

The Defense Health Research Consortium

April 14, 2020

Senator Richard Shelby
Chair
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
122 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Richard Durbin
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
115 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Durbin:

As you continue your efforts to provide the investments needed to respond to the novel coronavirus pandemic, we thank you and encourage you to continue your 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). Many of these programs are directly related to preparedness and response to global pandemics, while other equally important CDMRPs fund research to protect the men and women who serve in our Armed Forces, military families, veterans, and civilian populations from a wide range of medical conditions and health challenges. We therefore encourage you to increase funding for these critical programs by five percent plus inflation, to ensure that our country is prepared to meet current and future public health-related threats and challenges to our national security.

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, rare 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 a transformative 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.

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- 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 encourage timely enactment of the fiscal year 2021 Defense Appropriations Act, to ensure continuity in the defense health research programs. We recognize the challenges that the current pandemic has placed on your ability to move appropriations bills through the "regular order" process. However, we must continue to maintain continuity in investment in this important research to ensure that our nation is prepared for future pandemics and other public health challenges that threaten our current military populations and their families, as well as veterans and the general civilian population.

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Therefore, the undersigned respectfully request your support increasing the appropriation for defense health research programs by five percent plus inflation in the FY 2021 Defense Appropriations Act.

Sincerely,

Action to Cure Kidney Cancer
ALS Association
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
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
American Brain Tumor Association
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Rheumatology
American Epilepsy Society
American Gastroenterological Association
American Liver Foundation
American Psychological Association
American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy
American Urological Association
Aplastic Anemia & MDS International Foundation
APS Foundation of America, Inc.
Arthritis Foundation
Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization
Association of American Cancer Institutes
Association of American Universities
Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America
Batten Disease Support and Research Association
Beyond Celiac
Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network
Blinded Veterans Association
Brain Recovery Project: Childhood Epilepsy Surgery Foundation
Cancer ABCs
Celiac Disease Foundation
Child Neurology Foundation
Children's Cardiomyopathy Foundation
Children's Tumor Foundation

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Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
Citizens United for Research in Epilepsy
Coalition for National Security Research
CureHHT
Danny Did Foundation
Deadliest Cancers Coalition
Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer
debra of America
Duke Health
Duke University
Dup15q Alliance
ECAN Esophageal Cancer Action Network
Epilepsy Foundation
Epilepsy Leadership Council
Fight Colorectal Cancer
FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered
Foundation for Peripheral Neuropathy
Foundation to Eradicate Duchenne
George Mason University
Global Health Technologies Coalition
Global Healthy Living Foundation
Global Liver Institute
GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer
Hepatitis B Foundation
HIV Medicine Association
Immune Deficiency Foundation
Indiana University
International Myeloma Foundation
International Pemphigoid Foundation
Johns Hopkins University
KidneyCAN
Kidney Cancer Association
LAM Foundation
Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
LGS Foundation
Littlest Tumor Foundation
Living Beyond Breast Cancer
LUNgevity Foundation
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
Lupus Foundation of America
Malecare
Melanoma Research Foundation

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METAvivor
Miami Project to Cure Paralysis
Michigan State University
Military Order of the Purple Heart
Muscular Dystrophy Association
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research
National Alliance of State Prostate Cancer Coalitions (The Prostate Cancer Alliance)
National Autism Association
National Brain Tumor Society
National Fragile X Foundation
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Pancreas Foundation
National Vietnam and Gulf War Veterans Coalition
Neurofibromatosis Midwest
Neurofibromatosis Network
Neurofibromatosis Northeast
Non-Commissioned Officers Association
Ovarian Cancer Research Alliance
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network
Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy
Penn State University
Phelan-McDermid Syndrome Foundation
Polycystic Kidney Disease Foundation
Project Sleep
Prostate Cancer Clinical Trial Consortium
Prostate Cancer Foundation
Scleroderma Foundation
Sergeant Sullivan Circle
SHEPHERD Foundation
Sjögren's Foundation
Sleep Research Society
Society for Neuroscience
St. Baldrick's Foundation
Stony Brook University
Susan G. Komen
Syngap Education & Research Foundation
TB Alliance
Texas NF Foundation
The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research
Theresa's Research Foundation
TREA: The Enlisted Association
Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance

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United Ostomy Associations of America

United Soldiers and Sailors of America

University of Central Florida

University of Iowa

University of Pittsburgh

University of Washington

Us TOO International

Vasculitis Foundation

Veterans for Common Sense

VetsFirst

Wayne State University

Weill Cornell Medicine

ZERO-The End of Prostate Cancer

cc: Members of the U.S. Senate

Enclosure