

RACGWVI: Recommendations Update



Karen Block, PhD
Designated Federal Officer

Veterans Health Administration

P.L. 117-168: Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022



Draft - Pre-Decisional Deliberative Document
Internal VA Use Only



VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

Section 501: Toxic Exposure Research Working Group (TERWG)

***Karen Block, Ph.D., VA Co-Chair TERWG**

Office of Research and Development



Section 501: Toxic Exposure Research Working Group (TERWG)

YEAR 1 (FY2023)

Legislative Requirements

- Establish a federal wide ‘working group’ consisting of employees of VA, DOD, EPA, HHS and other entities involved in research activities regarding the health consequences of toxic exposures experienced during active military.

Approach

- Leverage multi-disciplinary subject matter experts, technologies, data, and biospecimens across the Federal agencies.
- Socialized the PACT Act SEC. 501 charge and needs with mission-aligned Federal agencies with the goal of establishing collaborations in research activities regarding the health consequences of toxic exposures experienced during active military.
- Partnered with Executive Office of the President (EoP)/Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), National Science and Technology Council’s (NSTC’s), Joint Subcommittee on Environment, Innovation and Public Health (JEEP) to leverage broad toxic exposure expertise, infrastructure, and resource capabilities across the Federal family.



VA



U.S. Department
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Toxic Exposure Research Working Group (TERWG)

~40 SMEs and representatives from 8 Federal Departments

Co-Chairs

Karen Block, Director Gulf War Research, Veterans Health Administration, ORD

Benjamin Place, Assistant Director for Environmental Health, OSTP [2023 – 2024]

Paul South, Assistant Director for Environmental Health, OSTP [2024 – Present]

Thomas Sussan, Chief, Toxicity Evaluation Division, Defense Health Agency - Public Health

Melanie Buser, Health Scientist, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

David Balshaw, HHS/NIH/NIEHS

Michelle Buchanan, DOE

Shae Buchanan, VA/VBA/MET

Antonia Calafat, HHS, CDC

Joel T Culpepper, VA/VHA/HOME

Maria Carolina Gonzalez-Prats, VA/VBA

Kathie Dionisio, EPA/ORD

Annette Guiseppi-Elie, EPA/ORD

Kim Heermann-Do, VA/FEHRM

Grant Huang, VA/VHA/ORD

Steven P Jones, DOD/OASD-HA

Kaitlin Kelly-Reif, HHS/CDC/NIOSH

Kathryn Kundrod, EOP/OSTP/JEEP

Carmine S Leggett, EOP/OMB

Michael Lewin-Smith, DOD/JPC

Ruth M Lunn, HHS/NIH/NIEHS

Coty Maypole, DOD/DHA

Suril Mehta, HHS/NIH/NIEHS

Sri Nadadur, HHS/NIH/NIEHS

Patricia Passman, DOD/ASD-R

Molini Patel, DOS

Charles Pitrat, DOD/DHA

Pamela Protzel-Berman, CDC/ASTDR

Christopher M Reh, CDC/ASTDR

Jessica Reiner, DOC/NIST

Catherine Rimmer, DOC/NIST

Rudolph P Rull, DOD/NHRC

Peter Rumm, VA/VHA/HOME

Carla Ryan, VA/VBA/MET

Patricia Underwood, DOD/OASD/EI&E

Natalia Vinas, DOD/OASD/EI&E

Christine Whittaker, HHS/CDC/NIOSH

Marc Williams, DOD/DHA

Jody R Wireman, DOD/OASD-HA

Joey Zhou, DOE/EHSS

Executive Admin

Marsha Turner, Health System Specialist, Veterans Health Administration, ORD

Technical Writer

Daniel Sloper, Technical Writer-Editor, Veterans Health Administration, ORD



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Toxic Exposure Research Working Group (TERWG) (Planning Phase)

YEAR 2 (FY2024)

