

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**Veterans Health Administration**  
**Washington DC 20420**

**OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**  
**Request for Proposals**

**RESEARCH DIRECTED TO UNDERSTANDING ILLNESSES AFFECTING  
GULF WAR VETERANS**

**1. Purpose.** The Office of Research and Development (ORD) places a high priority on scientific research focused on further understanding the unexplained illnesses affecting veterans of the Gulf War (Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm; August 2, 1990 – July 31, 1991). Research focused on adverse health conditions associated with deployment to the Persian Gulf is currently funded through established programs that solicit investigator-initiated research, such as Merit Review, the Deployment Health Research Initiative, training programs (e.g., Career Development), and other programs including Cooperative Studies and the Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP).

This announcement provides an additional expanded opportunity to fund scientifically meritorious research for studies directly relevant to understanding and treating the illnesses affecting veterans who participated in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Proposals may include fully developed research studies that focus on Gulf War illnesses and potential long-term health effects of Gulf War-related exposures in several areas of interest. Additionally, this funding announcement offers an opportunity to propose innovative pilot projects focused on these topics.

**2. Eligibility.** Investigators must meet current Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) eligibility requirements at the time of submission. Current eligibility requirements are described in VHA Handbook 1200.15, Eligibility for VA Research Support. (Note: This VHA Handbook is accessible on the VA web site at: [http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=440](http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=440)) Investigators with an active Merit Review or Investigator-Initiated Research (IIR) award funded by either of the research services within ORD will be allowed to submit an additional proposal in response to this announcement.

**3. Background.** In response to Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in August 1990, the United States deployed military personnel to Southwest Asia in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. At the conclusion of the first year of operations on July 31, 1991, the United States had deployed 696,841 military personnel from all five services to the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations (KTO).

During and after their return from the KTO, a proportion of Gulf War veterans have reported a range of chronic symptoms and health problems at rates that exceeded non-deployed era veterans. These symptoms include: persistent headaches; joint pain; extreme fatigue; muscle pain; cognitive problems; gastrointestinal difficulties; and skin abnormalities.

As of November 2004, more than 30 percent of veterans who served in the 1990-1991 Gulf War had been service-connected for conditions associated with their military service, although fewer than 3,300 had been service-connected for the special “undiagnosed illness” category established for Gulf War veterans. It is recognized that there exists a much larger number of Gulf War veterans with multiple, unexplained symptoms who have not sought or received service-connected status.

To date VA, the Department of Defense (DoD), and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have funded 274 projects pertaining to the health consequences of military service in the Gulf War, as described in Annual Reports to Congress. (Past annual reports to Congress on Federally Sponsored Research on Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses are available on the VA web site at [http://www.va.gov/resdev/resources/pubs/pubs\\_individual.cfm?Category=Gulf War Reports](http://www.va.gov/resdev/resources/pubs/pubs_individual.cfm?Category=Gulf%20War%20Reports)). In addition to the Gulf War Annual Reports, several committees have explored the issues associated with the illnesses of Gulf War Veterans and provide useful background. See Appendix A for additional references.

VA has increased its support for deployment related health research over the last several years. ORD hopes that the high level of interest shown by researchers in response to the 2004 Request for Proposals (RFP) on Gulf War illness research will continue with the present announcement, resulting in proposals that will lead to further progress in understanding and treating the illnesses related to Gulf War deployment.

**4. General Scope of ORD Research Interests.** ORD will support a broad spectrum of research that focuses on Gulf War veterans’ illnesses. Research areas of interest for this RFP include epidemiologic, clinical, and laboratory studies that have the potential to make significant progress in understanding and treating Gulf War-related conditions. These include studies of: (a) long-term health effects of potentially hazardous substances to which Gulf War veterans were exposed during deployment; (b) improvements in understanding pathophysiological processes and identifying biomarkers associated with Gulf War veterans’ illnesses; (c) treatments that provide benefit for Gulf War veterans’ illnesses; (d) epidemiologic investigations of diagnosed conditions affecting Gulf War veterans; (e) studies of the health of Gulf War veterans’ family members; and (f) integration and additional utilization of currently-available data resources relating to Gulf War veterans. **Proposals for which the principal focus is on psychological stress or psychiatric conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), will not be funded under this RFP.** Proposals that

focus on these conditions will continue to be accepted through the standing merit review programs, including program announcements related to deployment health and PTSD.

The core objective of research on Gulf War veterans' illnesses is to improve the health of ill veterans. ORD will place the highest priority on research capable of making progress in accomplishing this goal. Therefore, scientifically meritorious proposals will be given priority consideration if their purpose is to: (a) Identify new treatments that provide benefit to ill veterans; (b) evaluate the effectiveness of treatments currently being used to treat ill veterans; or (c) identify and/or investigate biological mechanisms associated with Gulf War illnesses that are potentially amenable to treatment.

