

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
CHARTER OF THE
RESEARCH ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON
GULF WAR VETERANS' ILLNESSES**

A. OFFICIAL DESIGNATION: Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses (RACGWVI).

B. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF ACTIVITY: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses (the Committee) shall provide advice and make recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs 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 Persian Gulf War.

The guiding principle for the work of the Committee shall be the premise that the fundamental goal of Gulf War-related government research is to ultimately improve the health of ill Gulf War veterans, either through basic research, the goal of which is to increase understanding, or applied research, and that the choice and success of research efforts shall be judged accordingly.

The Committee shall review all relevant research, investigations, and processes for funding research conducted previously and assess their methods, results, and implications as a starting point. The Committee shall review all proposed federal research plans, initiatives, procurements, grant programs, and other activities in support of research projects on Gulf War-associated illnesses and assess the individual projects and the overall effectiveness of government research to answer the central questions on the nature, causes, and treatments of Gulf War-associated illnesses. The Committee, consistent with law, shall have access to all VA documents and other sources of information it finds potentially relevant to such reviews. It shall not be a function of the Committee to conduct scientific research.

Topics which the Committee may review and on which it may advise the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and provide him oversight of the Research Working Group (RWG) of the Military and Veterans Health Coordinating Board include but are not limited to:

- Assessment of the state and direction of research;
- Identification of gaps in factual knowledge and conceptual understanding;
- Identification of testable hypotheses;
- Identification of potential research approaches;
- Review of developing research concepts;
- Collection and dissemination of peer-reviewed research information;
- Assurance that appropriate peer-review and oversight are applied to research conducted and/or sponsored by the Federal Government;
- Recommendations to RWG member Departments and Agencies on research funding based on programmatic needs.

The Committee shall be comprised of members of the general public, including Gulf War veterans, the representatives of such veterans, and members of the medical and scientific communities representing appropriate disciplines such as, but not limited to, biomedicine, epidemiology, immunology, environmental health, neurology, and toxicology. Membership of veterans and their representatives shall be based on the members' abilities to represent the broad health concerns of Gulf War veterans. Close attention will be given to equitable geographic distribution and to ethnic and gender representation. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may appoint non-U.S. citizens as committee members to take advantage of their special experience or specialties.

Members shall be appointed for overlapping three-year terms. Initially, members will be appointed for two- or three-year terms. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may renew the terms of members. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall appoint the chairperson of the Committee. The term of office for the chairperson shall be two years, also renewable by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The Committee may establish subcommittees to study and evaluate particular aspects of the subject. The Committee chair shall notify the Secretary upon the establishment of any subcommittee, including its name, members (including subcommittee chair), function, estimated duration, and estimated meeting frequency.

As a part of its function, the Committee may accept input from all sections of society including public and private organizations, especially Gulf War veterans and their representatives.

The Committee may, at the discretion of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, establish a panel of experts from the U.S. or abroad, representing appropriate medical and scientific disciplines. Panelists will be nominated by the Committee chairperson and appointed to the panel on a continuing basis by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. They may be called on by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for advice and consultation, and may advise the Committee on research or conduct other appropriate activities for the Committee, at the request of the Committee chairperson. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may in writing delegate to the Committee chairperson authority to appoint panelists. Panelists shall report directly to the Chairperson or such Committee members designated by the Chairperson, but they shall not be members of the Committee.

The Committee shall advise the chairperson, Research Working Group of the Military and Veterans Health Coordinating Board, of its findings.

C. PERIOD OF TIME NECESSARY FOR THE COMMITTEE TO CARRY OUT ITS PURPOSE(S): The Committee is governed by the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), Public Law 92-463, as amended (5 U.S.C. Appendix 2). The formation of this Committee is required under section 104 of Public Law 105-368. As a statutory body, the Committee is a continuing body with no termination date.

D. OFFICIAL TO WHOM THE COMMITTEE REPORTS: The Committee will provide advice and make recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

E. AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING COMMITTEE SUPPORT: The Department of Veterans Affairs will provide support for the committee. To the extent permitted by law, and subject to availability of Department of Veterans Affairs appropriations, the Secretary shall designate the accounts from which the funding shall be provided. A VA manager selected by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide committee management, under the direction of the Committee chairperson. In addition, technical support for the Committee shall be provided by a staff that reports to the Committee chairperson, who may appoint a technical director from the staff to supervise its operation. Staff members may be VA employees, employees of other government agencies, or independent agents employed as temporary VA employees.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, to the extent provided by law, seek support from other Federal agencies and Executive Departments to provide the Committee with information and research findings as it may require for purposes of carrying out its functions.

F. DUTIES FOR WHICH THE COMMITTEE IS RESPONSIBLE: By December 1 of each year, the Committee shall provide to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs an annual report summarizing its activities for the preceding year. Providing funds are available, the Committee is authorized to develop additional reports or other materials. To augment the expertise of the Committee, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may, at the request of the chairperson of the Committee, contract through VA for the services of non-governmental consultants who may prepare reports and background papers or prepare other materials for consideration by the Committee, as appropriate.

Reports by the Committee on specific issues shall be submitted to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and other appropriate entities as directed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The Committee, as directed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, may request specific responses to its recommendations from the RWG, and such responses should be provided to the Committee within 30 days of publication of such recommendations.

To avoid duplication of effort, the Committee is encouraged to review deliberations of other entities with government oversight responsibilities related to Gulf War veterans' illnesses. The Committee may incorporate or otherwise use the results of the deliberations of such entities, as it deems appropriate.

G. ESTIMATED ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS IN DOLLARS AND STAFF-YEARS: The estimated annual cost for operating the Committee and its support staff is \$400,000 and 4 FTE. Members may be compensated at a rate not to exceed the maximum amount authorized by 5 U.S.C. 3109, plus per diem and travel expenses in accordance with standard Government travel regulations.

H. ESTIMATED NUMBER AND FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS: Meetings of the Committee shall occur not less than twice annually at the call of the chairperson.

Meetings of the subcommittee(s) shall be convened as necessary. A federal government official shall be present at all meetings.

Meetings of the Committee shall be open to the public. Occasionally, the Committee may want to close all or part of a meeting. These exceptions will be handled in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 552b. Advance notice of all meetings of the Committee shall be given to the public through publication of a notice in the Federal Register.

Meetings shall be conducted, and records of proceedings kept, as required by applicable laws and regulations.

I. COMMITTEE TERMINATION DATE: Authorized by law for an indefinite period, the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses has no termination date.

J. DATE CHARTER IS FILED:

APPROVED: Signed by Anthony J. Principi
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Date: 1/23/2002