

The Defense Health Research Consortium

May 13, 2026

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) 2027 Defense Appropriations Act, we thank you for your continued support of the critical and highly successful Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP) at the Department of Defense (DoD). The CDMRP plays a vital role in advancing research that protects the health and readiness of our Armed Forces, military families, and veterans, while also benefiting civilian populations.

For FY 2027, we urge you to increase funding for these critical programs above FY 2024 levels by at least five percent plus inflation, to approximately \$1.62 billion. This investment is essential to ensure our nation 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, as well as the 57 percent reduction in spending for these programs resulting from the enactment of the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act (Public Law 119-4).

We appreciate your bipartisan efforts to fund CDMRP at \$1.27 billion in FY 2026. However, this level remains well below the \$1.51 billion funding level for CDMRP enacted in FY 2024. Without full restoration and growth, 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 typically sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or other federal agencies. Many of the programs' unique award mechanisms are specifically designed to propel the exploration of revolutionary ideas and concepts. These programs prioritize research with the potential to deliver significant impact—both within their respective scientific fields of research and the health and well-being of the men and women in the U.S. Armed Services. CDMRP grants study a range of conditions, including cancers, respiratory diseases, neurodegenerative disorders, 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, pancreatic, kidney, 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: 61 FDA-treatments including 16 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, reflects rapid change in knowledge, addresses research gaps, and prevents 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 CDMRP 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, CDMRP represents a model of effective and efficient stewardship of taxpayer dollars, delivering meaningful benefits to active-duty servicemembers, veterans, the broader patient population, and the nation's economy. Perhaps most importantly, DoD's innovative approach to funding biomedical research has led to several significant breakthroughs and achievements, contributing to national security and the health and welfare of U.S. Armed Forces personnel and their families. Continued federal funding will only build on these successes.

Letter to Chair McConnell and Ranking Member Coons

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Lastly, we encourage the timely enactment of the FY 2027 Defense Appropriations Act to ensure continuity in the defense health research programs. We recognize the continuing challenges inherent in advancing appropriations bills through the “regular order” process. However, sustained and predictable investment in this important research is critical to ensure that our nation is prepared for future 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. Some of the programs that received no funding or significantly reduced funding in FY 2025 still have not had funding restored to their FY 2024 levels.

We, the undersigned respectfully request your support for increasing the appropriation for CDMRP by at least five percent plus inflation in the FY 2027 Defense Appropriations Act.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Vision Research

ALS Arizona

ALS Association

ALS Network

ALS New Mexico

ALS Northwest

ALS of Nevada

ALS United

ALS United Connecticut

ALS United Greater New York

ALS United Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri

ALS United of Georgia

ALS United Ohio

ALS United, North Carolina

ALS United Rocky Mountain

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology

American Academy of Ophthalmology

American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons

American Brain Tumor Association

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Inc.

American College of Rheumatology

American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American Epilepsy Society

American Gastroenterological Association

American Lung Association
American Parkinson Disease Association (APDA)
American Psychological Association Services
American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy
American Society of Hematology
American Urological Association (AUA)
Angelman Syndrome Foundation
Aplastic Anemia & MDS International Foundation
APS Foundation of America, Inc
Arthritis Foundation
Association for Clinical Oncology (ASCO)
Association of American Cancer Institutes
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Autism Speaks
Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network (BCAN)
Blue Faery: The Adrienne Wilson Liver Cancer Association
CACNA1A Foundation
Cancer ABCs
Cancer Support Community
Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine
Celiac Disease Foundation
Children's Cardiomyopathy Foundation
Children's Hospital Association
Children's Tumor Foundation
Cholangiocarcinoma Foundation
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
Coalition for National Trauma Research
Coalition to Cure CHD2
COMBINEDBrain
Connect Melanoma
Crohn's & Colitis Foundation
CURE Epilepsy
Cure HHT
Cure SMA
CureGRIN Foundation
Danny Did Epilepsy Foundation
Deadliest Cancers Coalition
Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer (DDF)
Debra of America
Defense Health Research Consortium
Dravet Syndrome Foundation
Duke Health
Duke University
Dup15q Alliance
Epilepsies Action Network
Epilepsy Alliance America

