

# NAVREF NEWSLETTER



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# RASHI'S ROUNDUP!

A message  
from our CEO



## Dear Members,

As we reflect on the third quarter of this year, our NAVREF team is operating at full steam as we approach our signature event of the year – our Annual Conference in September. Our association's goal—to promote partnerships to improve veterans' health—continues to thrive thanks to your unwavering dedication and collaboration. This quarter's achievements highlight the power of collaboration, and we are confident that together, we will continue making significant strides in improving veterans' health.

Last month, our NAVREF Board convened in Kansas City for an excellent meeting, where we welcomed four new Board Members (see page 20)! A highlight of our week was sharing lunch with the local Kansas City NPC Board, where we engaged in a thoughtful conversation around the nuances of a multisite NPC and how best to engage community leaders in veteran research. A huge thanks Kansas City's Executive Director, Julie Gouda, for supporting our visit. As we begin our planning for FY25, please let us know if your site would be interested in an on-site visit with our NAVREF Board!

As we think about ways to grow and nurture our NPCs, our team is exploring opportunities related to NPC authorities for education and training. With the addition of an Associate Chief of Staff for Education to our Board (Dr. David Cennimo from the New Jersey Health Care System), NAVREF is connecting with different offices across VA to explore how we can leverage the flexibilities of the NPCs to advance VA's mission. Please let us know if your sites are supporting ongoing initiatives related to education and training or if this is an area you seek to grow. On this front, we would also like to congratulate Stephen Coombs with the Asheville NPC on a new grant from the state of North Carolina for digital literacy training for veterans to improve telehealth accessibility!

As we move towards a strong finish for FY24 with our Annual Conference in September, let's take time to celebrate and recognize the achievements of our members over the past year. I am thrilled to announce the formation of a new award – the Partnership for Progress in Veterans' Health Award. Developed in close partnership with the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC), this new award will celebrate achievement in VA-NPC-Academic Affiliate partnerships that have advanced medical research or education. While navigating these relationships can sometimes be challenging, I am inspired by what we can achieve when all diverse partners come together to support veterans in their community. Please take a minute to review all the Awards available on our Awards Portal (see page 10 for more information) – we can't wait to review the submissions.

Looking ahead, I continue to be inspired by the dedication and inspiration of each of our NPC Members. Your commitment to improving veterans' health is the cornerstone of our association's success. I look forward to seeing many of you at our Annual Conference in September and celebrating our collective achievements.

See you at the Conference!

*Rashi V. Romanoff*

# MEMBERSHIP UPDATES



Left to Right: NAVREF CEO Rashi Romanoff; NAVREF COO Hawk Tran; Dr. Sanjay Saint from the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System in Ann Arbor, MI; Dr. Alvin Powers from the VA Tennessee Valley Health Care System in Nashville, TN; Front Row: Dr. Susan Kirsch, Dr. Paula Bickford from the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa, FL, Dr. Matthew Rettig from the VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System, NAVREF Board Chair Peggy Bradley; NAVREF Board Secretary/Treasurer Leslie Hughes; CRADO Dr. Rachel Romani, NAVREF Board Vice Chair Rebecca Rosasles; Dr. Wes Ely from the VA Tennessee Valley Health Care System in Nashville, TN.

## 2024 RESEARCH WEEK KICK-OFF EVENT

This year's National VA Research Week took place from May 13-17. NAVREF was honored to attend the kick-off event with Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Denis McDonough. The live-streamed award presentation at the VA Central Office in Washington, DC recognized five exceptional investigators. The theme, "Building Community Through Research," celebrated VA researchers' contributions to the national veteran and health science communities.

NAVREF was proud to support the event and have our esteemed board members present. Congratulations to this year's awardees: Dr. Alvin Powers and Dr. Wes Ely

(VA Tennessee Valley Health Care System, Nashville, TN), Dr. Sanjay Saint (VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System, Ann Arbor, MI), Dr. Paula Bickford (James A. Haley VA Medical Center, Tampa, FL), and Dr. Matthew Rettig (VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System).

Pictured Left to Right: VA Secretary Denis McDonough, NAVREF Board Secretary/Treasurer Leslie Hughes, NAVREF Board Chair Peggy Bradley, NAVREF CEO Rashi Romanoff, NAVREF Board Vice Chair Rebecca Rosasles



# SPOTLIGHT ON CLINICAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION!



The Clinical Research Foundation, Inc., (CRF) an NPC Affiliate of Robley Rex VA Medical Center expanded their efforts to ensure maximum engagement and awareness among veterans and staff for National VA Research Week!

