

# VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

## Charge to Committee – *Sec. 801 Epidemiological Study on Fort McClellan Veterans*

Presentation for: NASEM Committee

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U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Background

- VA - NASEM partnership has been beneficial for Veterans.
  - NASEM provides independent and objective reviews of scientific and medical evidence.
  - NASEM committees include expertise that may not be readily available within VA.
- Some examples:
  - Review of VA's Presumptive Decision-Making Process
  - Evaluation of Manhattan Project Records for Veteran Health and Exposure Assessments
  - Review Long-Term Health Effects of Antimalarial Drugs
  - Review of Mental Health Effects of Toxic Exposures Among Veterans



# VHA HOME Overview

The VA Health Outcomes Military Exposures (HOME) office is specifically devoted to possible health effects of military environmental exposures.

## Mission Statement

HOME serves Veterans and their Families as the leader and authority on health outcomes of military exposures through science, policy, education and communication.

## Vision Statement

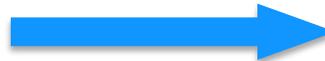
HOME is a trusted team that Veterans and stakeholders rely on as a definitive source of information on military exposures.

We have a comprehensive website that covers exposure topics:

<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/topics/index.asp>

We have an app!

<https://mobile.va.gov/app/exposure-ed>



HOME consists of the following programs:

- Epidemiology
- Policy & Operations
- Surveillance Military Environmental Exposures
- Policy & Operations
  - VET-HOME
- War Related Illness and Injury Study Centers (California; New Jersey; Washington, DC)
  - Centers of Excellence: AHBPCE, CETCE, EXPRT, WOMEN
- Metal Exposures - Depleted Uranium Center

Whole of Government Partners: DoW, DHHS, CDC, ATSDR, NIH, FDA and EPA



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# Legislative Requirement (PACT Act)

- H.R. 3967 (*Honoring our PACT Act of 2022*) [establishes the legislative requirement.](#)
- Sec. 801: Epidemiological Study On Fort McClellan Veterans
  - The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct an epidemiological study on the health trends of veterans who served in the Armed Forces at Fort McClellan at any time during the period beginning January 1, 1935, and ending on May 20, 1999.



# Legislative Requirement

- [\(38 U.S.C. 1176\) establishes the legislative requirement](#)
- “ ...to provide for the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (in this section referred to as the “Academies”), an independent nonprofit scientific organization with appropriate expertise that is not part of the Federal Government, to review and evaluate the available scientific evidence regarding associations between diseases and toxic exposures”

## Scientific Determinations Concerning Diseases (38 U.S.C 1176)

To the extent possible, the NASEM committee will aim to determine:

1. Whether an association exists between toxic exposures and the occurrence of the disease, taking into account the strength of the scientific evidence and the appropriateness of the statistical and epidemiological methods used to detect the association.
2. The increased risk of the disease among those reporting toxic exposures during active military, naval, air, or space service.
3. Whether there exists a plausible biological mechanism or other evidence of a positive association between the toxic exposure and the occurrence of the disease.
4. Determine the strength of evidence for a positive association.

# Preliminary Efforts to Assess Feasibility

- VA previously contracted external subject matter experts to review available historical literature and to assess the feasibility of multiple methodologies of design/conduct of epidemiological studies in this population.
  - Materials derived from this effort are provided/available to NASEM to assist in this effort.
- Major conclusions of the feasibility study suggest:
  - A multi-modal approach combining qualitative interviews and surveys is likely to yield informative results regarding morbidity.
  - A sample derived from a Department of War roster of Service members who served at Ft. McClellan from 1979-1999 is likely to identify study eligible study participants.



# NASEM Announcement of Committee

- A consensus committee established by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine will conduct an epidemiological study of a predefined list of Veterans and Service members who served at Fort McClellan between 1979 and 1999 based on information provided by the Department of War and develop a report on the health of these Veterans and Service members to meet requirements established by Congress.
- This review will be performed in accordance with [38 U.S.C. 1176](#)

# Statement of Task - Scientific Determinations Concerning Diseases

- The consensus committee will:
  - Conduct an epidemiological study of a predefined list of Veterans who served at Fort McClellan between 1979 and 1999 based on information provided by DoW. The development of the survey tool will rely on known or suspected military environmental exposures and potential health outcomes.
  - The survey will examine health risk behaviors and other factors germane to understanding the risk of developing chronic disease following occupational or environmental exposures to potentially hazardous substances or conditions.

# Scope – Health Effects of Service at Fort McClellan

- NASEM will:
  - Seek Veteran input to support an epidemiological study on exposures and potential health effects of military service at Fort McClellan.
  - Prepare a research protocol and institutional review board package for an epidemiological study.
  - Develop materials to support an epidemiological study and communicate with key stakeholders (website content, brochure, fact sheet, solicitation letters) and the public.
  - Develop survey content that addresses the exposures and health concerns of Fort McClellan Veterans.
  - Provide an analysis and report of morbidity and mortality for Fort McClellan Veterans using existing VA data resources.



# Conclusion

- The committee's report will include findings and interpretations based on their performance of requested analytic activities.
  - Report will be submitted to VA Secretary, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and House Veterans' Affairs Committee.
  - The committee will deliver a comprehensive final report detailing methodology and results of the epidemiological study.
- VA will establish a technical working group to assess the report findings and, if applicable, provide recommendations in accordance with 38 U.S.C. 1171-1176.
- The committee will not provide recommendations regarding service-connected presumptive conditions.