



THE AMERICAN GERIATRICS SOCIETY
40 FULTON STREET, 18TH FLOOR
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10038
212.308.1414 TEL 212.832.8646 FAX
www.americangeriatrics.org

April 8, 2019

The Honorable Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Carter
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz and Ranking Member Carter:

The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) respectfully requests your strong support for increased fiscal year (FY) 2020 funding for Medical and Prosthetic Research within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The AGS is a national non-profit organization comprised of nearly 6,000 geriatrics healthcare professionals and basic and clinical researchers specializing in aging. Many of our members work within the VA healthcare system, serving in a variety of roles to advise VA leadership on the unique needs of older, medically complex Veterans; lead the demonstration of new care models; perform cutting-edge research; and train the VA workforce to provide the highest standard of care for older Veterans and their families.

As a member of Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA)—a diverse coalition representing national academic, medical, and scientific societies; voluntary health and patient advocacy groups; and veteran-focused associations—the AGS request that **VA Medical and Prosthetic Research be funded at \$840 million in FY 2020**, a \$61 million (7.8 percent) increase over FY 2019. This funding level would allow for meaningful growth above inflation and continued investment in groundbreaking programs like the Million Veteran Program (MVP), while also allowing VA research to support chronic and newly emerging needs of our nation's Veterans.

The AGS also requests that the Committee provide sufficient funding to support VA research projects within the VA Information Technology Systems account. This is important because the current framework buries IT support for research across multiple budget activity lines, making it difficult to determine if research is properly supported or not. The failure to provide sufficient IT funding for VA research purposes impacts the VA's ability to expand Veteran's access to high quality clinical trials, increase the real-world impact of VA research and constraints to the MVP and other VA Big Data/Data Science programs. Research and development efforts typically spend between five to ten percent of their overall budget on IT, yet VA research receives far less than this benchmark. Notably, the FY 2021-2025 multi-year plan submitted by VA research includes approximately 20 projects in five major program areas and the total development and sustainment amount in the portfolio is approximately \$100 million. We encourage the Committee to make available sufficient funding in the FY 2020 Military Construction, Veteran Affairs, and Related Agencies appropriations bill to ensure research requirements for IT infrastructure are being met.

Sustained and enhanced federal investment in VA research is essential to delivering high-quality, coordinated, and efficient care to our nation's growing population of aging Veterans. As of 2017, nearly 50 percent of the 18.2 million Veterans in the U.S. were 65 or older¹, and more than 1.6 million were over the age of 85²—including over 700,000 surviving World War II Veterans and increasing numbers of Korean and Vietnam Veterans.¹ The VA Medical and Prosthetic Research program aims to improve the health of our Veterans and to lay the groundwork for improved care within the VA—the largest managed healthcare system in the nation.

The VA Medical and Prosthetic Research program funds nearly 2,000 high-priority research projects. This work expands knowledge in areas critical to Veterans' healthcare needs, most notably for enhanced understanding of mental illness, aging, health services delivery, cancer, and heart disease. VA researchers continue to provide benefits to Veterans and all Americans. Today, VA researchers are on the cutting-edge of research on Alzheimer's disease; diabetes; exercise in the older adults; prosthetic limb use; safety and quality improvement for healthcare settings; management and rehabilitation from stroke and traumatic brain injury; end-of-life care models; osteoporosis and osteoarthritis diagnosis, management, and prevention; and the use of electronic technology for telemedicine, telemonitoring, and tele-education. In addition, the VA research program develops and supports innovative health research initiatives, including demonstration programs that focus on high-priority issues important to the health and well-being of aging Veterans and their caregivers. For example, COINs (Centers of Innovation), funded by VA Health Services Research and Development program, are helping push research findings into frontline care and are an integral part of evaluating new models of care delivery for the older VA population.

The Veterans Health Administration is the nation's largest provider of graduate medical education, and plays a critical role in nurturing health scientists across their careers. In order to recruit and retain talented researchers, sufficient funding is needed to support the promising and often groundbreaking research undertaken by new investigators. Support also helps sustain important work and mentoring conducted by those with long-standing experience in the field of aging research.

We are concerned that without adequate appropriations, the VA not only could fall behind in its role as a major contributor to medical and scientific research, but also be unable to meet its statutory mission of training a new generation of investigators to serve the needs of Veterans and the nation. Congress must ensure that we can properly care for Veterans and ensure they can thrive long after their service to our country.

Thank you for your consideration of our funding request for VA research. If you have comments or questions about this request or other issues related to the well-being and healthy aging of older Veterans, please contact Anna Mikhailovich, Manager of Public Affairs & Advocacy, at 212-308-1414 or amikhailovich@americangeriatrics.org.

¹ FFF: Veterans Day 2018: Nov. 11. United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2018/veterans-day.html>. Published October 12, 2018. Accessed March 25, 2019.

² National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp. Updated November 12, 2018. Accessed March 25, 2019.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Laurie Jacobs in black ink.

Laurie Jacobs, MD, AGSF
President

Handwritten signature of Nancy E. Lundebjerg in black ink.