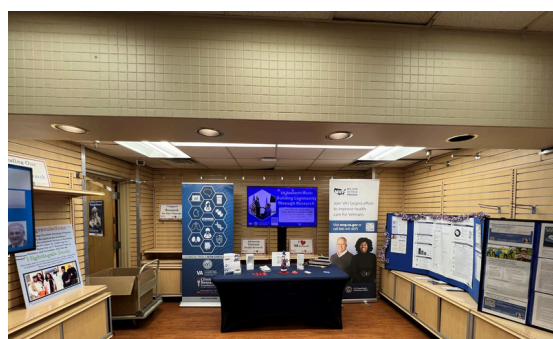
The week kicked off with a tabling event where attendees were treated to complimentary hot and iced coffee. The midweek VA2K event featured a CRF table offering complimentary refreshments and branded research water bottles. The week concluded with a Coffee Hour where attendees enjoyed complimentary coffee and cookies. This session was particularly special, featuring a research discussion led by Dr. Craig McClain and Dr. Matt Cave, who shared insights into their groundbreaking research and its significance for veterans' health.

CRF's Research Week reflects their unwavering dedication to advancing medical knowledge and improving veteran care. NAVREF is proud to highlight the exceptional work of the Clinical Research Foundation, Inc. for this year's Research Week!

Angela Churn, Research Assistant/Supporter



Left to Right: Rachael Boykins, Regulatory Coordinator; Angelia Bellaphant Streater, Program Support Assistant



# BROOKLYN'S BEST PRACTICE CONSULTATION

Left to Right: Anne Cordato; Bethanne Wenzel, Executive Director; Angie Smith, Executive Director; Alicia Drake, Executive Director

## NAVREF Provides Financial Best Practices Consultation (BPC) to Narrows Institute

NAVREF was pleased to visit with our member NPC in Brooklyn, NY for a BPC visit with the Narrows Institute for Biomedical Research. At their request, NAVREF facilitated a BPC focused on the Institute's financial operations.

Angie Smith, Executive Director of the North Florida Foundation for Research and Education (Gainesville, FL), and Alicia Drake, Executive Director of Research!Mississippi (Jackson, MS), led the consultation. They provided valuable insights and tools to help the Narrows Institute optimize their financial management.

This no-cost service is one of the ways NAVREF supports NPCs across the Department of Veteran's Affairs healthcare system. We're thrilled to have assisted the Narrows Institute and hope the consultation empowers them to achieve their organizational goals!



# NEBRA SITE VISIT

NAVREF had the pleasure of visiting the Nebraska Educational Biomedical Research Association (NEBRA) this past June, hosted by Executive Director Marti Baumert and Dr. Fred Hamel, ACOS-R.

The visit offered a valuable opportunity to:

- **Tour NEBRA's research facilities:** NAVREF gained firsthand insight into NEBRA's support of the research space.
- **Learn about NEBRA's key programs:** Discussions focused on NEBRA's most impactful programs and their future direction.
- **Engage with VA and NPC leadership:** Open communication facilitated a direct exchange of concerns and priorities to be conveyed back to Washington, D.C.

NPC visits like this are crucial for NAVREF's mission as they allow us to:

Left to Right: Marti Baumert, Executive Director; Dr. Fred Hamel, ACOS-R



- **Gain a deeper understanding of NPC capabilities**
- **Build strong relationships with NPC leadership**
- **Inform our advocacy efforts**

NAVREF encourages other NPCs to reach out and welcomes the opportunity to visit your sites to ensure continued success for VA research and education initiatives!

# NAVREF VISITS RICHMOND INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS RESEARCH

NAVREF recently had the pleasure of visiting the Richmond Institute for Veterans Research (RIVR) at the Richmond VA Medical Center. The visit highlighted the institute's innovative research and cutting-edge technology aimed at improving veterans' health.

RIVR's ongoing projects cover a broad spectrum of research and innovation, including Parkinson's and pain research, as well as advancements in prosthetics and rehabilitation. One standout project is the exoskeleton for Parkinson's Disease, led by Principal Investigator Mark Barron. This groundbreaking project assists with gait, reduces freezing episodes, and manages asymmetry.

During the visit, Dr. Hermansen introduced NAVREF to advanced prosthetics for amputee care. His work focuses on sports medicine and rehabilitation, emphasizing the institute's dedication to enhancing veterans' mobility and quality of life.

The visit was facilitated by an impressive team, including Dr. Jose Huizar, Dr. Denise Lester, MD, FASAM, Dr. John Hernandez, and RIVR's Executive Director, Sheryl Underwood. Their remarkable contributions to veteran healthcare and ongoing dedication to research were truly inspiring! Thank you for having us!



