

# Testimony statement on Medical and Prosthetic Research at the Department of Veterans Affairs

The American Physiological Society (APS) thanks the committee for its ongoing support of Medical and Prosthetic Research at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA medical research facilities across the country provide veterans access to state-of-the-art health care and conduct research that specifically addresses the medical needs of veterans. **The APS urges you to make every effort to fund the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research Program at a level of \$664.7 million in FY 2017.**

## Challenges for VA research and medical care

The VA research program specifically addresses medical needs of veterans, but new technologies and treatments developed at VA medical centers lead to healthcare improvements for all Americans. VA scientists have done seminal research into rehabilitation following traumatic injury, development of state of the art prosthetic devices to recover functionality, and treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and mental health issues including suicide. These medical problems are more prevalent among veterans but are also common in the general population. VA research also explores other conditions such as dementia, diabetes, pain, addiction and cancer and offers hope for the veteran and non-veteran alike. The research carried out in these areas and their resulting innovations will be particularly important in the coming decades as an aging population brings new challenges to the American health care system.

VA scientists are increasing research on issues specific to female veterans to better understand gender-specific health care needs, women's experiences in service, and future health risks. The VA also has a long-standing research portfolio aimed at addressing minority health care needs and disparities in access, delivery and quality.

## Bringing innovation to health care

Because most VA researchers are also clinicians caring for patients, the VA research system is ideally situated to foster the translation of basic biomedical research findings into clinically relevant diagnostics and treatment modalities. The VA has developed a number of programs that facilitate the translation of knowledge gained in the lab to use in a clinical setting. One example is the Million Veteran Program (MVP) which collects genetic samples and general health information from one million veterans and tracks them over five years, creating a wealth of information that will inform research and efforts to improve health care.

Finally, in addition to focusing on research and patient care, VA medical researchers also play a critical role in educating the next generation of physician-scientists. Currently, more than half of all practicing physicians in the US receive some of their training at a VA facility.

## **Investing in the future**

In recent years, Congress has increased funding for the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research Program, allowing clinicians and researchers to pursue new ideas that would otherwise go unexplored and expand research in promising areas of science. In order to build on this investment in the VA research enterprise, the APS joins our colleagues at the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology in urging you to appropriate \$664.7 million for VA Research in FY 2017. This level of investment will allow the VA to maintain their current research program while pursuing new directions to address the needs of the veteran population.

*The APS is a professional society dedicated to fostering research and education as well as the dissemination of scientific knowledge concerning how the organs and systems of the body work. The Society was founded in 1887 and now has more than 10,000 member physiologists. Our members conduct research at colleges, universities, medical schools, and other public and private research institutions across the U.S., including VA facilities.*