

April 30, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
H-405, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
H-405, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chair
Defense Subcommittee
House Committee on Appropriations
H-405, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Ranking Member
Defense Subcommittee
House Committee on Appropriations
H-405, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

We, the undersigned organizations, write in support of continued funding for infectious disease research at the Department of Defense (DoD). Specifically, we are concerned by threats to funding for critical malaria research. At a modest cost, these investments support the development of malaria prevention and treatment tools that protect service members stationed abroad and, when made publicly available, benefit hundreds of millions of people at risk for malaria worldwide. As the primary supervisors of defense appropriations, we request that you protect malaria research in Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22).

Every year, DoD ranks malaria as one of the leading infectious disease threats to our men and women in uniform (including number one in U.S. Africa Command area of responsibility and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility). Combatant commanders repeatedly reiterate the need for continued infectious disease research for the benefit of service members forward deployed in malaria-endemic countries, but also for partner and ally militaries, Americans traveling abroad, and all people at risk for these conditions.

Despite this history of need and impact, malaria research programs at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) and the Naval Medical Research Center (NMRC)—the world's premier malaria research programs—are on the verge of elimination due to Army budget cuts enacted without the consent of Congress or combatant commanders. DoD has gone so far as to outline a plan to eliminate malaria drug and vaccine research funding entirely over the next two years. DoD has already reduced funding for malaria vaccine research by shifting and removing lines and program elements, but now the entire malaria drug and vaccine portfolio is at risk during a global pandemic when the need for research and development capabilities for infectious diseases is at its highest.

Cutting or eliminating malaria research programs at WRAIR and NMRC would be detrimental to troop readiness and protection, as well as global health, and would force an irreversible loss of scientific talent and research infrastructure. The shortsightedness of such a move is astounding given these anticipated impacts of funding cuts:

- DoD would lose world-leading infectious disease researchers—many of whom can and have pivoted to apply their expertise to COVID-19, Zika, and other threats when needed.
- The US government’s only bench-to-bedside malaria research capabilities would be lost.
- The premier malaria research labs would be decimated and face enormous difficulty should they need to be rebuilt or re-staffed if there is another military confrontation in malaria-endemic regions, or if parasites become resistant to current malaria drugs—a trend which is accelerating in many regions of the world.

Given the stakes, we ask that, at a minimum, you protect and maintain malaria research funding provided through Army Research, Development, Test and Evaluation (RDT&E) accounts at no less than FY19 levels. Both WRAIR and NMRC draw on these funds, even though they are Army accounts.

A year into the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, which has further exacerbated the impact of other infectious diseases like malaria worldwide due to treatment and public health interruptions, is not the time to cut funding for infectious disease research—especially research that directly protects service members. Thank you for considering our concerns, and please do not hesitate to reach out. If you have any questions, please contact Jodie Curtis at jodie.curtis@faegredrinker.com or Jacci Guy at JGuy@unfoundation.org.

Sincerely,



cc: The Honorable Adam Smith, Chair, House Committee on Armed Services
The Honorable Mike Rogers, Ranking Member, House Committee on Armed Services