Left to Right: David Stout, NAVREF Program Support Specialist; Rashi Romanoff, NAVREF CEO; Sheryl Underwood, Executive Director; Liz Stout, NAVREF Communications and Public Policy Administrator; Hawk Tran, NAVRE COO



Exoskeleton for Parkinson's, PI Mark Barron

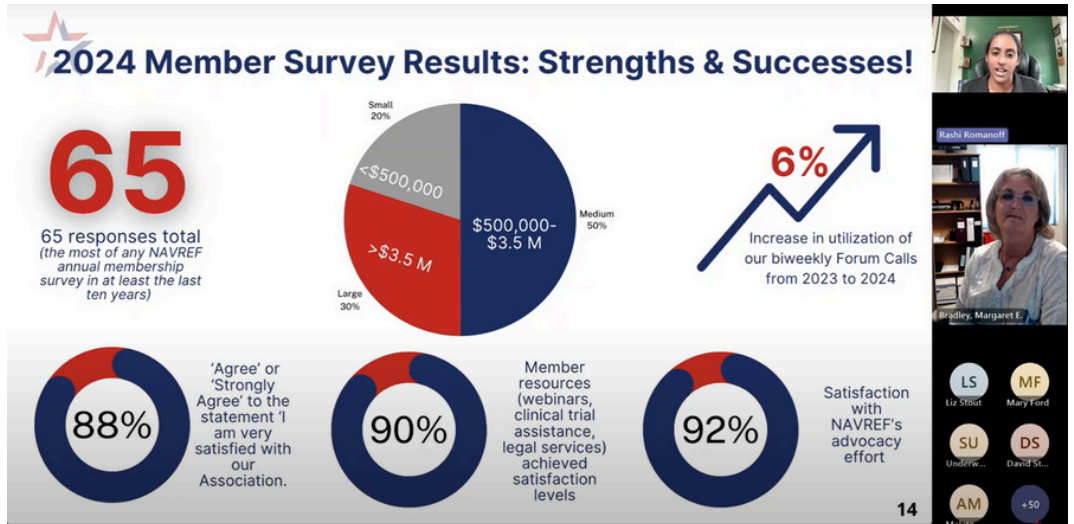


Prosthetics for Amputee Care, PI Dr. Hermansen



Naloxone Trainer, a spray training device to instruct opioid overdose

# NAVREF TOWN HALL RECAP



Thank you to everyone who attended our Town Hall Webinar on April 25th! We hope you found the session informative and appreciated the opportunity to engage directly with Peggy and Rashi.

For those who missed the webinar or would like to revisit the discussion, a recording of the session is available [here](#). Additionally, the slide deck used by the presenters can be accessed [here](#) for your reference. Both the recording and the slide deck will also be available on our website in the NPC Educational Content section.

## A NOTE FROM NPPO

Independent contractors are unable to receive WOC status, therefore, cannot work in VA research or education. They can do administrative work but not the other.

Additionally, as of July 1, 2024, the minimum salary threshold for exempt employees under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) is \$844 per week, or \$43,888 per year. This threshold will increase again on January 1, 2025, to \$1,128 per week, or \$58,656 per year.

## ASHEVILLE MEDICAL RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CORPORATION AWARDED \$500,000 DIGITAL CHAMPION GRANT

We are incredibly proud to highlight the Asheville Medical Research and Education Corporation, for being awarded \$500,000 from The Digital Champion grant program!

This substantial grant will empower veterans with access, training, and support for telehealth services and digital literacy. Through strategic partnerships, community resources, and a comprehensive outreach plan, Asheville Medical Research and

Education Corporation is ensuring the sustainability of this initiative beyond the grant funding.

The Digital Champion grant program has awarded over \$30 million to various organizations, including community service, nonprofit, higher education, and regional entities, to expand digital equity across North Carolina. This significant contribution underscores the importance of digital access and literacy in today's healthcare landscape!

# NAVREF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT



## DR. CARY ZINK

*Baltimore Research and Education Foundation*

We're thrilled to share that Dr. Cary Zink, Executive Director of Baltimore Research and Education Foundation is a newly appointed member of the National Research Advisory Council (NRAC), appointed by the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs!

NRAC is a federal advisory committee that provides guidance to the Department of Veterans Affairs on research and development activities. NRAC advises the VA Secretary and the VA Office of Research and Development (ORD) on the policies and programs of the VA's research initiatives. This includes:

- making recommendations on research priorities, strategies, and the allocation of resources
- evaluating the quality and effectiveness of VA research programs
- long-term planning of the VA's research agenda
- facilitating communication and collaboration between the VA and various stakeholders
- ensuring that VA research adheres to ethical standards and complies with relevant regulations

Dr. Zink will join for her first meeting later this month.

## CELEBRATING A HISTORIC MILESTONE: ONE MILLION REASONS EVENT

Last November, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs celebrated a historic milestone, enrolling its one millionth Veteran in the groundbreaking Million Veteran Program (MVP). This achievement makes MVP the world's largest and most diverse genetic research program within a healthcare system.

