

2024 Current Fiscal Year Report: Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

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1. Department or Agency

Department of Veterans Affairs

2. Fiscal Year

2024

3. Committee or Subcommittee

Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

3b. GSA

Committee No.

5294

4. Is this New Fiscal Year?

No

5. Current Charter

01/11/2023

6. Expected Renewal Date

01/11/2025

7. Expected Term Date

8a. Was Terminated During Fiscal Year?

No

8b. Specific Termination Authority

8c. Actual Term Date

9. Agency Recommendation for Next Fiscal Year

Continue

10a. Legislation Req to Terminate?

Not Applicable

10b. Legislation Pending?

Not Applicable

11. Establishment Authority

Statutory (Congress Created)

12. Specific Establishment Authority

Public Law 105-368

13. Effective Date

06/23/1998

14. Committee Type

Continuing

14c. Presidential?

No

15. Description of Committee

Scientific Technical Program Advisory Board

16a. Total

Number of Reports

No Reports for this Fiscal Year

17a.

Open

0

17b. Closed

0

17c. Partially Closed

0

Other Activities

0

Meetings and Dates

No Meetings

Current

FY

Next
FY

18a(1). Personnel Pmts to Non-Federal Members	\$0.00	\$0.00
18a(2). Personnel Pmts to Federal Members	\$0.00	\$0.00
18a(3). Personnel Pmts to Federal Staff	\$0.00	\$0.00
18a(4). Personnel Pmts to Non-Member Consultants	\$0.00	\$0.00
18b(1). Travel and Per Diem to Non-Federal Members	\$0.00	\$0.00
18b(2). Travel and Per Diem to Federal Members	\$0.00	\$0.00
18b(3). Travel and Per Diem to Federal Staff	\$0.00	\$0.00
18b(4). Travel and Per Diem to Non-member Consultants	\$0.00	\$0.00
18c. Other(rents,user charges, graphics, printing, mail, etc.)	\$0.00	\$0.00
18d. Total	\$0.00	\$0.00
19. Federal Staff Support Years (FTE)	0.00	0.00

20a. How does the Committee accomplish its purpose?

The Research Advisory on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Committee (RACGWVI) provides advice and makes recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (SECVA) on proposed research studies, research plans, and research strategies relating to the health consequences of military service in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the 1990-91 Gulf War. The Committee reviews all VA-funded 1990-91 Gulf War relevant research and assesses their methods, results, and implications to the field regarding the nature, causes, and treatments of Gulf War-associated illnesses. In addition, the RACGWVI staff gathers other relevant Gulf War research in the form of public manuscripts,

reviews, and book chapters and 1) posts the links as a research resource on its website, and 2) shares the information to the RACGWVI Committee, the Veterans, and other interested stakeholders. Additionally, we invite subject matter experts from academia and outside federal agencies to ensure leveraging of publicly available research plans, initiatives, strategies and activities from other agencies supporting research about the health consequences of military service in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the 1990-91 Gulf War. In FY23, the RACGWVI parent and subcommittee successfully held 4 open public meetings, held both in-person and virtually to be accessible to the public on-line and by phone. All public meetings included subject matter expert presentations and discussions to inform future committee recommendations. The Committee staff have developed an extensive marketing campaign to ensure the word gets out to all stakeholders such as Veterans and clinician and non-clinician scientists interested in joining. Additionally, the Director of Medical Center, Associate Chief of Research, public affairs offices, chaplains, and Veteran Service Organizations around the meeting location are contacted for wide spread of information. The balanced membership plan crosses all aspects of the Veterans who served during the 1990-91 Gulf War. This ensures all voices and concerns are included in all discussion.

20b. How does the Committee balance its membership?

The RACGWVI seeks to attract diverse candidates for nomination to the Committee in accordance with its Charter and Membership Balance Plan. The diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) of the RACGWVI is defined as a membership that parallels the diversity of the

1990-91 Gulf War Veterans the Committee serves that account for: gender, race, geographical reach, branch of service, service occupation and deployment and non-deployment status.

Marketing of RACGWVI nominations to attract and maintain DEI membership include: 1. Language posted in the Federal Register Solicitation of Nominations: The Committee makes every effort to ensure that the membership of this VA Federal Advisory Committee is diverse in terms of points of view represented and the Committee's capabilities. Appointments to this Committee shall be made without discrimination because of a person's race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, age, disability or genetic information. The VA Secretary seeks members who have diverse professional and personal qualifications including but not limited to subject matter experts in representation of 1990-91 Gulf War Veterans, members of the medical and scientific communities representing appropriate disciplines such as, but not limited to, epidemiology, genetics, immunology, environmental health, neurology and toxicology. 2. DEI Work Group (DEI WG): Solicitations for RACGWVI nominations are shared with the Office of Research & Development DEI WG who send notice to their DEI contacts which include leadership of Historically Black Colleges & Universities and other diverse leadership partners. To enhance unbiased communication, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Health Equity Style Guide will be consulted. This guide provides overarching principles and considerations for communicating with select populations, groups and Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) Membership Balance Plan communities using a health equity lens in order to emphasize inclusivity, recognize and respect diversity and

