

NAEVR Requests FY2006 Funding for Defense-related Eye and Vision Research

NAEVR has formally requested that “Eye and Vision Research” be added to categories eligible for peer-reviewed funding within the Congressionally-directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) within the Department of Defense (DOD). In FY2005, for example, the CDMRP program provided \$50 million of funding for research in autism, epilepsy and osteoporosis.

The CDMRP program is funded through the Military Quality of Life appropriations bill in the House, which was passed in May but did not include the list of approved research categories. The program is funded in the Senate through the DOD appropriations bill, which was not marked up by the Subcommittee prior to the August recess and will likely be considered in September. From past practice, new CDMRP research categories are often not added until the conference process between the House and Senate bills. The practical implication of the addition of “Eye and Vision Research” to the CDMRP program will be the opportunity for defense-related vision researchers to submit competing grants for funding. With greater experience with this process, grantees may then seek direct earmarks from Congress in future DOD spending bills.

A working group of ARVO members was pivotal to the development of a funding justification document, which cites three major areas of vision research most applicable to defense applications:

visual acuity, eye trauma and infection, and vision health disparities. NAEVR’s case was strengthened by a Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs finding that 15 percent of current wartime injuries relate to the eye, with optic nerve trauma the most grave condition.

ARVO Board member Dr. Bob Barlow and AUPO member Dr. John Hoepner of Syracuse College of Medicine/SUNY have advocated for NAEVR’s position with their representative, Cong. James Walsh (R-NY), chair of the Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee. Dr. Christopher Girkin of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (see AEVR Briefing story) has advocated with Senator Richard Shelby, a member of the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. Although Hill contacts have indicated that NAEVR has made a strong case, there have been an inordinate number of similar requests as various research communities seek alternative funding sources.

NAEVR is soliciting additional examples of defense-related vision research to enhance its justification, which appears on the Web site at www.eyeresearch.org. ■