Legislative Requirements

- (1)** Identify collaborative research activities and resources available among entities represented by members of the Working Group to conduct such collaborative research activities.
- (2)** Develop a five-year strategic plan for such entities to carry out collaborative research activities.
- (3)** Reporting: SECVA submit to the SVAC and HVAC a report containing the collaborative research activities identified and the strategic plan developed by the working group. **Due: August 10, 2024**

Approach:

- VA and DOD military exposures research and initiatives were presented to the TERWG.
- Key research gaps were identified.
- Non-military mission aligned exposures research was discussed and outside efforts were highlighted.
- A landscape synthesis of trusted resources and capabilities across the TERWG representatives was conducted.
- Report 2: The TERWG 5-year interagency strategic plan has been finalized.
- Concurrence status (*as of June 26, 2024*):
 - Completed OSTP / Joint Subcommittee on Environment, Innovation and Public Health agency-level clearance.
 - Undergoing concurrent OSTP and VA level clearance.



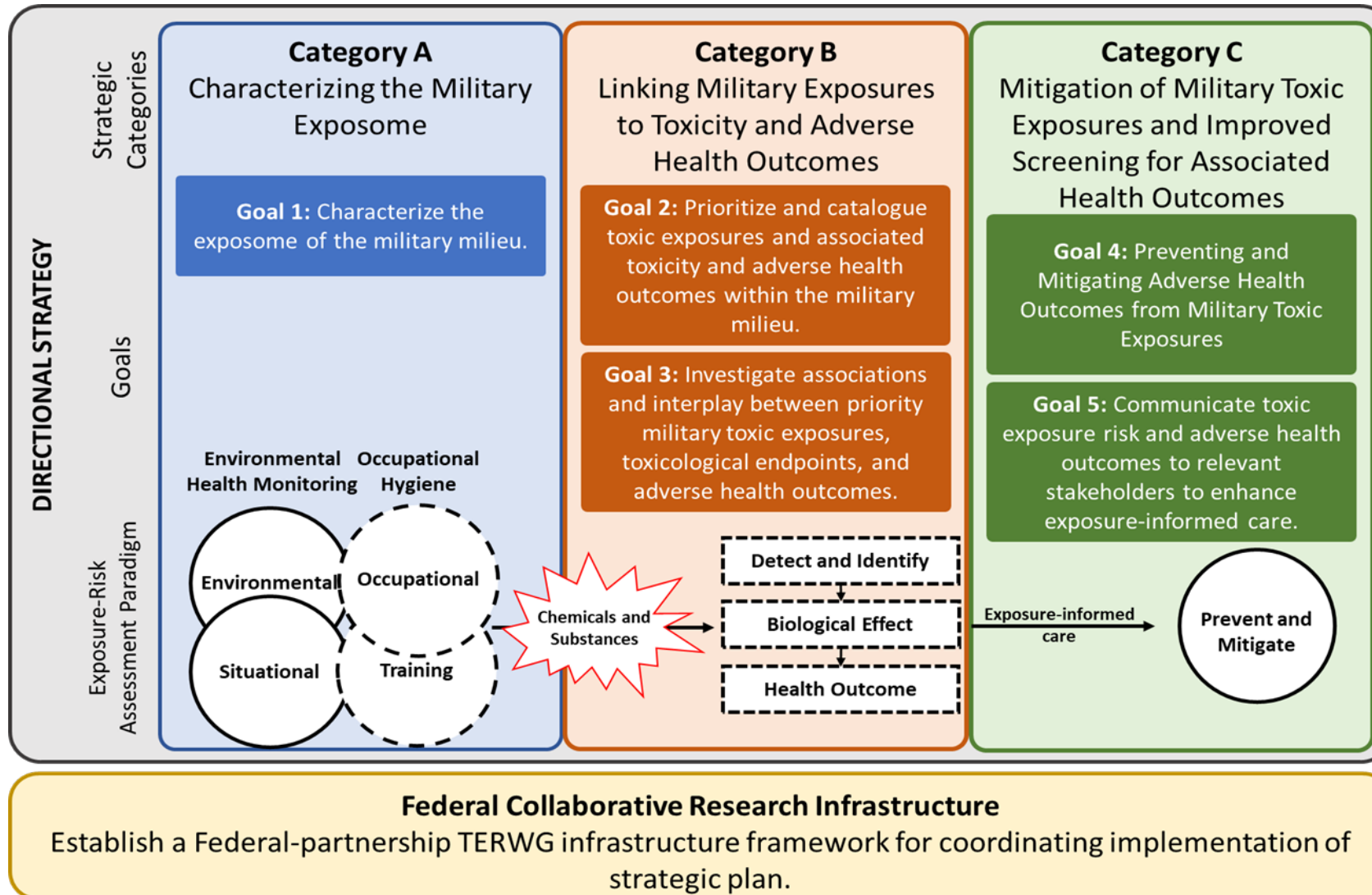
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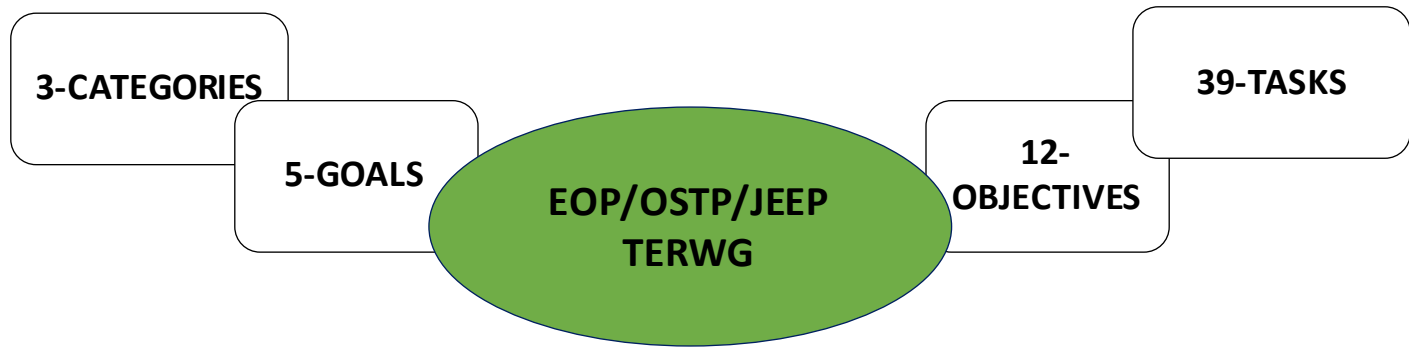
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Schematic of TERWG Strategic Plan (Planning Phase)