To commemorate this momentous achievement in Veteran health research and to galvanize and inspire future activities related to

MVP, NAVREF and VA are hosting a one-of-a-kind event on September 23 in Washington D.C. to celebrate and honor those who made this possible. Beyond a celebration event, "One Million Reasons" seeks to promote forward-thinking dialogue and innovative collaboration among VA, private industry, the nonprofit sector, other Federal leaders, policymakers, clinicians, and most importantly, veterans and Veteran Service Organizations (VSO).





# NAVREF MEMBERS SPOTLIGHT!

Follow us on LinkedIn to check out new stories on VA Research! Click any of these stories to learn more:



The Launch of CReATE Motion Center at Philadelphia VA Medical Center



VREF OKC's Commitment to PTSD and Alzheimer's Research



PAVIR's Innovative Research Projects for PTSD and Alzheimer's Awareness Month



Highlighting Efforts in Clinical Research Diversity: Insights from NCIRE and UCSF



Tampa VA Research & Education Foundation's Commitment to PTSD Research



Bay Pines VA Healthcare System's Pioneering Research Efforts with Bay Pines Foundation

# EDUCATION UPDATES

## 2024 ANNUAL NAVREF CONFERENCE UPDATES



We are thrilled to announce that the 32nd NAVREF Annual Conference is just around the corner! This year, our conference theme, "Passing the Torch," is crafted to ignite inspiration and empower all participants to explore boundless horizons within our unique VA research community. Much like the Olympic tradition of passing the torch, we will embark on new journeys of discovery together, propelling the VA research portfolio forward.

**REGISTER NOW**



We recently added a "Quickbooks track" to the program which will consist of structured presentation followed by 1:1 Q&A tutoring. If you want to learn more about the conference agenda, visit this [link](#).

**For the first time, we are excited to announce there will be a Career Development Award (CDA) track!** This is for young VA researchers who are early into their career and who want to learn more about the VA Research program.

## 9TH ANNUAL NAVREF AWARDS DINNER

We are also pleased to continue our "Awards for Distinguished Service & Innovation" for the ninth year. The awards dinner will recognize professional contributions by individuals to NAVREF, its member nonprofit corporations, or affiliated organizations within the fields of VA research and education.

This year, we are excited to introduce the newest award: the Partnership for Progress in Veterans' Health Award. Presented in partnership with the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), this award celebrates and honors excellence in veterans' research partnerships. It recognizes specific research initiatives that have required collaboration across a local VA Medical Center, an academic medical affiliate, and a VA-affiliated nonprofit or NPC, and/or significantly advanced veterans' health care and research.

**CLICK HERE**

**to submit your Award Nominations!**

# GRANTS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP RECAP!

From June 13-14, NAVREF hosted our Grants 101 workshop in Kansas City, Missouri. Grants are a potent tool to diversify an NPC's funding and grow its research enterprise, and our guest presenter and longtime friend of NAVREF Maggie McCarthy (presently of Baylor University) provided an exhaustive guide to effective grant-writing and grant development. Maggie covered metrics for assessing what kinds of grants your organization is ready for, the necessary platform registrations to have in order to submit grants to different funders, how to identify the grants for which your organization will be most competitive, a step-by-step for dissecting a request for proposals and writing a good budget, and a discussion of how to plan strategically for expanding your organization's capacity in the long term.

We also had the opportunity to hear the insights and experiences of the colleagues from the dozen NPCs who joined us, who were both a wealth of knowledge and a pleasure to reconnect with in person. The second installment of this grants training series is scheduled for August (more details to follow), at which our partners and sponsors for this year's Annual Conference Moss Adams will share their insights on pre- and post-award grant management.

As always, it was a pleasure to see members of our community in person, and we look forward to hearing how takeaways from the workshop are put into practice to support VA research!



Left to Right: Jim McGaffin, Administrative Officer, Robert J. Dole VAMC; Marcia Weese, Grants and Contracts Specialist, FAVER; Chloe Mullins, Grants and Projects Manager, BRINM



Left to Right: David Stout, NAVREF Program Support Specialist; Maggie McCarthy, Guest Presenter



Left to Right: Carol Meyer, ED of IMR; Adam Wehner, ED of TVAMRF; Christopher Wood, ED of DRI

# NAVREF AT THE VA IMMERSIVE SUMMIT



NAVREF CEO Rashi Romanoff

On June 11, NAVREF CEO Rashi Romanoff attended and spoke at VA's Immersive Summit in Washington, DC to highlight the opportunities across VA's NPC Network to facilitate education and training at the VA.

VA Immersive is focused on the effective implementation of emerging technology (e.g., Virtual Reality) to advance veteran health care. VA is deploying over 1,200 virtual reality (VR) headsets across more than 160 VA medical centers and outpatient clinics nationwide.

The VA Immersive program collaborates with industry, academia, and other government agencies to develop content and devices that benefit Veterans. It also focuses on enhancing the education and training of VA's learners, clinicians, and staff through VA-developed content and innovative training platforms.

