NAVREF
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Statement for the Record
Submitted by the National Association of Veterans' Research and Education Foundations (NAVREF)

To the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs – Full Committee Oversight Hearing
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2026 and Fiscal Year 2027 Advance Appropriations

May 15, 2025

Dear Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Committee:

The National Association of Veterans' Research and Education Foundations (NAVREF) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record in support of robust and sustained funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) research program, and in response to the VA's FY 2026 budget request and FY 2027 advance appropriations.

NAVREF is the national nonprofit organization representing over 75 VA-affiliated nonprofit research and education corporations (NPCs), established by Congress to support VA's medical and scientific research enterprise. Our members facilitate clinical trials, recruit private sector and academic partners, and advance groundbreaking discoveries that improve the health and lives of veterans. We stand at the intersection of science, service, and public-private collaboration, helping VA translate research into real-world care.

As chair of the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA), NAVREF joins nearly 80 organizations in urging Congress to prioritize investments in the VA research program. For FY 2026, we echo FOVA's and *the Independent Budget* formal recommendation that Congress appropriate **$1.2 billion** for the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research program, **at least $100 million** for major and minor construction in VA research facilities, and **at least $25 million** for research-related Information Technology in the Office of Information and Technology (OIT) budget.

VA research is distinct in its focus, its mission, and its model. It is the only federal research program singularly focused on the health and well-being of our nation's veterans. Rooted within the largest integrated health care system in the country, VA researchers have unparalleled access to veteran-specific clinical data, longitudinal health histories, and cutting-edge informatics platforms like the Million Veteran Program (MVP)—which surpassed one million enrollees in 2023.

The discoveries that emerge from VA's Medical and Prosthetic Research program do not stop at theory—they go directly to the bedside. Over 60% of VA researchers are also VA clinicians, ensuring a tight feedback loop between scientific discovery and patient care. This unique model has yielded innovations in areas such as: suicide prevention and mental health treatments tailored for veterans; precision medicine approaches to lung cancer, spinal cord injury, and toxic exposures; gender-specific prosthetics for women veterans; and revolutionary regenerative therapies, including injectable gels for degenerative disc disease and neuro-prosthetics offering sensory feedback.

Despite these successes, the VA research program's progress is jeopardized by underinvestment in infrastructure, technology, and scientific capacity. Many VA research facilities operate in outdated, deteriorating buildings that hinder modern science. Without dedicated construction and maintenance funds, VA cannot address longstanding backlogs or meet 21st-century research needs.

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Similarly, the lack of dedicated IT funding for research cripples the program's ability to scale data-intensive science. Big data analytics, cloud computing, and secure interoperability with partners require stable and sufficient OIT funding allocated specifically for research.

Without predictable, robust funding increases that outpace biomedical inflation, VA research cannot fully meet the growing and complex needs of today's veteran population—including long COVID, Gulf War illness, post-9/11 toxic exposures, and the health impacts of military service on women.

Congress recognized the unique value of nonprofit research and education corporations (NPCs) when it authorized them to support VA's research mission. NPCs act as critical engines of innovation—facilitating public-private partnerships, enabling participation in industry-sponsored clinical trials, and accelerating translation of VA discoveries into products and practices that reach veterans faster.

NAVREF is committed to strengthening this ecosystem. Our efforts to modernize technology transfer, reduce barriers to collaboration, and streamline contracting processes help ensure VA remains a premier venue for biomedical research.

NAVREF urges the Committee to support full funding of $1.2 billion for the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research program in FY 2026, along with at least $100 million in research facility construction and at least $25 million in research IT capacity.

Veterans deserve a health care system that is as innovative as the country they served. VA research is how we deliver on that promise.

Respectfully submitted,

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