

# The Defense Health Research Consortium

May 7, 2019

The Honorable Peter Visclosky  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Defense  
Committee on Appropriations  
H-405 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ken Calvert  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Defense  
Committee on Appropriations  
1016 Longworth House Office Bldg  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Visclosky and Ranking Member Calvert:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) Defense Appropriations bill, we write to request your continued support for the critical and highly successful defense health research programs funded through the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP) at the Department of Defense (DoD). We deeply appreciate your support in a challenging fiscal environment for these programs, and recognize the remarkable achievement of both the House and Senate Committee leadership in working together to enact a bill prior to the end of the fiscal year. You and your predecessors on the committee have exhibited extraordinary leadership in ensuring continuity in funding and operations for defense health research programs.

The highly innovative research portfolio supported by the CDMRP fuels scientific discovery by funding high impact research not sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other federal agencies. Many of the programs' award mechanisms propel the exploration of revolutionary ideas and concepts. Programs focus on the potential of having a significant impact upon both their respective fields of research and support and treatment for members of the military. Defense health research programs are worthy of continued federal support for the following reasons:

- Directly relevant to DoD-prevalent conditions: The medical research programs at DoD directly impact the health and lives of the U.S. military, their families, veterans and the public. Programs provide groundbreaking research on psychological health, Gulf War Illness, effects of burn pits and other airborne hazards, spinal cord injury, and hearing and vision loss (which comprise a significant portion of current battlefield injuries). Research also focuses on existing and emerging infectious diseases that may threaten operational readiness and health security, and why diseases like ALS and multiple sclerosis occur at greater rates in those who have served in the military. The DoD's defense health research program has also funded the orthopedic research program that has resulted in new limb-sparing techniques to save injured extremities and preserve and restore the functions of injured extremities.

Equally important, this disease-specific approach includes important medical research programs related to several forms of cancer (breast, blood, colorectal, kidney, melanoma, pancreatic, brain tumors, lung, ovarian, prostate, stomach, liver, cancers related to radiation exposure, and childhood cancers), autoimmune diseases and other disorders (like neurofibromatosis and tuberous sclerosis complex) that have led to breakthroughs on nerve regeneration, traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

- Complementary – and not duplicative – of other federal research: Defense health research program grants neither duplicate nor supplant NIH or VA research efforts, but rather enhance those efforts. They fund highly innovative projects – support that is typically unavailable through other federal programs. For example, programmatically-related VA research funding is only available to VA employees (at least 0.625 full-time equivalent). CDMRP funds the best-qualified proposals from researchers and research teams at top research universities and medical centers. The NIH and DoD medical research portfolios have symbiotic relationships, allowing NIH-funded basic research to serve as a foundation for ground-breaking, disorder-targeted research at DoD. NIH and DoD program officers meet regularly to ensure collaboration and prevent duplication.
- Cutting-edge and focused on cures: While the NIH funds high-quality basic biomedical research, the defense health research programs provide essential emphasis on and support for finding innovative cures or new therapies for medical conditions. For several disorders, DoD breakthroughs have led to new clinical trials, new drug products, and novel procedures that are making a difference in the everyday lives of affected patients and families. For example, research funded by DoD led to the development of the only treatment for tuberous sclerosis complex approved by Food and Drug Administration. The ALS Research Program is supporting translational research and has developed four potential treatments for the disease, for which an effective treatment currently does not exist. Enclosed is a detailed white paper providing many examples of breakthroughs that have benefitted active duty warfighters, veterans, military families and civilian populations.
- Agile, adaptable, and collaborative: Each of the separate programs is guided by a specific vision and mission statement, which in addition to incorporating Congressional direction, reflect rapid change in knowledge, address research gaps, and prevent duplication. Annual funding prevents out-year budget commitments, which in turn further enhances programmatic flexibility. Many DoD programs identify, develop and fund collaborative and consortium-based research, helping to bring unique, interdisciplinary, inter-institutional, collaborative efforts to bear on complex medical research issues unlikely to be solved though the inherent limits of individual researchers.

- **Competitive and unique peer review process:** While Congress allocates funding through the annual Defense Appropriations Act to specific medical conditions, it does not direct the programs' dollars to specific researchers. These programs utilize an efficient multi-tiered process that includes multiple stages of peer review, including two levels of formal peer review of final proposals. Proposals are scored in a number of key areas such as scientific merit and impact for patients and the military, providing a robust comparative basis for helping accomplish the program's mission of finding and funding the best research related to these important medical conditions.
- **Consumer review:** All defense health research programs incorporate the full and equal participation of consumer reviewers at every stage of the multi-tiered review process – a novel and valuable practice in medical research funding. Consumers – people actually affected by the disease or medical condition – help ensure the program's funded research will have the greatest impact on those who are affected. Consumer reviewers also help inform and educate their disease advocacy communities and others.
- **Generating economic growth across the United States:** Research activities promote job growth and encourage long-term economic development through innovation. It has been estimated that for every dollar awarded in biomedical research grants, more than \$2 of additional business activity is created. Defense health research grants are awarded to universities and institutes in every state in the country.