VA Immersive is just one example of emerging innovations projects where the NPCs could be uniquely positioned to advance veterans health care.

# VHA-MIT HACKING MEDICINE COMPETITION

NAVREF proudly congratulates Teresa "Angie" Smith, MPH, Executive Director of the National Foundation for Functional Research and Education (NFFRE), for her outstanding achievement at the first-ever VHA-MIT Hacking Medicine Competition. Angie was part of the winning team that addressed a critical issue faced by hiring managers across the VA.

Reflecting on the experience, Angie noted, "The incredible team were strangers who met for the

first time at the hackathon and collectively put our experiences together to tackle a critical problem faced by hiring managers across VA. In under 48 hours, we isolated a significant inefficiency that plagues 35,000 hiring managers. The result was a GenAI solution that slashes the time needed to screen qualified candidates by an impressive 92% while keeping humans in complete control."

[Read the story here.](#)



Left to Right: NAVREF COO Hawk Tran; NFFRE ED Angie Smith; TVAREF ED Doug Reeder

# ADVOCACY UPDATES



Caitlin Cunningham

## NAVREF WELCOMES NEW LEGAL SPECIALISTS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SCALE LLP

NAVREF is excited to announce the addition of two legal specialists to our team, in partnership with Scale LLP. Please join us in welcoming Jacqueline Post Ladha and Caitlin Cunningham!

### Meet Caitlin Cunningham

Caitlin Cunningham specializes in corporate governance and compliance, with extensive experience in the nonprofit sector. Her expertise in crafting sound legal frameworks will ensure our members have the guidance they need to thrive in an ever-evolving legal environment.

### Meet Jacqueline Post Ladha

Jacqueline Post Ladha brings a wealth of experience in nonprofit and healthcare law. She has a proven track record of providing strategic legal counsel and navigating complex regulatory landscapes. Jacqueline's dedication to supporting nonprofit organizations aligns perfectly with NAVREF's mission to enhance the success of VA-affiliated research and education foundations.

We encourage all members to learn more about Jacqueline and Caitlin's impressive backgrounds and the services they offer by visiting our [General Counsel Services page](#).

**For any legal inquiries, please direct your questions to [Legal@navref.org](mailto:Legal@navref.org).**



Jacqueline Post Ladha

## NAVREF LEADERSHIP MEETS WITH VHA OFFICE OF HEALTHCARE AND INNOVATION LEARNING (OHIL)

In early June, the NAVREF team met for a day-long planning session with colleagues at VA's Office of Health Innovation and Learning (OHIL) to kick off a discussion around how the NPCs may be utilized to support VA Innovation Projects (pending finalization of VHA Directive 1200.17). It was a day of rich discussion, kicked off by Dr. Clancy, about the exciting opportunities that lay ahead!

Left to Right: Rashi Romanoff, NAVREF CEO; Dr. Clancy, Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Discovery, Education and Affiliate Networks; Kit Teague, Executive Director, VHA Innovation Ecosystem



# 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual NAVREF CONFERENCE Passing the Torch



## Preliminary Agenda for NAVREF Hill Day

NAVREF is returning to Capitol Hill to show Congress that VA-Affiliated Nonprofit Corporations have a voice championing the success of the VA Research Program. This bi-annual event engages legislators and their staff to learn more about the unique NAVREF community and the needs effecting broader VA research issues. Participants are prepared through a 3-part "lobbying crash-course" which includes an in-depth look at relevant legislative priorities, and mock interviews mimicking what participants may encounter on Capitol Hill during their visits.

### Tuesday, July 23rd, 1:00 PM - PREP COURSE 1

MODULE 1: Welcome and Orientation	Instructor welcome and program orientation
MODULE 2: Advocacy vs. Lobbying	Overview of Government Relations
MODULE 3: NAVREF Legislative Priorities	Presentation on NAVREF legislative priorities
MODULE 4: Quiz/Review Legislative Priorities	Checking for understanding
MODULE 5: Developing Your Narrative	Leave Behinds, Anecdotes, Story Telling
Q & A	

### Tuesday, August 27, 1:00PM - PREP COURSE 2

#### *Deep Dive into NAVREF Legislative Priorities*

MODULE 6: Setting the "Mood"	Scene setting, meeting conditions
MODULE 7: The Who	Types of staffers / likely encounters
MODULE 8: What to Look Out for	Etiquette, protocol, procedures
MODULE 9: Scenario Role Play	Mock Interviews/Prep
Q & A	

### Wednesday, September 18, 2:00PM - PREP COURSE 3

MODULE 10: Review NAVREF Leg. Priorities	Overview of legislative priorities/updates
MODULE 11: Practice Pitches	Mock interviews/dialogue
MODULE 12: Navigating the Hill	Tips on navigating the Capitol Campus
Wrap Up/Q & A	Load vehicles for transport to Capitol Hill

# CONGRESS CHRONICLES



## HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS FY25 MARKUP

### **Total Funding**

For FY25, the Department of Veterans Affairs is set to receive \$337.4 billion. This amount surpasses the FY25 Budget Request by \$75.5 million and exceeds the FY24 enacted level by \$30.2 billion.