Nancy E. Lundebjerg, MPA
Chief Executive Officer



THE AMERICAN GERIATRICS SOCIETY
40 FULTON STREET, 18TH FLOOR
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10038
212.308.1414 TEL 212.832.8646 FAX
www.americangeriatrics.org

April 8, 2019

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Schatz:

The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) respectfully requests your strong support for increased fiscal year (FY) 2020 funding for Medical and Prosthetic Research within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The AGS is a national non-profit organization comprised of nearly 6,000 geriatrics healthcare professionals and basic and clinical researchers specializing in aging. Many of our members work within the VA healthcare system, serving in a variety of roles to advise VA leadership on the unique needs of older, medically complex Veterans; lead the demonstration of new care models; perform cutting-edge research; and train the VA workforce to provide the highest standard of care for older Veterans and their families.

As a member of Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA)—a diverse coalition representing national academic, medical, and scientific societies; voluntary health and patient advocacy groups; and veteran-focused associations—the AGS request that **VA Medical and Prosthetic Research be funded at \$840 million in FY 2020**, a \$61 million (7.8 percent) increase over FY 2019. This funding level would allow for meaningful growth above inflation and continued investment in groundbreaking programs like the Million Veteran Program (MVP), while also allowing VA research to support chronic and newly emerging needs of our nation's Veterans.

The AGS also requests that the Committee provide sufficient funding to support VA research projects within the VA Information Technology Systems account. This is important because the current framework buries IT support for research across multiple budget activity lines, making it difficult to determine if research is properly supported or not. The failure to provide sufficient IT funding for VA research purposes impacts the VA's ability to expand Veteran's access to high quality clinical trials, increase the real-world impact of VA research and constraints to the MVP and other VA Big Data/Data Science programs. Research and development efforts typically spend between five to ten percent of their overall budget on IT, yet VA research receives far less than this benchmark. Notably, the FY 2021-2025 multi-year plan submitted by VA research includes approximately 20 projects in five major program areas and the total development and sustainment amount in the portfolio is approximately \$100 million. We encourage the Committee to make available sufficient funding in the FY 2020 Military Construction, Veteran Affairs and Related Agencies appropriations bill to ensure research requirements for IT infrastructure are being met.

Sustained and enhanced federal investment in VA research is essential to delivering high-quality, coordinated, and efficient care to our nation's growing population of aging Veterans. As of 2017, nearly 50 percent of the 18.2 million Veterans in the U.S. were 65 or older¹, and more than 1.6 million were over the age of 85²—including over 700,000 surviving World War II Veterans and increasing numbers of Korean and Vietnam Veterans.¹ The VA Medical and Prosthetic Research program aims to improve the health of our Veterans and to lay the groundwork for improved care within the VA—the largest managed healthcare system in the nation.

The VA Medical and Prosthetic Research program funds nearly 2,000 high-priority research projects. This work expands knowledge in areas critical to Veterans' healthcare needs, most notably for enhanced understanding of mental illness, aging, health services delivery, cancer, and heart disease. VA researchers continue to provide benefits to Veterans and all Americans. Today, VA researchers are on the cutting-edge of research on Alzheimer's disease; diabetes; exercise in the older adults; prosthetic limb use; safety and quality improvement for healthcare settings; management and rehabilitation from stroke and traumatic brain injury; end-of-life care models; osteoporosis and osteoarthritis diagnosis, management, and prevention; and the use of electronic technology for telemedicine, telemonitoring, and tele-education. In addition, the VA research program develops and supports innovative health research initiatives, including demonstration programs that focus on high-priority issues important to the health and well-being of aging Veterans and their caregivers. For example, COINs (Centers of Innovation), funded by VA Health Services Research and Development program, are helping push research findings into frontline care and are an integral part of evaluating new models of care delivery for the older VA population.

The Veterans Health Administration is the nation's largest provider of graduate medical education, and plays a critical role in nurturing health scientists across their careers. In order to recruit and retain talented researchers, sufficient funding is needed to support the promising and often groundbreaking research undertaken by new investigators. Support also helps sustain important work and mentoring conducted by those with long-standing experience in the field of aging research.

We are concerned that without adequate appropriations, the VA not only could fall behind in its role as a major contributor to medical and scientific research, but also be unable to meet its statutory mission of training a new generation of investigators to serve the needs of Veterans and the nation. Congress must ensure that we can properly care for Veterans and ensure they can thrive long after their service to our country.

Thank you for your consideration of our funding request for VA research. If you have comments or questions about this request or other issues related to the well-being and healthy aging of older Veterans, please contact Anna Mikhailovich, Manager of Public Affairs & Advocacy, at 212-308-1414 or amikhailovich@americangeriatrics.org.

¹ FFF: Veterans Day 2018: Nov. 11. United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2018/veterans-day.html>. Published October 12, 2018. Accessed March 25, 2019.

² National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp. Updated November 12, 2018. Accessed March 25, 2019.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Laurie Jacobs in black ink.

Laurie Jacobs, MD, AGSF
President

Handwritten signature of Nancy E. Lundebjerg in black ink.

Nancy E. Lundebjerg, MPA
Chief Executive Officer