

# The Defense Health Research Consortium

June 8, 2017

Senator Thad Cochran  
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 Cochran and Ranking Member Durbin:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) 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 during the FY17 budget process. As in previous years, you both 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, and 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, spinal cord injury, and hearing and vision loss (which comprise a significant portion of current battlefield injuries). Research also focuses on 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, avoid amputations, 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 and cancers related to radiation exposure) 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. 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 primarily high-quality basic biomedical research, the defense health research programs provide essential emphasis on and support for finding innovative cures or new therapeutics 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.
- 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 overlaps. Annual funding prevents out-year budget commitments, which in turn further enhances programmatic flexibility. Many DoD programs find (or even work to 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 a number of significant breakthroughs and achievements, contributing to national security and the health and welfare of U.S. Armed Forces personnel and their dependents. Enclosed is a detailed white paper providing several examples. Continued federal funding will only build on these successes.

Lastly, we are concerned about reports that Congress may not complete the fiscal year 2018 appropriations process and instead attempt to pass a long-term continuing resolution. This approach would have devastating consequences for medical research, creating unnecessary instability and uncertainty in the grant solicitation, grant review, and grant making processes at DoD. This will also delay the ability of 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 FY18 grants.

The undersigned respectfully request your support for FY 2018 funding of all programs within the defense health research programs.

Sincerely,

AcademyHealth  
Action to Cure Kidney Cancer  
Adult Congenital Heart Association  
The ALS Association

American Association for Cancer Research  
American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases  
American Association of Clinical Urologists  
American Brain Tumor Association  
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American Diabetes Association  
American Gastroenterological Association  
American Lung Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Thoracic Society  
American Urological Association  
Aplastic Anemia & MDS International Foundation  
Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization  
Association of American Medical Colleges  
Association of American Universities  
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities  
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America  
Autism Speaks  
Beyond Celiac  
Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network  
Children's Heart Foundation  
Children's Tumor Foundation  
Coalition for National Security Research (CNSR)  
Crohn's & Colitis Foundation  
Cure HHT  
Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer  
debra of America  
Digestive Disease National Coalition  
Duke University  
Duke University School of Medicine  
Dystonia Medical Research Foundation  
Epilepsy Foundation  
Fight Colorectal Cancer  
FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered  
Foundation to Eradicate Duchenne  
George Mason University  
GBS|CIDP Foundation International  
Global Health Technologies Coalition  
Hepatitis B Foundation  
Hepatitis Foundation International  
Indiana University

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International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders

International Myeloma Foundation

Interstitial Cystitis Association

Johns Hopkins University

LAM Foundation

Littlest Tumor Foundation

Living Beyond Breast Cancer

Lung Cancer Alliance

Lupus Foundation of America

Lupus Research Alliance

Lymphoma Research Foundation

Malecare Cancer Support

The Marfan Foundation

Melanoma Research Foundation

The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research

Michigan State University

Muscular Dystrophy Association

National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research

National Autism Association

National Brain Tumor Society

National Kidney Foundation

National Multiple Sclerosis Society

National Pancreas Foundation

NephCure Kidney International

Neurofibromatosis Midwest

Neurofibromatosis Network

Ovarian Cancer Research Fund Alliance

Pancreatic Cancer Action Network

Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy (PPMD)

Penn State University

Phelan-McDermid Syndrome Foundation

Prostate Cancer Clinical Trials Consortium, LLC

Prostate Conditions Education Council

Pulmonary Hypertension Association

Research!America

Scleroderma Foundation

The Sergeant Sullivan Circle

Society of Gynecologic Oncology

Stony Brook University

Susan G. Komen

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Texas NF Foundation  
Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance  
University of Central Florida  
University of Cincinnati  
University of Kansas  
University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center  
University of Pittsburgh  
University of Washington  
U.S. Hereditary Angioedema Association  
Us TOO International Prostate Cancer Education & Support  
Vanderbilt University  
Veterans for Common Sense  
The Veterans Health Council  
Vietnam Veterans of America  
Weill Cornell Medicine  
ZERO - The End of Prostate Cancer

Enclosure  
cc: Members, Senate Appropriations Committee