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VA, DOD to fund up to $50 million in new research on traumatic brain injury

WASHINGTON –The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) launched the Long-Term Impact of Military-related Brain Injury Consortium (LIMBIC) Oct. 1, for which the two organizations pledged to fund up to $50 million, to research mild traumatic brain injuries (TBI) or concussions.

The five-year effort will receive $25 million in funding from DOD and up to $25 million from VA, depending on availability of funds.

"VA and DOD share an urgent, ongoing commitment to better understand the long-term impact of TBI," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Through this overarching effort, we are harnessing the best work of our nation's scientists and will lay the groundwork for meaningful progress in diagnosis and treatment."

LIMBIC is composed of researchers and resources from more than 20 organizations, spanning VA, DOD, the National Institutes of Health, universities and nonprofit organizations. VA and DOD's funding will support a consortium led by a team at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia. The lead investigator, Dr. David X. Cifu, is a senior TBI specialist for VA and a professor at VCU.

The consortium extends the work of a previous collaborative effort known as the Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium, or CENC, also led by Dr. Cifu. The existing CENC cohort, consisting of more than 2 million Veterans and service members, started in 2012 and has become the world's largest and best-characterized research cohort dedicated to the study of military TBI. It will expand the cohort; integrate with other government, academic and nonprofit research; and spur new public-private partnerships.

Researchers associated with CENC, and now with LIMBIC, have already documented links between combat concussions and dementia, Parkinson's disease, chronic pain, opioid usage and suicide risk. They have also developed specialized diagnostic tests using questionnaires, physical exams, brain imaging, fluid biomarkers and electrophysiology to probe how the brain recovers from injury.

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