



March 28, 2016

The Honorable Mark Kirk
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Military
Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Military
Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Kirk and Ranking Member Tester:

The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) respectfully requests your strong support for increased funding for the Medical and Prosthetic Research Program within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in FY 2017. 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 for the VA healthcare system or are affiliated with the VA, 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 the 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 requests that the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research Program be funded at \$660.9 million in FY 2017. We are requesting a \$30.2 million increase (4.8 percent) from the enacted FY 2016 level of \$630.7 million; since at least \$15 million is needed to account for biomedical research inflation to keep VA research funding at current-service levels and an additional \$15 million is needed to sustain support of research on chronic conditions of aging veterans and conditions prevalent among OIF and OEF veterans. In addition, the AGS recommends \$75 million to support the VA's Million Veteran Program.

We know that sustained and enhanced federal investments in VA research are essential to delivering high-quality, coordinated, and efficient care to our nation's growing population of aging veterans. Approximately 45 percent of the 21 million veterans in the U.S. are 65 or older, and more than 1.5 million are over age 85—including almost 700,000 surviving World War II veterans. 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 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 elderly; prosthetic limb use; safety considerations 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. The VA 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, CREATE (Collaborative Research to Enhance Transformation and Excellence), a Health Services Research and Development program, is helping push research findings into frontline care and is an integral part of evaluating new models of care delivery for the older VA population.

In addition, the VA 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.


The VA Medical and Prosthetic Research Program is committed to ground-breaking, high quality research. We are concerned that without adequate appropriations, the VA will be unable to train a new generation of investigators to deliver on the program's legacy of quality care and innovation. Congress must ensure that we can properly care for our older veterans who fought for our country across its history—past, present, and future.

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

Sincerely,



Steven R. Counsell, MD, AGSF
President



Nancy E. Lundebjerg, MPA
Chief Executive Officer