

FOVA

Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research

Executive Committee

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Dear Colleagues:

On behalf of the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA) coalition, thank you for your past support of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) research program. We want to update you on some of our FOVA Executive Committee activities this fall and highlight some upcoming opportunities for your organizations. Membership in FOVA is free and open to all organizations interested in veterans' health.

Typically FOVA advocates for VA's medical and prosthetic research account (the intramural research program) by meeting upstream with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) staff, talking with VA research staff to get a sense of their research priorities, and then urging members of Congress on key committees to provide appropriate funding for VA research. Advocacy most often includes meetings with personal office and committee staff, Capitol Hill briefings, and public witness appropriations testimony. In the past few months, FOVA's Executive Committee has been active in the following areas:

- **Independent Budget and FOVA's FY14 Funding Recommendations for VA Research:** FOVA has partnered with *The Independent Budget* again this year to advocate for funding for VA research that will enable growth in areas of timely importance to veterans. Co-authored by AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, *The Independent Budget* is a comprehensive budget and policy document that provides recommendations that address key issues involving veterans' health care and benefits, and projected budgetary needs of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Over the years, *The Independent Budget* has become a highly regarded document that is utilized by members of Congress to determine the federal appropriations necessary to fund the VA.

For Fiscal Year 2014, FOVA and *The Independent Budget* recommend \$611 million or more for the Medical and Prosthetic Research account. Additionally, FOVA recommends \$50 million or more for up to five Major Construction projects; and \$175 million in non-recurring maintenance (NRM) and Minor Construction funding to address Priority 1 and 2 deficiencies identified in the VA research infrastructure report (in accounts that are segregated from VA's other major, minor, and maintenance and repair appropriations). Specifically, we recommend \$100 million for NRM and \$75 million for Minor Construction projects. *The Independent Budget* will be published and presented to Congress in February 2013 and will be available at www.independentbudget.org.

We are asking FOVA member organizations to endorse our Fiscal Year 2014 VA research and research facility recommendations, which you may do by simply replying to Dr. Heather Kelly at this email (hkelly@apa.org).

FOVA was founded over 20 years ago to ensure that America's veterans receive high-quality health care. Today, FOVA is a diverse coalition representing national academic, medical, and scientific societies; voluntary health and patient advocacy groups; and veteran-focused associations. FOVA works in concert with the *Independent Budget* veterans service organizations.

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You also may officially endorse The Independent Budget as an entire document by completing the attached form and returning it to PVA by December 21, 2012.

- **VA Research Facilities Report:** The long-awaited “Final Report of the VA Research Infrastructure Program” was submitted to Congress in July 2012, with significant prodding from FOVA and a strong push from former Rep. Anne Marie Buerkle (R-NY), chair of the Subcommittee on Health of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. The appraisal provides a detailed blueprint for prioritizing and addressing deficiencies in VA’s research infrastructure, and may be found at <https://www.aamc.org/varpt>.

FOVA’s Executive Committee was initially successful in getting the House Appropriations Committee to request the facilities study in House Report 109-95 accompanying the Fiscal Year 2006 VA appropriations bill. At that time, the Committee directed VA to conduct “a comprehensive review of its research facilities and report to the Congress on the deficiencies found and suggestions for correction of the identified deficiencies.” To comply, VA initiated a thorough assessment of VA research infrastructure. Although VA has spent minor construction and NRM funds to make a number of facility improvements since the study was initiated, and several new facilities have been built during the intervening years, this comprehensive assessment verifies that much remains to be done. FOVA is currently exploring how this report may be used to direct congressional attention to the state of VA research facilities and to obtain funding for new construction and needed improvements.

- **FOVA Meeting with OMB:** FOVA’s Executive Committee met with OMB on two separate occasions to discuss Fiscal Year 2014 funding for VA Medical and Prosthetic Research as well as research infrastructure. Amid national budget concerns and a potential growth increase in the VA research Fiscal Year 2013 carryover, obtaining an increase in the president’s Fiscal Year 2014 budget request will be difficult. FOVA outlined its recommendations and agreed to encourage VA’s research office to enhance its budget justification with additional details on how research is improving veterans’ lives. OMB was pleased to receive a copy of the congressionally requested report on VA research facilities, and Executive Committee members outlined the funding reasons behind VA’s degrading infrastructure and the broader affects the current status has on clinician recruitment and patient care.
- **FOVA Capitol Hill Briefing Series:** As most of you know, FOVA currently sponsors one Capitol Hill briefing each spring, for which we bring in two currently-funded VA researchers who can engage members of Congress and their staff in a dynamic discussion of the value of VA research to veterans’ health. We rotate the research topics and solicit funding from FOVA member organizations to support the annual lunch briefing.

In response to interest from several FOVA member organizations, we also have begun supporting what we’re going to brand as a “Veterans Research Capitol Hill Briefing Series.” FOVA is pleased to help individual organizations interested in veterans’ health and research organize additional joint briefings. The FOVA Executive Committee will coordinate the events if groups can pay for their researchers to participate and for refreshments. Please contact Heather if you are interested and your topic area is not chosen for the spring 2013 FOVA briefing.

In the new year, we will update you on plans for FOVA’s traditional annual meeting with you, FOVA’s endorsers, as well as meetings with the Chief of VA Research and Development, and congressional staff following release of the President’s budget. Later in the spring we will invite you to the annual FOVA Capitol Hill VA Research Week briefing and will highlight other VA-sponsored research week activities. We also will keep you informed as we meet with members of congressional authorizing and appropriating committee staff

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regarding VA research funding and related issues. Please let us know what you are hearing from the Hill and your own organization's members in terms of challenges and opportunities for VA research.

Some of you may note that Barbara West is not listed below as a member of the FOVA Executive Committee. After more than twenty years as executive director of NAVREF and as an Executive Committee member, she announced her resignation earlier this year. We bid Barbara a fond farewell and welcome Thomas Stripling as her NAVREF replacement. Additionally, we are pleased to announce the appointment of Grant Olan of the American Society of Nephrologists to the Executive Committee.

We look forward to working with you, and as always, let us know if another colleague is the more appropriate contact for your organization's FOVA activities.

Sincerely,

The FOVA Executive Committee