FRIENDS OF VA MEDICAL CARE AND HEALTH RESEARCH

A BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR FY 2021
About FOVA

Over 30 years ago, the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA) coalition was founded to ensure that America’s veterans receive high-quality health care.

Today, FOVA is a diverse coalition representing nearly 90 national academic, medical, and scientific societies; voluntary health and patient advocacy groups; and veteran-focused associations.

FOVA organizations work in concert with the Independent Budget veterans service organizations to advocate for continued, necessary funding for the research and health programs that serve the nation’s veterans.

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Why Do Veterans Need a VA-Based Research Program?

**VA research improves veterans’ health care**

**Investigating a Veteran-Centric Comprehensive Research Portfolio**
Research at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) focuses on veteran-unique conditions in four main areas: biomedical, clinical science, health services, and rehabilitation. All research proposals must affect veterans’ health.

**Collaborating With Partners to Leverage Taxpayers’ Investment**
The VA has established nationwide partnerships with other federal research agencies, for-profit medical industry companies, nonprofit organizations, and academic affiliates to maximize and augment its research capabilities.

**Supporting the Next Generation of Veterans’ Health Researchers**
By offering mentored research opportunities, the VA attracts, develops, and retains talented postdoctoral researchers in clinical, translational, and basic science disciplines.

**Recruiting and Retaining Clinicians To Care for Veterans**
Because the VA awards grants only to VA employees, the VA uses a dedicated funding source to attract high-quality physicians and clinical investigators to the VA health care system and retain them.

**Fostering Excellence in Veterans’ Health Research**
VA researchers have received three Nobel Prizes in physiology or medicine, seven Albert Lasker Medical Research Awards (“America’s Nobels”), and numerous other distinctions that drive innovations in VA health care.

**Helping Veterans: Bench to Bedside**
More than 60% of VA researchers are clinicians who also provide direct care to veterans and, as a result, have developed a cultural competency for the unique needs of veteran patients.
FOVA FY 2021 Recommendation: VA Medical and Prosthetic Research

$860 million

Funding for VA research must be predictable and sustained to meet ongoing commitments while allowing for innovative scientific growth to address critical emerging needs in the veteran community.

Addressing Growing Health Care Needs While Supporting Long-Term Investments

In line with past budget requests and report language, FOVA believes that Congress should appropriate additional funding in fiscal year (FY) 2021 for expanded research on both emerging and chronic conditions, as well as for groundbreaking research programs at the forefront of personalized medicine.

The VA is uniquely positioned to advance genomic medicine through the Million Veteran Program (MVP):

- It is currently the world’s largest genomic database connected to one health care system, offering tremendous potential to study and enhance the health of all veterans through precision medicine.
- This effort seeks to collect biological samples and general health information from 1 million veterans by 2021. To date, more than 800,000 veterans have enrolled in MVP.
- Although MVP has tremendous translational and clinical potential, funding for the program should not detract from other critical VA research priorities.

Additional funding will help the VA support its new research priority areas, including:

- Postdeployment mental health concerns, such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, and suicide.
- New engineering and technological methods to improve the lives of veterans with prosthetic systems or to activate paralyzed nerves, muscles, and limbs.
- Chronic pain abatement through alternatives to opioids such as new, safer medications and nonprescription strategies.

FOVA believes that other critically underfunded areas should be maintained to expand research in areas affecting the entire, diverse veteran community, including:

- The gender-specific health care needs of the VA’s growing population of women veterans.
- Studies dedicated to understanding chronic multisymptom illnesses among Gulf War veterans and the long-term health effects of exposures to potentially hazardous substances.
- Innovative health services strategies, such as telehealth and self-directed care, that lead to accessible, high-quality, cost-effective care for all veterans.
Sustaining Investments in Veteran Research

FOVA is thankful to Congress for its recent investments from FY 2016 through FY 2019 to support veteran-centric research, following years of flat funding that left the VA research program lagging behind the pace of biomedical research inflation. While the FY 2020 enacted level would have continued this investment and covered the cost of biomedical inflation, the FY 2020 appropriations bill also included $50 million in rescissions from the Medical and Prosthetic Research Program.

The Biomedical Research and Development Price Index, as projected by the Department of Commerce and the National Institutes of Health, estimates that the Medical and Prosthetic Research appropriation should be increased in FY 2021 by 2.7% over the FY 2020 baseline — about $22 million — for VA research simply to maintain current research levels. FOVA’s FY 2021 recommendation of $860 million for VA research would restore the investment in veteran-centric research to a trajectory of meaningful growth above inflation and renewed investment in groundbreaking programs and state-of-the-art technologies.

Congressionally Directed VA Research

Both FOVA and the Independent Budget veterans service organizations strongly believe that all decisions regarding the selection of individual research projects and their funding should be made through the VA peer-review process. Therefore, funding for any potential congressionally mandated VA research is not included in the Independent Budget or FOVA recommendations. FOVA believes that any such directed research, if so desired by Congress, warrants a separate, supplemental appropriation.
FOVA FY 2021 Recommendation: VA Research Facilities Improvement

At least $100 million

Addressing Shortfalls in VA Research Infrastructure Funding

State-of-the-art research requires investment not only in state-of-the-art technology and equipment, but also in facilities. For decades, VA construction and maintenance appropriations have failed to provide the resources the VA needs to replace, maintain, or upgrade its aging research facilities. The impact of this funding shortage was first observed in a congressionally mandated report published in 2012 that found a clear need for research infrastructure improvements systemwide. The VA recently completed a Phase II assessment of fewer than one-third of sites inspected in Phase I. Findings from these select sites show that while certain projects have received funding, significant deficiencies remain — totaling over $200 million to correct Priority 1-5 deficiencies. Specifically, the Phase II assessment detected $99.5 million in Priority 1 deficiencies, defined as needing to be addressed within one year and presenting life safety hazards.

FOVA believes that designating funds for specific VA research facilities is the only way to bring VA research up to standard. For capital infrastructure, renovations, and maintenance, FOVA recommends at least $100 million in funding to address the most pressing deficiencies identified in the Phase II VA research infrastructure report. A copy of the 2012 report is available at aamc.org/varpt.
## Improving Veterans’ Lives Through Innovation and Discovery

For more than 90 years, the VA Research and Development Program has been improving veterans’ lives through innovation and discovery that has led to advances in health care for veterans and all Americans.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Launch of the VA Research and Development Program with the first hospital-based research study</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Invented the implantable cardiac pacemaker</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>Established concepts leading to the development of the CAT scan</td>
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<td>1967</td>
<td>Conducted first successful liver transplant; developed methods to prevent rejection of transplanted organs</td>
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<td>1984</td>
<td>Developed the nicotine patch and other smoking cessation therapies</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>Developed functional electronic stimulation to aid in moving paralyzed limbs</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>Linked aspirin to a reduced rate of heart attacks</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>Revealed the first powered ankle-foot prosthesis, which propels users forward</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>Collaborated with U.S. Army to study suicide prevention in active service members and veterans</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>Invented a “standing” wheelchair that provides greater independence</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>Enrolled 800,000th volunteer in the Million Veteran Program</td>
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Organizations Endorsing the FOVA FY 2021 Recommendations

Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine & Health AcademyHealth