**5. Intent to Submit.** Information regarding intent to submit a proposal under this RFP is due April 30, 2005. The following information should be sent by electronic mail to **VHACADEReview@va.gov** from the local VA research office: (a) Principal Investigator (PI) Name, Degree, and VA appointment (in eighths); (b) VA Medical Center; and (c) Title of Research Proposal. A confirmation e-mail acknowledging receipt of intent to submit information will be sent from ORD and should be included as the last page of the full proposal when submitted.

**6. Proposal Preparation and Submission.** Although proposals may address scientific issues related to biomedical, clinical, rehabilitation, or health services research, for purposes of this solicitation investigators will comply with guidelines for a Merit Review proposal submitted to Biomedical Laboratory R&D Service or Clinical Science R&D Service, as specified in VHA Handbook 1202.1, Merit Award Program. This handbook is accessible at the following website link: [http://www.va.gov/resdev/resources/policies/docs/1202\\_Merit\\_Review\\_Handbook\\_JIT.doc](http://www.va.gov/resdev/resources/policies/docs/1202_Merit_Review_Handbook_JIT.doc)

Preliminary data, while useful, is not required for pilot projects that approach existing problems from a new perspective and/or use new avenues of investigation. However, these pilot proposals should be based on rational hypotheses derived from critical review and analysis of the literature and/or logical reasoning.

Proposals submitted in response to this RFP must be received no later than **June 30, 2005** to be considered. Proposals must be forwarded to:

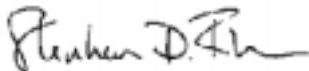
**Department of Veterans Affairs (125)  
Attn: Gulf War RFP  
810 Vermont Avenue N.W.  
Washington, DC 20420**

**7. Review.** All proposals will be evaluated on the basis of scientific quality, significance and innovation of the research question(s), rigor of the

methodological approach, feasibility, and relevance to the areas of interest and priorities identified in this announcement. All proposals will be reviewed under the standard merit review process. Proposals that specifically address issues relevant to treatments for Gulf War illnesses, as described in paragraph 4, will be given priority consideration. Proposals that do not follow stated guidelines will not be accepted for review.

**8. Funding.** Proposals may request up to three years of funding. Generally, the maximum budget for research studies will be \$200,000 per year, exclusive of the PI's salary. If a PI is eligible to receive a salary, the salary may only be included on the application if they are not already salaried from another VA source. The maximum budget for pilot projects will be \$100,000 per year, with a total duration of no more than two years. Requests may also be made to submit studies that address key priorities identified in this announcement but require higher levels of funding. Such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with their scientific merit and other criteria associated with the merit review process. Requests for budget exceptions must contain detailed justification and must be submitted with the proposal. The proposed research design is expected to be appropriate and efficient, with all budget categories well justified. In planning project budgets, applicants are reminded to adhere to ORD guidelines regarding allowable use of research funds for specific items.

**9. Inquiries.** Please direct all questions regarding this RFP including questions about areas of research investigation, eligibility, application preparation, funding, and review to Preeti Hans, (202) 254-0223 or by email to preeti.hans@va.gov.



Stephan D. Fihn, MD, MPH  
Acting Chief Research and Development Officer

Office of Research and Development  
March 28, 2005

## APPENDIX A

### GENERAL REFERENCES RELATED TO GULF WAR VETERANS' ILLNESSES

Institute of Medicine. *Gulf War and Health. Updated Literature Review of Sarin.* Washington, DC, National Academy Press; 2004.

Institute of Medicine. *Gulf War Veterans: Treating Symptoms and Syndromes.* Washington, DC, National Academy Press; 2001.

Institute of Medicine. *Protecting Those Who Serve: Strategies to Protect the Health of Deployed US Forces.* Washington DC: National Academy Press; 2000. Accessed at [www.gulflink.osd.mil/medical/ptws.pdf](http://www.gulflink.osd.mil/medical/ptws.pdf)

Institute of Medicine. *Health consequences of Service During the Persian Gulf War: Recommendations for Research and Information Systems.* Washington, DC, National Academy Press; 1996.

Joint Chiefs of Staff, Medical Readiness Division. *Force Health Protection: Healthy and Fit Force, Casualty Prevention, and Casualty Care and Management.* Washington, DC: DoD; 1999. Accessed at [www.ha.osd.mil/forcehealth/library/main.html](http://www.ha.osd.mil/forcehealth/library/main.html)

Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses. *Final Report.* Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office; December 1996. Accessed at <http://www.gulflink.osd.mil/gwvi/>

Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses. *Scientific Progress in Understanding Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses.* Washington, DC: VA; October 8, 2004. Accessed at [www.va.gov/rac-gwvi/](http://www.va.gov/rac-gwvi/)

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. *Report of the Special Investigation Unit on Gulf War Illnesses.* Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office; September 1998. Accessed at <http://veterans.senate.gov/Reports/siu.htm>

Special Oversight Board. *Final Report.* Washington, DC: DoD, December 2000. Accessed at [www.gulflink.osd.mil/oversight/](http://www.gulflink.osd.mil/oversight/)