

# The Defense Health Research Consortium

May 19, 2025

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Defense  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Christopher Coons  
Vice Chair  
Subcommittee on Defense  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair McConnell and Vice Chair Coons:

As you begin work on the fiscal year (FY) 2026 Defense Appropriations Act, we write to thank you and encourage you to continue your support for the critical and highly successful Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP) at the Department of Defense (DoD). While the CDMRP funds 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, many of these programs are also directly related to preparedness and response to global pandemics. We therefore encourage you to increase funding from FY 2024 levels for these critical programs by at least five percent plus inflation (approximately \$123 million increase), to ensure that our country is prepared to meet current and future public health-related threats and challenges to our national security. An increase in funding is particularly vital to mitigate the impact of inflation on the purchasing power of individual CDMRP programs, particularly those programs that have been flat funded for several years.

We also encourage you to work expeditiously to restore through supplemental appropriations the \$859 million in FY 2025 funding that was cut from the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) through the enactment of the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act (Public Law 119-4). While this legislation reduced CDMRP overall by 57 percent, this reduction was not applied equally across all 35 programs. Instead, many programs vital to warfighter health -- such as traumatic brain injury/psychological health; vision and hearing, orthotics, prosthetics and spinal cord; and pancreatic, kidney and lung cancer -- received no funding for research grants in FY 2025. If not fully restored, these programs will experience research interruptions that could have long-term implications for the health and readiness of our warfighters.

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) or 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 the health and well-being of the men and women in the U.S. Armed Services. CDMRP awards grants to study many of the conditions -- including cancers, respiratory diseases, and other toxic exposure outcomes -- added as the result of the PACT Act as VA benefit presumptive service-connected health

conditions. Defense health research programs are worthy of continued federal support for the following reasons:

- Directly relevant to DoD-prevalent conditions: As the enclosed white paper demonstrates, the medical research programs at DoD directly impact and are aimed at improving the health and lives of current and former members of the U.S. military, their families, and the public. Programs provide groundbreaking research on traumatic brain injury and psychological health, toxic exposures including Gulf War Illness and burn pits, respiratory health, spinal cord injury, hearing and vision loss, and newer conditions such as Long COVID. Research also focuses on existing and emerging infectious diseases that may threaten operational readiness and health security, and why diseases like ALS, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease occur at greater rates in those who have served in the military. CDMRP has also funded orthopedic research that has resulted in new limb-sparing techniques to save and restore functions of injured extremities, as well as outcomes research benefiting injured warfighters in need of orthotic and prosthetic devices.

Equally important, this disease-specific approach includes important medical research programs related to several forms of cancer (breast, blood, colorectal, bladder, brain tumors, lung, ovarian, prostate, stomach, liver, esophageal, melanoma, 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 two treatments 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. The CDRMP's impact is undeniable: 56 Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved treatments including 11 cancer drugs, a rapid blood test to detect traumatic brain injuries and more than 600 clinical trials for cutting-edge drugs and vaccines.

- 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 two dollars of additional business activity is created. Defense health research grants are awarded to researchers 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.

Letter to Chair McConnell and Vice Chair Coons  
May 19, 2025  
Page 4

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 FY 2026 Defense Appropriations Act, to ensure continuity in the defense health research programs. We recognize the continuing challenges you must face 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. The failure to enact an FY 2025 Defense Appropriations Act led to the devastating 57 percent cut to CDMRP, demonstrating the importance of Congress enacting the Defense bill with full funding for CDMRP.

We, the undersigned respectfully request your support for increasing the appropriation for defense health research programs by at least five percent plus inflation in the FY 2026 Defense Appropriations Act, and restoring the \$859 million cut from the program in FY 2025.

