

REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive announces programmatic changes in the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D).

2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES: Primary changes include:

a. A major revision to the RR&D Mission Statement. The revised statement broadens the previous version by adding language to more accurately describe the main focus of RR&D.

b. Incorporates the newly created RR&D Vision Statement, which describes the fundamental purpose of RR&D.

c. Name change to the RR&D Center program award. It removes the word “excellence” in the title. The impetus relates to avoid confusion with the numerous Centers of Excellence that exist in VHA, the Department of Defense, and elsewhere in the Federal Government.

3. RELATED ISSUES: VHA Directive 1200, VHA Handbook 1200.01, VHA Handbook 1200.2, VHA Handbook 1203.01.

4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: The Office of Research and Development (10P9) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions may be addressed to 202-443-5600.

5. RESCISSION: VHA Directive 1203, dated July 9, 2008, is rescinded.

6. RECERTIFICATION: This VHA Directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of February 2021.

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1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive provides an overview of policy for programs of the Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D), and serves as a guide to additional sources for program-specific information and procedures. **AUTHORITY:** 38 U.S.C. 7303.

2. BACKGROUND

a. RR&D in VHA is an intramural program administered by the Office of Research and Development (ORD) and conducted at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities nationwide under the authority of Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.), 7303 (see VHA Directive 1200).

b. RR&D's mission is to generate knowledge and innovations to advance the rehabilitative health and care of Veterans and the Nation. In support of this mission, RR&D strives to effectively integrate preclinical, clinical, and applied rehabilitation research and translate research results into practice. In accordance with this mission, RR&D goals are to:

(1) Sustain a superior environment of inquiry conducive to the highest quality research, education, and patient care.

(2) Capitalize on VHA's value as a national research asset.

(3) Lead and manage an effective and efficient rehabilitation research enterprise.

(4) Increase awareness and understanding of VHA's research contributions in the field of rehabilitation.

c. RR&D's vision is to maximize the physical and social autonomy of Veterans and ultimately the general population through innovative research that repairs injured organs and tissues, brings basic discoveries to clinical use, replaces using prosthetics, orthotics, and assistive devices what cannot be repaired, restores physiological function, and enhances social integration.

d. Values guiding all RR&D efforts include: scientific excellence, the ethical conduct of research, protection of human subjects, and animal welfare. The RR&D program spans the continuum from pre-clinical research through the translation of research into rehabilitative health care practice, and emphasizes the Veteran's health concerns.

e. VA/ORD makes research awards to its investigators. VHA ORD does not have the statutory authority to make research grants to colleges and universities, cities and states, or any other non-VA entities. Contracts may be utilized to obtain special services not available in VA. See VHA Handbook 1200.2.

f. VA investigators may obtain funding support for their research from extramural sources, such as: other Federal agencies, private voluntary health organizations and foundations, as well as commercial entities.

g. Letters of Intent (LOI) or research proposals received by RR&D that are determined to be more appropriate for review by another ORD Service may be transferred to that ORD Service to ensure appropriate placement and peer review. The ORD Service accepting review responsibility must notify the applicant. The LOI or research proposal must be reviewed in accordance with procedures applicable to the reviewing Service.

3. POLICY

It is VHA policy that ORD allocate appropriated research funds to VA medical facilities for scientifically meritorious research related to the high priority health care needs of Veterans to be conducted by VA employees. **NOTE:** *The requirements of any policies and operational procedures formulated in conjunction with this VHA Directive apply to all RR&D activities conducted at VA facilities and/or by VA investigators, whether funded by VA or by other sources, or unfunded.*

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Chief Research and Development Officer.** The Chief Research and Development Officer (CRADO) is responsible for the overall policy, planning, coordination, and direction of all Research and Development (R&D) activities within VHA. See VHA Directive 1200.

b. **Director, RR&D.** The Director, RR&D, has overall authority and responsibility to direct, plan, and manage the ongoing operations of the Service and is responsible to the CRADO, through the Deputy CRADO, for maximizing the physical and social autonomy of Veterans and ultimately the general population through innovative research that repairs injured organs and tissues, bringing basic discoveries to clinical use, replacing using prosthetics, orthotics and assistive devices what cannot be repaired, restoring physiological function, and enhancing social integration.

c. **VA Medical Facility Director.** The VA medical facility Director, acting in the capacity of the Institutional Official, is responsible for ensuring the R&D Committee, the Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for R&D or Coordinator for R&D (C for R&D), Administrative Officer (AO) for R&D, and the Veterinary Medical Officer follow the policies and procedures defined in VHA Handbook 1200.01.

