



Written Testimony of Steven J. Breckler, Ph.D.
On behalf of the American Psychological Association

Submitted March 16th, 2010 to the
United States House of Representatives Committee on
Appropriations
Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related
Agencies
The Honorable Chet Edwards, Chair

**Fiscal Year 2011 Appropriations for the Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Dr. Steve Breckler, Executive Director for Science at the American Psychological Association (APA), a scientific and professional organization of more than 152,000 psychologists and affiliates. Many of these psychologists work within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as research scientists and clinicians committed to improving the lives of our nation's veterans.

On behalf of APA, thank you for your continued support of the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research program. APA joins the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA) coalition in urging Congress to appropriate \$700 million in FY11 for VA Medical and Prosthetic Research, which represents an increase of \$120 million over current funding, and an additional \$300 million dedicated for research facilities upgrades.

Psychological Research in the VA

A strong VA psychological research program provides the scientific foundation for high-quality care within the VA system. Through its Medical and Prosthetic Research Account, the VA funds intramural research that supports its clinical mission to care for veterans. VA psychologists play a dual role in providing care for veterans and conducting research in all areas of health, including high-priority areas particularly relevant to veterans, such as: mental health, traumatic brain injury (TBI), substance abuse, aging-related disorders and physical and psychosocial rehabilitation. VA psychologists are leaders in providing effective diagnosis and treatment for all mental health, substance use and behavioral health issues. In addition, VA psychologists often receive specialty training in

rehabilitation psychology and/or neuropsychology, which helps to improve assessment, treatment, and research on the many conditions affecting veterans of the current conflicts, including: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), burns, amputation, blindness, spinal cord injuries and polytrauma. Equally important are the profoundly positive impacts of psychological interventions on the care of veterans suffering from chronic illnesses such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, HIV and chronic pain.

VA psychologists continue to be at the forefront of cutting-edge research on, assessment of and treatment for PTSD, a particular concern within the VA and Congress. The care of veterans suffering psychological wounds as a result of military service is at the heart of the VA's mandate "to care for him who shall have borne the battle," and preventing and treating PTSD has become an even more important priority within the VA given the current conflicts overseas. VA psychologists are responsible for the development of the most widely respected and used diagnostic instruments and therapeutic techniques for assessing and treating PTSD. The current conflicts present new challenges for VA psychologists, as many veterans with PTSD have post-concussive symptoms stemming from blast injuries. Additional research is needed to develop novel treatments for PTSD in cases when cognitive problems also may stem from a history of documented TBI.

VA psychologists also have used their expertise in program development and evaluation to successfully improve the VA's coordinated service approach. This includes models and practices of care that encompass inpatient, partial hospitalization and outpatient services including psychosocial rehabilitation programs, geriatric services in the community, and homelessness programs within the VA Secretary's new emphasis. VA psychologists have initiated and evaluated innovative programs, such as tele-mental health services, that will dramatically expand the VA's continuum of care for veterans.

VA Research Facilities Upgrades

Cutting-edge research also requires cutting-edge technologies, equipment and facilities in order to both recruit stellar scientists into the VA and provide them the basic space and tools needed to conduct 21st century science. FOVA anticipates that VA's ongoing research facilities assessment will identify a need for research infrastructure funding between \$1.5 and \$2 billion. VA has simply failed to provide the resources needed to adequately maintain, upgrade and replace aging research facilities. As a member of FOVA, APA urges Congress to make a down payment in FY11 of \$300 million dedicated exclusively to renovating existing research facilities.

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