagnostics, treatments, and restoration therapies for our nation's wounded warriors noting that, between year 2000 and third-quarter 2020, more than 430,000 U.S. service members had been diagnosed with a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and that upwards of 75 percent of those who had suffered a TBI report some level of visual dysfunction.

Dr. Wang discussed the VRP's history, the two-stage process used for reviewing proposals—first a Scientific Peer Review, followed by a Programmatic Review as to how it meets DOD-identified research priorities—and the FY2021 Program Announcements, which were released on May 14. She detailed the VRP's research priorities, funding mechanisms, application process, dollar

amounts, and expected number of funded projects for each award from the total \$20 million in funding. For FY2021, the VRP is using four funding mechanisms:

- Investigator Initiated Research Awards (IIRA, with two funding levels), with a maximum funding of \$260,000 over 2 years/\$750,000 over 3 years.
- Translational Research Awards (TRA), with a maximum funding of \$1 million over 3 years.
- Focused Translational Team Science Awards (FTTSA), with a maximum funding of \$4 million over 4 years.
- A new Clinical Trial Award (CTA), with a maximum funding of \$1.6 million over 3 years.

For all four awards, pre-proposals are due July 21, 2021. Researchers who are selected to submit a full proposal will be notified in September, and the deadline for full proposal submission is November 16, 2021. Final decisions on which proposals will be selected for funding will be made in March 2022.

A recording of the Webinar is posted for viewing on the Web site. Researchers who would like to be informed about potential DOD funding opportunities should contact NAEVR's David Epstein at depstein@eyerresearch.org to be added to NAEVR's Defense Research Interest List.

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



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