

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

March 13th, 2008

United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related
Agencies
The Honorable Chet Edwards, Chair

**Fiscal Year 2009 Appropriations for the Department of Veterans
Affairs**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Dr. Steven Breckler, Executive Director for Science at the American Psychological Association. APA is a scientific and professional organization of more than 148,000 psychologists and affiliates. Many of these psychologists work within the Department of Veterans Affairs as research scientists and as 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. Despite strong congressional support, however, the Administration has again proposed to cut the overall VA research account in FY09 by \$38 million dollars or 8 percent. In particular, the President's budget proposes significant cuts in funding for 8 of the VA's 21 Designated Research Areas, including mental health, central nervous system injury, acute and traumatic injury, and substance abuse. This would be in direct opposition to Congressional language calling for "additional research in the areas of mental health – especially the causes, prevention, mitigation, and treatment of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)...the full spectrum of traumatic brain injury [(TBI); and] substance abuse."

A strong VA psychological research program provides the scientific foundation for high-quality care within the VA system. VA psychologists play a dual role in providing care for veterans and in conducting research in all areas of health, including high-priority areas especially relevant to veterans such as mental health, brain injury, substance abuse, aging-related

disorders and physical and psychosocial rehabilitation. 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 PTSD, burns, amputation, blindness, spinal cord injuries and polytrauma. The current conflicts have presented new challenges for VA psychologists, as many veterans with PTSD have post-concussive symptoms stemming from blast injuries. Equally important are the positive impacts of psychological interventions on the care of veterans suffering from chronic illnesses such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, HIV and chronic pain.

APA joins the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research – the FOVA coalition – in urging Congress to reverse another round of cuts and appropriate \$555 million in FY09 for VA Medical and Prosthetic Research. This recommendation is echoed in the Independent Budget and the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Views and estimates. In addition to stellar scientists, cutting-edge research also requires cutting-edge technologies, equipment and facilities. VA’s Minor Construction Program has not provided the resources needed to adequately maintain, upgrade and replace aging research facilities. APA again joins FOVA in urging Congress to establish and appropriate a funding stream specifically for research facilities, with an annual appropriation of \$45 million beginning in FY09.

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.” We cannot risk being unable to serve our military personnel and veterans in this time of war, and we therefore urge the Committee and your colleagues in the Senate to reverse proposed cuts to the FY09 VA research account. Thank you.

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