### **Veterans' Medical Care**

A significant portion of the budget, \$112.6 billion, is allocated for veterans' medical care, fully aligning with the FY25 Budget Request.

### **Veterans' Benefits and Toxic Exposures-Related Needs**

The markup includes full funding for veterans' benefits and addresses needs related to toxic exposures for FY25. Key allocations include:

- Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF): \$22.8 billion in advance funding is dedicated to the TEF, which is crucial for addressing the health impacts associated with veterans' exposure to toxic substances during their service.

### **Medical and Prosthetic Research**

The budget allocates \$923.5 million for medical and prosthetic research and development, as authorized by chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code. This funding is available until September 30, 2026, and includes provisions to ensure:

- Sufficient amounts are allocated for prosthetic research specifically for female veterans.
- Adequate funding is directed toward toxic exposure research.

The Senate Appropriations Committee plans to hold the first markup of the Senate's FY25 funding bills the week of July 8.

NAVREF CEO Rashi Romanoff; NAVREF Communications/Public Policy Administrator Liz Stout



## NAVREF ADVOCACY UPDATES

In Q3, NAVREF has been actively engaging with key members of HVAC/SVAC committees to inform them about the external research infrastructure at VA. Some of our recent meetings include:

- Sen. Cassidy (R-LA)
- Sen. Hirono (D-HI)
- Rep. Takano (D-CA)
- Sen. Tester (D-MT)
- Sen. Hassan (D-NH)
- Rep. Bost (R-IL)
- Rep. Murphy (R-NC)
- Rep. Budzinski (D-IL)
- Rep. Miller-Meeks (R-IA)

We are also continuing to work closely with our partners on the Hill to resolve section 208.

## MILLION VETERAN PROGRAM UPDATE



### MILLION VETERAN PROGRAM

The Veterans Health Administration is now the largest integrated health care network in the United States, with 1,255 health care facilities serving 9 million enrolled Veterans each year. Since the beginning, research has been a core component of VA's work. VA conducted the first decisive trials of effective treatment for tuberculosis, developed the concept of CT scanning, demonstrated the relationship between smoking and lung cancer, and helped develop a practical, implantable cardiac pacemaker. In recent years, that research has reached new heights—thanks to more than a million Veterans who have joined MVP.

Founded in 2011, MVP's initial research studies focused on conditions like heart and kidney disease, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Gulf War Illness, and substance use. Now, more than 700 researchers use MVP data to study many health conditions, including cancers, heart disease, tinnitus, mental health conditions, and more.

The story of MVP's impact is still being written. Each year, researchers using MVP data are making groundbreaking discoveries in diverse populations—discoveries that will lead to better detection, prevention, and treatments for conditions that matter to Veterans. To learn more about MVP's research over the years, visit [www.mvp.va.gov/pwa/science](http://www.mvp.va.gov/pwa/science).



## A MESSAGE FROM VA OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL:

VA Office of General Counsel is saddened to share the passing of one of VA's STAR attorneys, Neil Nulty.

Neil graduated from Holy Cross High School in Flushing, NY before attending SUNY New Paltz. He attended Vermont School of Law, where he established a strong foundation to support his lifelong commitment to helping Veterans. Neil was a devoted public servant, having worked for VA for almost 30 years. He was a great attorney, a kind man, and wonderful person, who will be dearly missed. Donations can be made in memory of Neil to the American Cancer Society.



# TRIALS UPDATES

## WELCOME OUR NEW INDUSTRY PARTNERS!



NAVREF is excited to welcome Eli Lilly and BCG to the Industry Partner Consortium (IPC). We look forward to their valuable contributions and collaboration!

BCG Representatives:

- Harish Hemmige, President & CEO, BCG Federal Corporation
- Priya Chandran, Managing Director & Senior Partner

Eli Lilly Representatives:

- Christina Cooper, Associate Director, Clinical Research Lead
- Melissa Jacanin, Senior Director, BEACON Team

## FINDING RESEARCH GRANTS: TIPS AND TRICKS

One of the popular NAVREF member benefits is customized searches for research funding. Feel free to reach out to [Pwest@navref.org](mailto:Pwest@navref.org) if you're interested. But if you want to try your hand at searching yourself, many grant opportunities can be found with a simple internet search. Here are some tips:

- It's important to understand the research topic area and the approximate budget for the grant. Funders who provide small pilot grants typically aren't the same funders that support large, multi-year projects.
- Start by simply searching for 'grants' or 'funding' for the specific research topic area.
- One of the premier grant databases is the Foundation Directory online. It's quite expensive to subscribe, but Candid is available for public use at many universities and libraries: <https://candid.org/find-us>. NAVREF also has a subscription to the Foundation Directory, and we use this resource for our customized funding searches.
- You can sometimes find lists of funding opportunities published by nonprofits specializing in the area of interest, especially for rare diseases. Academic institutions may also publish lists of funders in specific research areas.
- Look for funders in recently published scientific articles in your research area. Funders will always be listed in the acknowledgement/disclosure section of the article.
- Charitable organizations may not publish their grant funding amounts on their website, but you search their recent Form 990 (usually publicly available) and can find a list of their grant recipients and the amounts of the grants. This can help you determine whether they're a good match for your project.

