Reasearchers Contact Congress at NAEVR Central Booth

NAEVR wishes to thank the hundreds of ARVO members who visited the NAEVR Central Booth, which served as the "Town Hall" for vision research funding advocacy and education. Many visitors contacted Congress thanking them for the FY2018 NIH $3 billion and NEI $41 million funding increases, while urging sustained increases in the FY2019 appropriations process.

NAEVR’s Defense-Related Vision Research Opportunities Session

At NAEVR’s April 30 session, new Department of Defense (DOD) Vision Research Program (VRP) Manager Tian Wang, PhD spoke to the vision research community for the first time. Dr. Wang also manages the Hearing Restoration Program within DOD's Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP), in addition to the VRP.

Dr. Wang reported that, since 2001 the CDMRP has funded $230 million in 189 awards, including Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) awards. Within that total, and since it was created by Congress in FY2009 Defense appropriations and through FY2017, the VRP has been funded by Congress at $70.2 million and has made 83 awards for a total of $82 million. The VRP has also managed additional funds from “sister” DOD agencies, such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), accounting for the difference between enacted funding and the total awarded.

Dr. Wang emphasized that, unlike NIH’s grant review process, the CDMRP uses a two-tier review process—Peer Review for scientific merit, and Program Review for military relevance, responding to DOD-identified research gaps. She announced that the FY2018 Program Announcement is expected in the July/August timeframe. Per an April 26 CDMRP Preliminary Announcement, FY2018 VRP funding will include Investigator Initiated Research Awards (IIRA) with maximum funding of $500,000 over three years and a new Focused Translational Team Science Award (FTTSA) mechanism, which seeks to support projects that are “highly collaborative” and would “fundamentally advance the understanding and treatment of military-relevant vision trauma.” This award would be funded over a period of four years for a maximum of $5 million and must have three-to-five distinct research teams addressing a specific trauma. Although the VRP is not funding a full Clinical Trial Award in FY2018 as it did in FY2017, the FTTSA may support a pilot clinical trial that would collect preliminary data.

Dr. Wang met one-on-one with researchers at a dedicated CDMRP booth from Monday through Wednesday. NAEVR wishes to thank her for participating in the session and her dedication to the soldiers who have experienced battlefield eye injuries and blindness.

See back page for more information on Defense-related Vision Research Funding