

## DEFENSE-RELATED VISION FUNDING

Since it was created by congress in FY09, the Vision Research Program (VRP) within the Congressionally Directed medical Research Programs (CDMRP) has been funded by Congress at \$144.95 million through FY21. Through FY20, VRP has made 135 awards for a total of \$133 million with FY21 awards pending.

### **NAEVR Participates in VRP Meetings and Joins Programmatic Review Panel**

On January 31, NAEVR Director of Government Relations David Epstein participated in the VRP's *Retinal and Optic Nerve Injury Research and State of the Science* Meeting, which was held virtually due to the pandemic. Researchers who have received funding from the VRP around retinal and optic nerve injury presented updates on the status of their investigations.

On March 14, Mr. Epstein attended VRP's Programmatic Review session, at which the Programmatic Panel members reviewed proposals for the FY21 funding cycle, paired their scores with the scores from the Peer Reviewers, and determined funded projects. On March 17, he attended the VRP's FY22 Vision Setting Meeting, at which the Program panel selected which grant mechanisms and research focus areas will be used for the FY22 funding cycle.

In addition to David's participation, on March 17, at VRP's request, Alliances' Executive Director, Dan Ignaszewski was asked to join the Programmatic Review Panel as an active member and presented about federal investment in vision research. At the inception of the VRP program, the Alliances staff were part of the programmatic review, but since 2014, due to previous executive orders, Alliances staff were unable to remain panelists. With updated executive orders, moving forward, Dan will be able to work with other members of the VRP program to review submissions and identify updates to the vision and grant mechanisms for VRP. Dan brings experience to the VRP program having served in his previous role on the CDMRP Orthotic and Prosthetic Outcomes Review Panel (OPORP) for over three years.

### **CDMRP Vision Manager Dr. Tian Wang to Speak at the ARVO Annual Meeting**

NAEVR will provide its May 2 *Defense Vision Research Opportunities* session at the ARVO Annual Meeting, as it did annually before the pandemic. VRP Program Director Quntian Wang, PhD has agreed to speak at the session. While attending the Annual Meeting, Dr. Wang will also meet with researchers interested in defense research funding opportunities, holding both in-person and virtual meetings with researchers unable to attend the Annual Meeting.

### **FY22: Congress Funds VRP at \$20 Million**

On March 11, President Biden signed the FY22 Omnibus appropriations bill which included VRP funding at \$20 million for the fourth year. NAEVR and its advocacy partners, including Blinded Veterans Association, ARVO, the American Academy of Ophthalmology, and the American Optometric Association, had requested \$30 million. NAEVR justified 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. There was also a specific provision within the Omnibus bill that clarifies intent and permits agencies to use appropriated funds for "interagency funding for coordination with, participation in, or recommendations involving activities of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command, the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs, and the National Institutes of Health research programs." NAEVR sees this as an opportunity for enhanced collaboration across agencies to support strong research proposals.

### **FY23: NAEVR to Request \$30 Million for VRP**

NAEVR has already begun for advocacy efforts for FY23. NAEVR is requesting VRP funding at a level of \$30 million, after 4 years at a level of \$20 million, and will coordinate with its advocacy partners. NAEVR continues to submit Programmatic Requests to Congressional offices and we are meeting with staff to support the funding request.



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