# BIO 2024 RECAP



International  
Convention



Back Row Left to Right: Pattie Cullum, Regional Technology Transfer Specialist; Tania DasBanerjee Lead VA Special Projects; Terri Hunter, Regional Technology Transfer Specialist; Richard Bodnar, Technology Transfer Specialist; Jenish Patel, Regional Lead Technology Transfer Specialist at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Front Row Left to Right: Davis Becker, Field Technology Transfer Specialist; Liz Stout, NAVREF Communications/Public Policy Administrator; Hawk Tran, NAVREF COO; Haskell Adler, Licensing Lead Veterans Affairs

NAVREF had the privilege of attending The BIO International Convention, the largest and most comprehensive event for biotechnology. This prestigious convention, held from June 3-6, brought together more than 18,500 industry leaders from across the globe, representing the full ecosystem of biotech.

In collaboration with the VA Technology Transfer Program, NAVREF met with various groups interested in conducting clinical trials at the VA. This opportunity allowed us to forge valuable connections and explore new possibilities for advancing veterans' health through innovative research.

# NEWLY ADDED INDUSTRY STUDIES AND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR NETWORK!

Study Title/Type	Sponsor/CRO	Announcement Date	Status
A Randomized, Open-label, Phase 3 Trial of Dato-DXd Plus Pembrolizumab vs Pembrolizumab Alone in Treatment-naïve Subjects With Advanced or Metastatic PD-L1 High (TPS ≥50%) Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer Without Actionable Genomic Alterations	Daiichi Sankyo	6/20/2024	Interested sites should contact Melissa.Fogarty@DaiichiSankyo.com
A Phase 3 Open-Label Study to Evaluate the Safety and Efficacy of Epcoritamab in Combination with Rituximab + Lenalidomide Compared to Lenalidomide in Subjects with Relapsed or Refractory Follicular Lymphoma	Abbvie	6/19/2024	Interested sites should contact Ernestine.Favors@abbvie.com
An Open Label, Phase 1/2 Study Evaluating Immunomodulatory AVM0703 in Patients With Lymphoid Malignancies	AVM Biotechnology	6/14/2024	Interested sites should contact Theresa Deisher at TDeisher@avmbiotech.com
A Prospective, Open-label, Randomized, Parallel-group, Phase 3 Trial of Acasunlimab (GEN1046) in Combination With Pembrolizumab Versus Docetaxel in Subjects With PD-L1 Positive Metastatic Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer After Treatment With a PD1/PD-L1 Inhibitor and Platinum-Containing Chemotherapy	Amgen	5/30/2024	Interested sites should contact Heather Griffith (hegr@genmab.com) and Hannah Reaney (hare@genmab.com)
AMG193, Methylthioadenosine (MTA) Cooperative Protein Arginine Methyltransferase 5 (PRMT5) Inhibitor, Alone and in Combination with Docetaxel in Advanced Methylthioadenosine Phosphohorvlase (MTAP)-Null Solid Tumors	Amgen	5/28/2024	Interested sites should contact Jonathan Salazer at Jonsalaz@Amgen.com

VISIT [NAVREF.ORG/CLINICAL-TRIAL-PIPELINE](https://navref.org/clinical-trial-pipeline) TO LEARN MORE

# GOVERNANCE UPDATE

## MEET OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS!



Dr. Jose Huizar

ACOS-R  
Richmond, VA



Dr. David Cennimo

ACOS-E  
East Orange  
VAMC



Dr. Chris Wood

Executive Director  
Columbia, SC  
Dorn Research  
Institute



Birgit Roller

Executive Director  
Ann Arbor, MI  
Veterans Education  
and Research  
Association

NAVREF is proud to welcome four new Directors to our Board: Jose Huizar, David Cennimo, Christopher Wood, Ph.D., and Birgit Roller!

As a membership association, we take great pride in ensuring that our Board reflects the diversity of VA's broad and growing research ecosystem. Each of these Board Members brings a wealth of experience and professional expertise that will usher in an exciting new period of growth for our organization.



Additionally, we want to give a huge thanks to the Kansas City VA Medical Center Director, Paul Hopkins, and his entire board for joining us and contributing to our Board of Directors meeting in Kansas City!

