

Written Testimony of Heather O'Beirne Kelly, Ph.D.  
**On behalf of the American Psychological Association**

Submitted April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009 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 2010 Appropriations for the Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Dr. Heather Kelly with the American Psychological Association (APA), a scientific and professional organization of more than 150,000 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 \$575 million in FY10 for VA Medical and Prosthetic Research, and an additional \$142 million for research facilities upgrades through the VA Minor Construction Account. To date, the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee also has recommended supporting these requests for the VA research program and research lab renovations in their recently-released Views and Estimates for FY10.

**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, homeless programs, and geriatric services in the community. 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 addition to stellar scientists. VA's Minor Construction Program has failed to provide the resources needed to adequately maintain, upgrade and replace aging research facilities. As a member of FOVA, APA urges Congress to establish and appropriate a funding stream specifically for research facilities, with an annual appropriation of \$142 million beginning in FY10.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's attention to this issue in previous years, particularly via the House Report accompanying the FY 2006 appropriations bill (P.L. 109-114), which expressed concern that

equipment and facilities to support the research program may be lacking and that some mechanism was necessary to ensure VA's research facilities remain competitive. The report noted that more resources may be required to ensure that research facilities are properly maintained to support VA's research mission. To assess VA's research facility needs, Congress directed VA to conduct a comprehensive review of its research facilities and report to Congress on the deficiencies found, along with suggestions for correction.

APA supports FOVA's request that Congress establish and appropriate a funding stream specifically for research facilities, using the VA assessment resulting from the FY 2006 report language. In the meantime, to ensure that funding is adequate to meet both immediate and long-term needs, we recommend \$142 million in the FY10 minor construction budget dedicated to research facilities improvements. This appropriation is a critical interim step to ensure VA can continue to conduct state-of-the-art research.

#### **VA Merit Review Award Caps**

APA and FOVA support the recent VA decision to raise the merit review award cap. By allowing the size of the merit awards to grow from \$125,000 to \$150,000 the VA is recognizing the increasing costs of conducting high quality research. The larger grant awards are needed to respond to research inflation, maximize productivity, foster recruitment, and speed the translation of research from the bench to the bedside. However, the welcome increase in grant size does put pressure on the VA to reduce the overall number of grants awarded. We urge the Committee to provide VA the resources needed to maintain the new grant awards while continuing to support a comparable number of grant awards.

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