Defense Related Vision Research

DOD Announces $11 Million in Funding Due to Quality of Grants

The Department of Defense’s (DOD) Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC), which manages the dedicated Peer Reviewed Medical Research-Vision (PRMR-Vision) line item in Defense appropriations, announced $11 million in awards for its Vision Research Program. This total reflects FY2009 and 2010 Congressional appropriations of $4 million and $3.75 million, respectively, from the PRMR-Vision line item plus $4.1 million from the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) program, minus administrative costs. The awards fund twelve domestic and international ophthalmic and optometric researchers.

The TBI dollars are funds transferred to NAEVR at Blinded Veterans National Convention

In late August, NAEVR attended the Blinded Veterans Association’s (BVA) 65th National Convention in Arlington, Virginia, and in late September, the Fourth Military Vision Symposium on Ocular and Brain Injury held by the Schepens Eye Research Institute (SERI) in Boston. NAEVR met with key DOD and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) contacts, vision researchers, and active and retired military members who benefit from advocacy.

BVA hosted hundreds of veterans and their families including, as in past years, 14 veterans who recently returned from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and had been blinded or experienced significant visual impairment.

The scientific program featured Randy Kardon, M.D., Ph.D. (University of Iowa), whose research is funded by the NEI, VA, and DOD. He is one of the recipients of TATRC’s most recent awards (see story above). Dr. Kardon was joined by NEI Extramural Research Director Dr. Lore Anne McNicol, who spoke about the latest in NEI funded research.

NAEVR’s James Jorkasky and David Epstein attended, with Jorkasky joining TATRC Vision Portfolio Manager Robert Read in discussing PRMR-Vision funding. “David and I were honored to attend this meeting, at which we interacted with the ophthalmic and optometric consultants to the various branches of the military with whom we serve on the TATRC Programmatic Committee. We also had an opportunity to speak with many of the investigators and hear their formal scientific presentations about research which is addressing immediate military needs.”

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

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Status of FY2011 PRMR-Vision

With TATRC’s awards announcement, NAEVR has tangible examples of vision research to share with its Capitol Hill champions. With BVA’s assistance, NAEVR was able to secure a House “Dear Colleague” letter by Cong. Tim Walz (D-MN) supporting PRMR-Vision funding at $10 million in FY2011 Defense appropriations. The Senate bill’s Report Language includes vision in a list of 33 areas of research that it recommends for funding, but details have not been released. The Senate bill’s Report Language includes vision in a list of 33 areas of research that it recommends for funding, but defers to the House bill on details.

“We are mindful not to give Congress the impression that these funds transferred over from the TBI/PTSD Program are always going to be available and that they do not need to adequately fund the dedicated PRMR-Vision line item in defense appropriations,” said NAEVR’s James Jorkasky, who added that they must keep the VRP as a distinct program focused on all battlefield eye and vision trauma.

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