

March 19, 2018

The Honorable Charlie Dent  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Military Construction,  
Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

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

Dear Chairman Dent and Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz:

The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) respectfully requests your strong support for increased FY 2019 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 \$823 million in FY 2019**. Our recommendation mirrors the priority areas outlined in the President’s budget request for FY 2019. This includes specific funding for: collaboration with the Department of Energy (DOE) to enhance VA research with the computing capabilities and biomedical imaging expertise at DOE; \$8 million to build a backup biorepository to store the invaluable biological samples collected for the Million Veteran Program (MVP) genomics program; and funding for the Secretary’s research priority areas of mental health, pain management, MVP, and prosthetics. While the President’s request incorporates some cost of biomedical inflation (BRDPI), our recommendation ensures that the entire research budget accounts for this cost. The VA research budget has been flat-funded since 2010 due to the increasing costs of biomedical inflation.

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 2016, nearly 50 percent of the 18.5 million veterans in the U.S. were 65 or older<sup>1</sup>, and more than 1.6 million were over the age of 85<sup>2</sup>—including over 700,000 surviving World War II veterans and increasing numbers of Korean and Vietnam veterans.<sup>1</sup> The VA Medical and Prosthetic Research program aims to improve the

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<sup>1</sup> FFF: Veterans Day 2017: Nov. 11. United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2017/veterans-day.html>. Published October 12, 2017. Accessed March 14, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. [https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran\\_population.asp](https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp). Updated February 14, 2018. Accessed March 14, 2018.

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 is 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](mailto:amikhailovich@americangeriatrics.org).

Sincerely,



**Debra Saliba, MD, MPH, AGSF**  
President



**Nancy E. Lundebjerg, MPA**  
Chief Executive Officer

March 19, 2018

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
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 Moran and Ranking Member Schatz:

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**Debra Saliba, MD, MPH, AGSF**  
President



**Nancy E. Lundebjerg, MPA**  
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