Epilepsy Foundation Alabama
Epilepsy Foundation Alaska
Epilepsy Foundation Arizona
Epilepsy Foundation Arkansas
Epilepsy Foundation Central & South Texas
Epilepsy Foundation Florida
Epilepsy Foundation Greater Orange County
Epilepsy Foundation Indiana
Epilepsy Foundation Iowa
Epilepsy Foundation Los Angeles
Epilepsy Foundation Louisiana
Epilepsy Foundation Maryland
Epilepsy Foundation Metro D.C.
Epilepsy Foundation Mississippi
Epilepsy Foundation Montana
Epilepsy Foundation Nebraska
Epilepsy Foundation Nevada
Epilepsy Foundation New England
Epilepsy Foundation New Jersey
Epilepsy Foundation New Mexico
Epilepsy Foundation North Carolina
Epilepsy Foundation North Dakota
Epilepsy Foundation of America
Epilepsy Foundation of Colorado & Wyoming
Epilepsy Foundation of Delaware
Epilepsy Foundation of Greater Chicago
Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan
Epilepsy Foundation of Minnesota
Epilepsy Foundation of Missouri and Kansas
Epilepsy Foundation of Northeastern New York, Inc.
Epilepsy Foundation of Southeast Tennessee
Epilepsy Foundation of Texas
Epilepsy Foundation of Wisconsin
Epilepsy Foundation Ohio
Epilepsy Foundation Oklahoma
Epilepsy Foundation Oregon
Epilepsy Foundation South Carolina
Epilepsy Foundation South Dakota
Epilepsy Foundation Utah
Epilepsy Foundation Washington
Epilepsy Foundation West Virginia
The Epilepsy Institute dba Epilepsy Foundation of Metropolitan New York
Esophageal Cancer Action Network
FDMAS Alliance
Fight Colorectal Cancer
FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered
Foundation for Angelman Syndrome Therapeutics

Foundation for Peripheral Neuropathy
Foundation to Eradicate Duchenne
Friedreich's Ataxia Research Alliance (FARA)
GBS|CIDP Foundation International
GI Cancers Alliance
GO2 for Lung Cancer
Hearing Loss Association of America
Hepatitis B Foundation
HIV Medicine Association
Hope for Stomach Cancer
Hydrocephalus Association
Infectious Diseases Society of America
International Myeloma Foundation
Interstitial Cystitis Association
Invisible Wounds Foundation
Johns Hopkins University & Medicine
Kidney Cancer Association
KidneyCAN
The LAM Foundation
Lennox-Gastaut Syndrome (LGS) Foundation
Long COVID Campaign
LUNGevity Foundation
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
Lupus Foundation of America
Lupus Research Alliance
Lymphoma Research Foundation
Malecare Cancer Support
Massachusetts ME/CFS & FM Association
ME/CFS San Diego
MEAction Maryland
MEAction NC
Melanoma Research Foundation
Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation
The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis
The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research
The Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Action Network (#MEAction)
National Alliance of State Prostate Cancer Coalitions
National Ataxia Foundation
National Autism Association
National Brain Tumor Society
National Fragile X Foundation
National Health Council
National Kidney Foundation
National LGBT Cancer Project
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
Neurofibromatosis (NF) Midwest
Neurofibromatosis Network

NF Northeast
North American Spinal Cord Injury Consortium
Ovarian Cancer Research Alliance
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCAN)
Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy
Patient-Led Research Collaborative
Penn State University
Phelan-McDermid Syndrome Foundation
PKD Foundation
Prevent Cancer Foundation
The Prostate Cancer Clinical Trials Consortium
Prostate Cancer Foundation
Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation
The Quinism Foundation
Rally Foundation for Childhood Cancer Research
Rare Epilepsy Network (REN)
RASopathies Network
ReNU2 United
Research!America
Ring 20 USA
The Sergeant Sullivan Circle
SHEPHERD Foundation
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons
Solve M.E.
Susan G. Komen
TB Alliance
Texas NF Foundation
Theresa's Research
TSC Alliance
Unite 2 Fight Paralysis
United Soldiers and Sailors of America-USASOA
United Spinal Association
University of Colorado Anschutz
University of Iowa
University of Pittsburgh
University of Washington
UsAgainstAlzheimer's
Vasculitis Foundation
Veterans for Common Sense
VHL Alliance
Virginia Commonwealth University
Washington State University
Weill Cornell Medicine
Wool + Wander
ZERO Prostate Cancer
cc: Members, U.S. Senate
Enclosure: "Relevance to National Security and Military Families"