strengthen best practices. 3. VA Advisory Committee Management Office (ACMO): ACMO has a large contact list of community and business leaders with diverse demographic characteristics. Solicitations for RACGWVI nominations are shared with ACMO for wide distribution. 4. RACGWVI outreach. Requests for new members are announced at RACGWVI parent and subcommittee open meetings as Gulf War Veteran and subject matter expert participants match the diverse landscape of the representative population of focus, 1990-91 Gulf War Veterans.

20c. How frequent and relevant are the Committee Meetings?

RACGWVI held a total of 4 open public meetings in FY23: 2 full committee meetings and 2 subcommittee VES, all held both in-person and virtual to maintain openness and transparency. RACGWVI is critical for VHA and the VA Office of Research and Development's mission and strategic priorities, staying current on published research on GWI, VA and non-VA research and health initiatives, and ORD program initiatives. Evidence-based research is supported with the goal of improving quality of life for GWV and filling knowledge gaps in the area of exposures and health outcomes. Veteran outreach has been a priority to gain attention of GWV nationwide to stay current on their changing health and health care needs to inform future VA research. Collaborative efforts have also been a priority, reaching out to both VA and non-VA subject matter experts with the goal of looking for opportunities to leverage existing resources, build on current research, and expedite implementation of GWV research into clinical practice. The first RACGWVI meeting in FY23 included updates on the VA Gulf War Research Program,

Intergenerational Effects of Military Exposures Working Group, Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) and the VA Million Veteran Program (MVP). In addition, the committee received information on VA research processes and protections to better inform non-VA members. A report on recent findings from VA funded research on acute exercise tolerance among Veterans with GWI was also presented. A 1990-91 GWV was invited to share his historical perspective on Gulf War Research and another 1990-91 GWV committee member presented a Veteran-centric overview on military exposures during their active-duty service. A military exposures roundtable discussion followed with all 1990-91 GWV committee members and the GWV invited guest, with the goal of giving the committee more knowledge about the GWV experience and health effects to better facilitate and expedite GWI research in this area. VA Senior Leadership, Mr. Guy Kiyokawa, Acting Deputy Secretary, attended the second parent meeting in FY23. Also a 1990-91 Gulf War Veteran, he identified with the frustration of both doctors and patients in trying to identify and diagnose early cases of what is now called GWI while working at Walter Reed Medical Center. He described the benefits of the PACT Act for GWVs and the need to expand outreach to reach more Veterans eligible for these benefits and to participate in VA research. Meeting discussion also included presentations by subject matter experts to inform committee recommendations on leveraging existing resources, including the DoD Serum Repository and Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) biological technologies, VA SHIELD biorepository and VA QUERI Research Initiatives Program. Additional presentations included topics of interest to GWVs on sleep

apnea and an update on the ICD-10 diagnostic code for GWI. The second day of this meeting was dedicated to committee discussion on topics for proposed committee recommendations to the SECVA, with the committee expressing their unanimous support of the ICD-10 code for Gulf War Illness. In FY23, 2 parent committee meetings were held and 2 subcommittee meetings were held. These meetings supported the VA and RACGWVI missions to communicate with all stakeholders, to provide clear and transparent information, build and maintain trust with GWVs, their family members and caregivers, and support world class customer service for Veterans struggling with health consequences of toxic exposures. RACGWVI, in line with VA strategic priorities, continues to strive towards excellence in all respects to improve experiences, satisfaction rates, accountability and security for Veterans. The RACGWVI subcommittee's continued outreach through VES facilitate GWV faith that they have a safe platform to voice their health and VA health care needs and concerns. The VES are a clear demonstration that VA ICARE and WECARE values have enabled trustful relationships between RACGWVI and GWV.

20d. Why can't the advice or information this committee provides be obtained elsewhere?

The formation of this Committee is required under Section 104 of Public Law 105-368. The Committee's revered expert membership provides a strategic mix of public/private scientific expertise and advocacy for Gulf War Veterans that is not available within or outside the Department.

20e. Why is it necessary to close and/or partially closed committee meetings?

All meetings are open to the public.

21. Remarks

In FY23, a Chair and Vice-Chair were appointed to the RACGWVI. FY23, continued to execute-or implemented new approved recommendations from prior years.

