

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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Sincerely,

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American Association for Dental Research
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American Psychological Association
American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy
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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
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Digestive Disease National Coalition
Duke Health
Duke University
Dysautonomia International
Dystonia Medical Research Foundation
Epilepsy Foundation
Fibrous Dysplasia Foundation
Fight Colorectal Cancer
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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

The Defense Health Research Consortium

May 7, 2019

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

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

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Durbin:

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