Defense Related Vision Research
TATRC Begins Review of FY2011 Pre-Proposal Submissions

On October 17, the Department of Defense (DOD) Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center’s (TATRC) Program Committee began review of the 100+ pre-proposal submissions it received by the September 15 deadline for funding by the FY2011 Vision Research Program (VRP). Although the Congressional appropriation was $4 million for the Peer Reviewed Medical Research-Vision (PRMR-Vision) line item that funds the VRP, TATRC will support at least $8.7 million of awards in two categories: Investigator-initiated awards at $1 million each and Hypothesis Development Awards at $250,000 each. The additional funding beyond the appropriation reflects that made available from other DOD programs due to the past quality and responsiveness of vision research proposals.

TATRC is inviting a number of investigators to submit full proposals for further review. NAEVR’s James Jorkasky and David Epstein and ARVO’s Joanne Angle serve on TATRC’s Program Committee.

NAEVR Opposes Cuts in FY2012 Defense Vision Research Funding

Congress is not expected to act on the FY2012 Defense and Military Construction/Veterans Administration (VA) spending bills until late in the 2012 appropriations process due to potential defense cuts. Current status of the PRMR-Vision line is as follows:

House:
On July 8, the House passed a FY2012 Defense bill that includes $3.2 M for PRMR-Vision, down 20% from FY2011. All defense health categories, except for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and orthopedics, had a similar cut. This was especially frustrating since NAEVR has consistently stressed the military relevance of this research, how it addresses DOD-identified research gaps, and how it may be rapidly translated into battlefield applications. NAEVR also had one-quarter of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee membership as bi-partisan champions for funding at $10 M—Cong. Jim Moran (D-VA), Cong. Maurice Hinchey (D-NY), Cong. Pete Visclosky (D-IN) and Cong. Jerry Lewis (R-CA). NAEVR has added Cong. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ) as a champion, and his staff is requesting that Subcommittee Chair Bill Young (R-FL) increase this number.

Senate:
NAEVR has worked closely with a number of Senate offices, including Defense Appropriations Subcommittee member Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), who served as champion for its request. On September 15, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved its bill, which does not fund PRMR-Vision as a separate line item but includes vision research as one of 33 research areas eligible for funding from the DOD’s $50 million Peer-Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP). Since the House leads on this issue, NAEVR is working with Senate leaders to Garner their support in the conference process for the dedicated PRMR-Vision line item funded at a level greater than $3.2 million.

Visit the Defense-related Vision Research section of NAEVR’s Web site for more details

NAEVR Board Approves Cost of Blindness Study

At its October 23 meeting, the NAEVR Board of Directors approved funding for a study on the lifetime costs to the DOD, VA, and society of blindness and vision impairment as a result of battlefield injuries. NAEVR will be working with Kevin Frick, Ph.D. (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health) to develop a report for release in first-quarter 2012 for use in FY2013 advocacy. NAEVR has a DOD Working Group that includes the BVA, American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO), American Optometric Association (AOA), and ARVO that will advise on the study. NAEVR will also engage ophthalmic and optometric consultants to the various branches of the military in the study process.

NAEVR Updates Academies on Defense Vision Research

On October 11 at the American Academy of Ophthalmology annual meeting in Boston, NAEVR spoke to the Armed Forces Optometric Society (AFOS) about defense vision research. On October 24 at the American Academy of Ophthalmology meeting, Immediate-Past ARVO President Mark Petrasch, Ph.D., FARVO, spoke about NAEVR’s advocacy efforts and added his perspectives on defense vision opportunities in his role as Vice Chair for Research in the Department of Ophthalmology at the University of Colorado School of Medicine/Denver.

On September 29, First Lieutenant Timothy Fallon (center), who was blinded in Afghanistan, met in a follow up visit with Senior Policy Advisor Steve Wilson (left) from the offices of Cong. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ), who had previously expressed concern about Lt. Fallon’s vision injuries since he is a New Jersey constituent. Tom Zampieri, Ph.D. (right) from the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) and NAEVR’s James Jorkasky also participated in the visit.

Media Highlights Proposed Defense Vision Cuts

The October 10 editions of USA Today and Military Times featured articles on the current plans by Congress to cut FY2012 defense research funding. Both BVA and NAEVR expressed their concerns, as did Senator Tom Harkin (D-AI) and Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ), who urged support for increased funding by stating that, “If we are going to send our armed forces in harm’s way, then we have an obligation to invest in the development of the best possible care and treatment.”