TERWG Strategic Plan (Implementation Phase – In Process)

Planning/Oversight



Action

12 INTERAGENCY OPERATIONAL TASKS

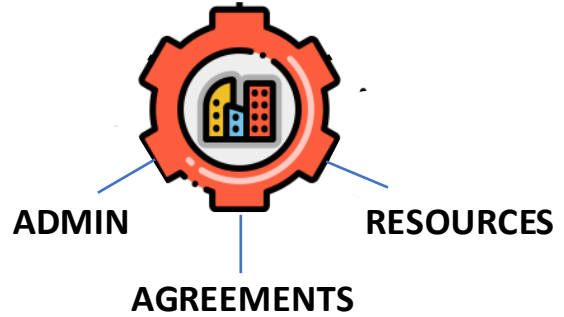


27 MISSION-ALIGNED RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES



TERWG Infrastructure Unit

VHA/
ORD



- Gather trusted sources of information for all mission-aligned agencies and programs.
- Provide products that support exposure-informed care.

- Conduct investigator research to fill gap needs.
- Generate data that advances military exposure knowledge & treatments.

- Support the TERWG implementation needs.

Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' illnesses (RACGWVI)

SECVA PACKAGES



- **2023 Recommendation (VIEWS 11249053)**
- **2024 Recommendations (VIEWS: 11481733)**
- **Nominations to the RACGWVI Package (VIEWS 11843734)**

2023 Recommendation (VIEWS 11249053)

RACGWVI Request:

- The RACGWVI Chairs and committee unanimously request the SECVA support the adoption of International Classification of Diseases-Clinical Modification (ICD-CM) codes for Gulf War illness (GWI).
- An ICD-CM code for GWI does not exist. An ICD-CM code is important for: 1) Enabling and accelerating research on GWI; 2) Accurate epidemiological monitoring and evaluation; 3) Validation of GWI for clinicians and patients; 4) Facilitating specific referrals and treatments for GWV; and 5) Improving the GWV patient experience.
- To obtain the SECVA written response and send to the Directors of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) with a courtesy copy to his counterpart, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

VA Decision:



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- To obtain the SECVA written response and send to the Directors of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) with a courtesy copy to his counterpart, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

VA Decision:

- **Package is pending review at the executive level:**
 - Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPIA)
 - Office of Communications and Legislative Affairs (OCLA)
 - Office of the General Counsel (OGC)
 - Senior Advisor
 - Secretary of Veterans Affairs (SECVA)

- ❖ This is a historic recommendation by this committee.
- ❖ Expect an answer anytime with suspense before membership term change.
- ❖ We will convene administration meeting before end September 2024 to inform members of the final outcome.

2024 Recommendations (VIEWS: 11481733)

RACGWVI Request:

The RACGWVI submits 3 recommendations for SECVA consideration.

The recommendations are focused on:

- 1) Building more efficient collaborative efforts with outside federal partners and non-VA funded researchers engaging in Gulf War research with the goal of leveraging research resources across the Nation.
- 2) Engage other federal funding agencies to engage in joint or matching funding with the goal of encouraging multidisciplinary investigator collaborations and non-duplicative research.
- 3) Establishing gulf war innovation centers to support PACT Act initiatives.

VA Decision:



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The RACGWVI submits 3 recommendations for SECVA consideration.

The recommendations are focused on:

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- 2) Engage other federal funding agencies to engage in joint or matching funding with the goal of encouraging multidisciplinary investigator collaborations and non-duplicative research.
- 3) Establishing gulf war innovation centers to support PACT Act initiatives.

VA Decision:

❖ We expected an answer on this package, but there was an error on a form, so it was fixed and pending signature.

- ❖ These are very strong recommendations by this committee.
- ❖ These recommendations will make a historic change to processes allowing the Gulf War Program to build resources and collaborations for the Gulf War research community.
- ❖ We will convene administration meeting before end September 2024 to inform members of the final outcome.

2024 Nominations to the RACGWVI Package (VIEWS 11843734)

RACGWVI Request:

Recommend:

- Allow expiration terms
- Addition of new members
- Chair updates

VA Decision:



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

2024 Nominations to the RACGWVI Package (VIEWS 11843734)

RACGWVI Request:

Recommend:

- Allow expiration terms
- Addition of new members
- Chair updates

VA Decision:

- Pending SECVA signature.
- The Certificates of Appointment are approved and ACMO is waiting on them to be printed .

Committee membership to 14

- ❖ **Recommend:** Kenneth S. Ramos, M.D., Ph.D. term expiration as Co-Chair and serve as Chair through September 30, 2026
- ❖ **Recommend:** Cheryl Walker, Ph.D. term expiration as Chair and serve as member through September 30, 2026
- ❖ **Recommend:** Appointment of a new Vice-Chair
- ❖ **Recommend:** Appointment of 4-new members
- ❖ **Recommend:** Term expirations for **Colonel Richard R. Gaard**, U.S. Army (retired), **Barbara A Ward**, **William A. Watts**, and **Captain James N. Woody**, M.D., Ph.D., U.S. Navy (retired) be allowed to expire on September 30, 2024

VETERAN ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

VES Committee

- ❖ Thomas P. Mathers, Gulf War Veteran and Chair
- ❖ Sonya L. Smith, Gulf War Veteran
- ❖ Ronald Brown, Gulf War Veteran
- ❖ Drew A. Helmer VHA
- ❖ Lisa Breun-Moreland VBA
- ❖ Karen Block, DFO
- ❖ Marsha Turner, Alt DFO
- ❖ Stanley Corpus, Operations
- ❖ Daniel Sloper, Technical Writer

QUESTIONS

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