Sincerely,

Adult Congenital Heart Association  
ALS Association  
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology  
American Academy of Ophthalmology  
American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation  
American Association for Cancer Research (AACR)  
American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research  
American Association of Orthopedic Surgeons  
American Brain Tumor Association  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network  
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American College of Rheumatology  
American Gastroenterological Association  
American Lung Association  
American Psychological Association Services Inc.  
American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy  
American Society of Hematology  
American Urological Association (AUA)  
Angelman Syndrome Foundation  
Aplastic Anemia and MDS International Foundation  
Arthritis Foundation  
Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization  
Association for Clinical Oncology (ASCO)  
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

Autism Speaks  
Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network  
Blinded Veterans Association (BVA)  
Cancer Support Community  
Cartwright & Associates  
Case Western Reserve University  
Celiac Disease Foundation  
Child Neurology Foundation  
Children's Cardiomyopathy Foundation  
Children's Tumor Foundation  
Cholangiocarcinoma Foundation  
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation  
Coalition for National Trauma Research  
Coalition to Cure CHD2  
Colorectal Cancer Alliance  
Crohn's & Colitis Foundation  
CURE Epilepsy  
Cure HHT  
Cure SMA  
CureSHANK  
Danny Did Epilepsy Foundation  
Deadliest Cancers Coalition  
Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer  
Defense Health Research Consortium  
Duke University  
Epilepsies Action Network  
Epilepsy Alliance America  
Epilepsy Foundation of America  
Epilepsy Services of New Jersey  
Esophageal Cancer Action Network (ECAN)  
FD/MAS Alliance  
Fight Colorectal Cancer  
FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered  
Foundation for Angelman Syndrome Therapeutics  
Foundation to Eradicate Duchenne  
Global Healthy Living Foundation  
Global Liver Institute  
GO2 for Lung Cancer  
GRIN2B Foundation  
Hearing Loss Association of America  
Hepatitis B Foundation  
HIV Medicine Association  
Hope for HIE  
Hope for Hypothalamic Hamartomas  
Hydrocephalus Association  
Indiana University  
Institute for Neuro Immune Medicine

International Myeloma Foundation  
Interstitial Cystitis Association  
Interstitial Cystitis Association  
Johns Hopkins University & Medicine  
KidneyCAN  
KPCOM  
LGBT Cancer Project  
Long COVID Campaign  
LUNgevity Foundation  
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.  
Lupus Foundation of America  
Lupus Research Alliance  
Lymphoma Research Foundation  
Malecare Cancer Support  
Melanoma Research Foundation  
Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation  
MiB Agents Osteosarcoma  
Monica Weldon Consulting LLC  
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research  
National Alliance of State Prostate Cancer Coalitions  
National Ataxia Foundation  
National Brain Tumor Society  
National CMV Foundation  
National Fragile X Foundation  
National Health Council  
National Multiple Sclerosis Society  
National Psoriasis Foundation  
Neurofibromatosis Midwest  
NF Network  
NF Northeast  
Nova Southeastern University  
Ovarian Cancer Research Alliance  
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCAN)  
Panza Maurer  
Partners Against Mortality in Epilepsy (PAME)  
Pediatric Epilepsy Research Consortium  
Pediatric Epilepsy Surgery Alliance  
Penn State University  
Phelan-McDermid Syndrome Foundation  
PKD Foundation  
Project CASK  
Prostate Cancer Foundation  
Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation  
Rally Foundation for Childhood Cancer Research  
Rare Epilepsy Network Coordinating Committee  
Research!America  
Ron and Kathy Assaf College of Nursing

Sgt. Sullivan Circle  
SHEPHERD Foundation  
Sjogren's Foundation  
Society for Women's Health Research  
Society of Gynecologic Oncology  
Solve M.E.  
South Carolina Advocates For Epilepsy  
St. Baldrick's Foundation  
St. Jude Children's Research Hospital  
Stony Brook University  
Susan G. Komen  
SynGap Research Fund, dba CURE SYNGAP1  
TargetCancer Foundation  
TB Alliance  
The Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis  
The Foundation for Peripheral Neuropathy  
The Kidney Cancer Association  
The LAM Foundation  
The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis  
The National Pancreas Foundation  
The Prostate Cancer Clinical Trials Consortium  
The Quinism Foundation  
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons  
Theresa's Research Foundation  
TSC Alliance  
United Ostomy Associations of America  
United Spinal Association  
University at Albany  
University of Cincinnati  
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus  
University of Iowa  
University of Pittsburgh  
University of Virginia  
Veterans for Common Sense  
VHL Alliance  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Weill Cornell Medicine  
ZERO Prostate Cancer

cc: Members, U.S. Senate

Enclosure: "Relevance to National Security and Military Families"