In short, the well-executed and efficient programs within the defense health research programs demonstrate responsible government stewardship of taxpayer dollars and benefit current and former military service members, the general patient population, and our nation's economy.

Perhaps most importantly, DoD's innovative approaches to funding biomedical research have led to several significant breakthroughs and achievements, contributing to national security and the health and welfare of U.S. Armed Forces personnel and their dependents. Continued federal funding will only build on these successes.

Lastly, we were encouraged by the ability of House and Senate negotiators to work in a bipartisan way to enact the fiscal year 2019 Defense Appropriations Act prior to the end of the fiscal year. We hope that this successful approach can be replicated this year. Timely enactment of the fiscal year 2020 Defense Appropriations Act will ensure continuity in the defense health research programs, allowing DOD to most effectively convene programmatic panels to identify and implement programmatic changes, effectively convene peer-review panels to provide thorough review of grant applications, and conduct appropriate negotiations to ultimately award FY20 grants.

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The undersigned respectfully request your support for FY 2020 funding of all programs within the defense health research programs.

Sincerely,

AcademyHealth  
Action to Cure Kidney Cancer  
ALS Association  
American Academy of Dermatology Association  
American Academy of Neurology  
American Academy of Ophthalmology  
American Association for Cancer Research  
American Association for Dental Research  
American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association (AARDA)  
American Brain Tumor Association  
American College of Rheumatology  
American Diabetes Association  
American Gastroenterological Association  
American Liver Foundation  
American Lung Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy  
American Society for Microbiology  
American Society for Transplantation and Cellular Therapy  
American Thoracic Society  
American Urological Association  
Aplastic Anemia & MDS International Foundation  
APS Foundation of America, Inc  
Arthritis Foundation  
Association of American Cancer Institutes  
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America  
Beyond Celiac  
Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network  
Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis  
Celiac Disease Foundation  
Children's Tumor Foundation  
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation  
Citizens United for Research in Epilepsy  
Coalition for National Security Research (CNSR)  
Crohn's & Colitis Foundation  
Cure SMA  
Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer

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debra of America  
Digestive Disease National Coalition  
Duke Health  
Duke University  
Dysautonomia International  
Dystonia Medical Research Foundation  
Epilepsy Foundation  
Fibrous Dysplasia Foundation  
Fight Colorectal Cancer  
FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered  
Foundation to Eradicate Duchenne  
GBS|CIDP Foundation International  
George Mason University  
Global Health Technologies Coalition  
Go2Foundation for Lung Cancer, formerly Lung Cancer Alliance  
Harvard University  
HIV Medicine Association  
Huntsman Cancer Institute at the University of Utah  
Hydrocephalus Association  
Indiana University  
Infectious Diseases Society of America  
International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders  
International Myeloma Foundation  
International Pemphigus and Pemphigoid Foundation  
Interstitial Cystitis Association  
Johns Hopkins University  
KidneyCan  
Kidney Cancer Association  
The LAM Foundation  
The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society  
Littlest Tumor Foundation  
Living Beyond Breast Cancer  
LUNgevity Foundation  
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.  
Lupus Foundation of America  
Lymphatic Research & Education Network  
Lymphoma Research Foundation  
Malaria No More  
The Marfan Foundation  
Melanoma Research Foundation  
METAvivor  
The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis

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The Michael J Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research  
Michigan State University  
Muscular Dystrophy Association  
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research  
National Alliance of State Prostate Cancer Coalitions  
National Autism Association  
National Brain Tumor Society  
National Fragile X Foundation  
National Kidney Foundation  
National Multiple Sclerosis Society  
National Pancreas Foundation  
NephCure Kidney International  
Neurofibromatosis (NF) Midwest  
Neurofibromatosis Northeast  
The Neurofibromatosis Network  
Ovarian Cancer Research Alliance  
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network  
Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy (PPMD)  
Penn State University  
PKD Foundation  
Princeton University  
Prostate Cancer Clinical Trials Consortium  
Prostate Cancer Foundation  
Pulmonary Hypertension Association  
Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation  
Scleroderma Foundation  
Sergeant Sullivan Circle  
Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation  
Sleep Research Society  
Society for Neuroscience  
Society of Gynecologic Oncology  
St. Baldrick's Foundation  
Stony Brook University  
Susan G. Komen  
Texas NF Foundation  
Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance  
University of California System  
University of Central Florida  
University of Iowa  
University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center  
University of North Carolina System  
University of Pennsylvania

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University of Pittsburgh  
University of Rochester  
University of Virginia Health System  
US Hereditary Angioedema Association  
Us TOO International Prostate Cancer Education & Support  
Vanderbilt University  
Vanderbilt University Medical Center  
Vasculitis Foundation  
Veterans for Common Sense  
Vietnam Veterans of America  
Weill Cornell Medicine  
Yale University  
ZERO - The End of Prostate Cancer

Enclosure  
cc: Members, House Appropriations Committee