Designated Federal Officer

Karen L. Block Health Science Officer

Committee Members	Start	End	Occupation	Member Designation
				Special Government
Brown, Ronald	04/01/2022	03/31/2025	Gulf War Veteran	Employee (SGE) Member Special Government
Gaard, Richard	10/01/2019	09/30/2024	Col Veteran West Point	Employee (SGE) Member Special Government
Helmer, Drew	09/01/2020	08/31/2025	Deputy Director of the Center for Innovations in Quality, Effectiveness, and Safety (IQuEST)	Regular Government Employee (RGE) Member Special Government
Mathers, Thomas	04/01/2022	03/31/2025	Gulf War Veteran	Employee (SGE) Member Special Government
Metcalf-Foster, Delphine	04/01/2022	03/31/2025	Gulf War Veteran	Employee (SGE) Member Special Government
Ramos, Kenneth	10/01/2022	09/30/2024	Professor of Translational Medical Sciences, Texas A&M University	Special Government Employee (SGE) Member Special Government
Smith, Sonya	04/01/2022	03/31/2025	Gulf War Veteran	Employee (SGE) Member

Symanski, Elaine	04/01/2022	03/31/2025	Environmental Health Research Scientist	Special Government Employee (SGE) Member
Walker, Cheryl	10/01/2022	09/30/2024	Professor, Baylor College of Medicine	Special Government Employee (SGE) Member
Ward, Barbara	10/01/2019	09/30/2024	Vietnam Veteran	Special Government Employee (SGE) Member
Wasvick, Jane	09/01/2020	08/31/2025	Retired, Licensed RN	Special Government Employee (SGE) Member
Watts, William	10/01/2019	09/30/2024	Gulf War Veteran	Special Government Employee (SGE) Member
Woody, James	10/01/2019	09/30/2024	Captain Gulf War Veteran	Special Government Employee (SGE) Member

Number of Committee Members Listed: 13

Narrative Description

The Committee provides on-going information to VA leadership regarding research findings related to Gulf War Veterans' illnesses and quality of life issues. This process takes place through Committee meetings where recommendations are adopted, through communication between the Committee and VA officials where the content of these meetings is discussed, and through formal reports. This material informs and advises VA leadership with the goal of improving patient care of ill Gulf War Veterans through evidence- and implementation-research. The reporting also addresses lessons learned from Gulf War Veterans' illnesses that are applicable to current and future troop deployments and thus the future execution of the Department's mission. In addition, the Committee provides a channel for Gulf War Veterans and other members of the public to communicate their views and insights into

Gulf War research and the experience of living with Gulf War illness.

What are the most significant program outcomes associated with this committee?

	Checked if Applies
Improvements to health or safety	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Trust in government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Major policy changes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advance in scientific research	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Effective grant making	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved service delivery	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Increased customer satisfaction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Implementation of laws or regulatory requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Outcome Comments

NA

What are the cost savings associated with this committee?

	Checked if Applies
None	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Unable to Determine	<input type="checkbox"/>
Under \$100,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$100,000 - \$500,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$500,001 - \$1,000,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$1,000,001 - \$5,000,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$5,000,001 - \$10,000,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over \$10,000,000	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cost Savings Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Cost Savings Comments

NA

What is the approximate Number of recommendations produced by this committee for the life of the committee?

Number of Recommendations Comments

This is a total of recommendations for FY 2003 through FY 2023.

What is the approximate Percentage of these recommendations that have been or will be Fully implemented by the agency?

70%

% of Recommendations Fully Implemented Comments

2022 Recommendations are concurred.

What is the approximate Percentage of these recommendations that have been or will be Partially implemented by the agency?

30%

% of Recommendations Partially Implemented Comments

It should be noted a substantial portion of the recommendations from previous years cannot be fully implemented by VA because they call for joint DoD/VA actions, actions to be taken only by other intra-VA departments, actions to be taken by DoD only, or actions to be taken by Congress. The most current recommendations were VA program only and are in the process of implementation.

Does the agency provide the committee with feedback regarding actions taken to implement recommendations or advice offered?

Yes ☒ No ☐ Not Applicable ☐

Agency Feedback Comments

Feedback is provided to the Committee through a variety of mechanisms, including written responses, follow up briefings by senior VA officials and other federal program managers, oral presentations at Committee meetings, and telephone conference calls.

What other actions has the agency taken as a result of the committee's advice or recommendation?

Checked if Applies

Reorganized Priorities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Reallocated resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Issued new regulation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Proposed legislation	<input type="checkbox"/>

Approved grants or other payments

☐

Other

☐

Action Comments

NA

Is the Committee engaged in the review of applications for grants?

No

Grant Review Comments

NA

How is access provided to the information for the Committee's documentation?

Checked if Applies

Contact DFO

☒

Online Agency Web Site

☒

Online Committee Web Site

☒

Online GSA FACA Web Site

☒

Publications

☒

Other

☐

Access Comments

N/A