

Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

2016 Recommendations

*The Committee recommends VA:*

- **Update the ORD Gulf War Research Strategic Plan for 2018 – 2022.** The strategic plan should continue prioritizing the development of effective therapeutic interventions and management strategies for Gulf War illness (GWI). Unaddressed research directions to consider should include investigation of potential risk factors, biomarkers and treatments for long-latency health conditions (e.g., neurodegenerative diseases and cancers); the use and/or development of technology for understanding and treating health conditions relevant to Gulf War Veterans; studies that disaggregate Veteran sub-groups, such as by sex and ethnicity. The plan should enable tracking of progress toward its goals and take a strategic approach to leveraging VA resources. Additionally, the plan should develop in consultation with the RAC-GWVI and other relevant stakeholders, such as VA's Office of Post-Deployment Health Services.
- **Establish a national hub-and-spoke coordinated system of centers within VHA that integrates research and clinical care in a way that meets Veterans' health care needs and advances knowledge of complex chronic conditions of post-deployment.** The system should have a presence at the national, VISN and local levels but function as an integrated research and care network committed to improving by continuously learning. Success will require effectively using data from disparate sources and forming strategic partnerships so that VA can fully serve Veterans in understanding and caring for post-deployment health conditions, an area where VA is uniquely positioned to lead. Further details are outlined in Appendix C of the RAC-GWVI 2016 Annual Report.
- **Actively seek strategic partnerships by raising awareness of or creating mechanisms for non-VA entities to collaborate with VA investigators in order to enhance research capabilities and incorporate cutting-edge methodologies into Gulf War research.**
- **Form a working group tasked with identifying barriers to recruiting research participants for Gulf War-relevant studies and developing solutions to overcome these challenges.**
- **Develop an approach/guidance to address comparison group (e.g., deployment status) issues and limitations of ICD-9/10 code usage. A major limitation of the ICD-9/10 codes from a research perspective is that GWI does not have a unique code.**