**If your site is interested in hosting a NAVREF Board Meeting, please email [htran@navref.org](mailto:htran@navref.org)!**

# VA RESEARCH IN THE NEWS

## **MVP is shifting the paradigm and expanding data access.**

MVP is currently piloting the VA Data Commons environment with 13 research groups, where researchers (VA and eventually Non-VA) will be able to access tools and pipelines to create cohorts and run GWAS on deidentified MVP data. Additionally, in 2024, MVP developed policy to expand MVP data access to more VA investigators through non-VA funding mechanisms allowing VA researchers with WOC and IPA appointments to be PIs on MVP projects. This aligns with the CRADO's priority, "Put VA data work for Veterans."

## **VA partners with DOE, NIH to provide new, diverse genetic data**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has partnered with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to identify 38,270 independent genetic variants associated with one or more health traits, a third of which were unique to non-European populations. The results of this study are universally available for further research through the National Institutes of Health (NIH), opening the door for any investigator to use the information to fast-track their own research into diverse populations typically underrepresented by scientific study. This genome-wide association study combined genetic health data from 635,969 volunteer participants in VA's Million Veteran Program (MVP) with two of the world's largest supercomputers -- DOE's Summit and Andes at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee -- to investigate links between nearly 44 million genetic variants resulting in more than 350 billion association analyses.

## **MVP using genetic data to improve Veteran care**

VA researchers in Boston created a pilot program using Million Veterans Program data to directly improve the health care of individual Veteran participants. In the MVP-Return of Actionable Genetic Results (MVP-ROAR) study, researchers recontacted MVP participants and invited them to receive genetic counseling based on their genetic risk for diseases. The pilot study focused on Veterans genetically predisposed to high cholesterol, with participants who received counseling significantly lowering their cholesterol six months after the intervention. The MVP-ROAR study marks a turning point in MVP and demonstrates the feasibility of returning genetic results to individual participants and providers.

## **VA Study Documents Health Risks for Burn Pit Exposures**

In a first-of-its-kind study, a multi-institution team of researchers led by the Providence VA Medical Center and Brown University in Rhode Island found an increased risk for respiratory and cardiovascular conditions in Veterans exposed to open burn pits. The innovative study connected declassified military deployment records with VA-documented health outcomes to form the largest group of Veterans to date to be studied in relation to burn pit exposures. The study found that for every 100 days of burn pit exposure, researchers found a 1% increased risk for asthma, a 4% increased risk of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and a 5% increased risk of ischemic stroke in Veterans with documented deployments to bases in

Afghanistan and Iraq. This group of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Veterans also had an elevated risk of developing high blood pressure. While Veterans' the increased risk for developing respiratory or cardiovascular disease may seem relatively small, the average duration of exposure was 244 days, with 86% of the study group having some burn pit exposure.

### **Health record tools can reduce clinician burnout**

VA Los Angeles researchers performed several cross-sectional analyses of a VA primary care personnel survey to find nine tools associated with lower odds of burnout. While technological burden is frequently cited as a cause of burnout, this study found those clinicians who used tools that help manage Electronic Health Records (EHR) had lower levels and less frequent symptoms of burnout. VA primary care teams have access to several internally developed tools, including a risk prediction algorithm, quality dashboards and registries, case management software, a housing instability indicator, and many more. The researchers recommended healthcare administrators carefully consider the potential workplace effects of introducing population health management tools for healthcare clinicians and trainees, but also warn of the potential for unintended increased workload related to these tools

### **Increased mental health staffing decreases Veterans' time to initiating care**

VA Boston researchers learned mental health staffing levels were the most important factor in Veterans beginning VA mental health care soon after leaving active-duty service. The study, which followed more than 54,000 Veterans recently separated from the military who had PTSD, depression, or substance use disorder, showed an increase in mental health staffing led to significantly faster initiation of mental health care. The effect of increased staffing was especially meaningful at smaller VA facilities with fewer mental health staff. Staffing had a greater effect on time to mental health care engagement than all other variables examined, including age, gender, race, driving distance, and income. The findings highlight the importance of mental health professionals' availability on Veterans' access to care.

### **Long COVID risk decreases significantly after three years**

A VA St. Louis study showed the risk of death from long COVID decreases significantly after three years. The study of more than 5 million Veterans found people who had been hospitalized with COVID-19 had a risk of death three years after infection that was 29% higher than those who did not contract COVID-19, which was significantly lower than the first year post-infection, which was 217% higher. Likewise, the risk of long COVID symptoms declined three years after infection for all COVID-19 patients, with hospitalized patients having a 34% higher risk, down from a 182% higher risk in the first year. Non-hospitalized patients only had a nominally higher risk in the third year, down from a 23% higher risk in the first year. While the findings show long COVID risks wane over time, the researchers cautioned there is still a substantial health burden for people who contract severe COVID-19.