5. DEFINITIONS

a. **Career Development Program.** The ORD Research Career Development (RCD) Program is an award series under which both clinically and non-clinically trained researchers may gain mentored research and protected time intended to advance awardees toward independence as funded VA investigators. The fundamental objective of the RR&D RCD Program is to attract, develop, and retain talented researchers. This will enable capacity building for VA to conduct research in areas of high relevance to the

VHA healthcare system and fulfill its primary mission of patient care, supported by appropriate research and education. See VHA Handbook 1200.4.

b. **Magnuson Award.** Paul B. Magnuson, M.D., was a bone and joint surgeon who continuously sought new treatments and devices for assisting his patients as they faced unique situations presented by their disability. The Magnuson award was established in 1998 in recognition of the importance of rehabilitation research within the VA healthcare system. It is the highest honor for VA rehabilitation investigators. It consists of a one-time cash award to the recipient, supplemental funding for ongoing peer-reviewed research, and a celebratory plaque. The award is presented annually to a VA RR&D investigator who exemplifies the entrepreneurship, humanitarianism, and dedication to Veterans displayed by Dr. Magnuson during his career. The award is presented by the RR&D Director or designee at an appropriate scientific meeting or event. See VHA Handbook 1203.06.

c. **Merit Review Program.** The RR&D Investigator Initiated Research (IIR) Merit Review Program is the principal mechanism for competitive funding of VA rehabilitation research. VHA Handbook 1203.01 provides policy and guidance related to RR&D Merit Review program and submission of IIR Merit Review proposals.

d. **Research Career Scientist Program.** The RR&D Research Career Scientist (RCS) Program is a highly selective program designed to sustain and enhance the research careers of established non-clinician scientists who have demonstrated commitment to VA rehabilitation research. The program is intended to provide recognition and research support for non-clinician scientists in VA. Non-clinician scientists contribute to the VA research programs by sharing scientific knowledge, as well as serving as mentors for clinician and non-clinician investigators. They provide an important expertise that complements the research programs of the clinical staff. See VHA Handbook 1203.3.

e. **Research Enhancement Award Program.** The goal of this program is to increase RR&D's capacity by assisting VA sites that show promise, as demonstrated by a history of RR&D peer reviewed research and career development funding but do not have a co-located RR&D CoE with similar research objectives. Funds provided under this program are for maintaining or creating a core program of investigators to support and facilitate the development of RR&D research projects and the training and mentoring of early career stage RR&D investigators. See VHA Handbook 1203.7.

f. **RR&D Centers.** RR&D Centers are established in VA medical facilities to conduct R&D in areas of special relevance to the rehabilitative health care needs of Veterans. They are selected competitively, based upon scientific review and the specific criteria and procedures outlined in the solicitation for proposals. RR&D Centers are intended to be a resource, first, for the Veterans served by VA and, second, for the rehabilitation community at large. They are expected to provide cutting edge solutions to the issues of chronic impairment. It is anticipated that Centers will establish and cultivate a community of VA clinical scientists and scholars within the VA health care system for the purpose of pursuing specific research objectives in accordance with a well-reasoned 5-year plan. See VHA Handbook 1203.04.

g. **Small Projects in Rehabilitation Research Program.** Small Projects in Rehabilitation Research (SPiRE) Awards are RR&D's mechanism for funding research that is smaller in scope (i.e., less time and resource intensive). SPiRE projects are expected to support research that is more appropriately executed through shorter and smaller investigations. These applications may include those that are high risk, but have high potential impact, applications from early career stage investigators, as well as senior investigators seeking to explore avenues of research outside of their current area of study. Preference is given to scientifically sound applications from early career stage investigators. Preliminary data are not a prerequisite for submission. See RR&D VHA Handbook 1203.01 for additional information.