The Defense Health Research Consortium

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
H-307 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter Visclosky
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Visclosky:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2017 (FY17) 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 FY16 budget process. 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), Veterans Administration (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. This disease-specific approach includes important medical research programs related to several forms of cancer (breast, blood, colorectal, kidney, melanoma, pancreatic, pediatric 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). Other 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). 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 orthopaedic 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.

- 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 short white paper providing several examples. Continued federal funding will only build on these successes.

The undersigned respectfully request your support for FY 2017 funding of all programs within the defense health research programs.

Sincerely,

Action to Cure Kidney Cancer
Adult Congenital Heart Association
Alpha-1 Foundation
ALS Association
American Association of Clinical Urologists
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American Brain Tumor Association
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Gastroenterological Association
American Psychological Association
American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy
American Urological Association

Aplastic Anemia & MDS International Foundation
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Autism Speaks
Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network (BCAN)
Children's Tumor Foundation
Coalition for National Security Research (CNSR)
Colon Cancer Alliance
COPD Foundation
Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America
CureHHT
Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer
Digestive Disease National Coalition
Epilepsy Foundation
Fight Colorectal Cancer
FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered
Foundation to Eradicate Duchenne
GBS/CIDP Foundation International
Hydrocephalus Association
Interstitial Cystitis Association
International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders
International Myeloma Foundation
Kidney Cancer Association
LAM Foundation
Littlest Tumor Foundation
Living Beyond Breast Cancer
Lung Cancer Alliance
Lupus Research Institute/Alliance for Lupus Research
Lymphoma Research Foundation
Malecare Cancer Support
Melanoma Research Foundation
Men's Health Network
Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA)
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research
National Alliance of State Prostate Cancer Coalitions
National Autism Association
National Gulf War Resource Center
National Kidney Foundation
National LGBT Cancer Project
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
Neurofibromatosis Midwest
Neurofibromatosis Network
Ovarian Cancer Research Fund Alliance

Pancreatic Cancer Action Network
Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy (PPMD)
Parkinson's Action Network
Prostate Cancer Foundation
Prostate Conditions Education Council
Prostate Health Education Network (PHEN)
Pulmonary Hypertension Association
Research!America
Scleroderma Foundation
Sleep Research Society
Society for Women's Health Research
Society of Gynecologic Oncology
Susan G. Komen
Texas Neurofibromatosis Foundation
Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance
Us TOO International Prostate Cancer Education and Support Network
Veterans for Common Sense
Veterans Health Council
Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)
Women Against Prostate Cancer
ZERO-The End of Prostate Cancer

Enclosure
cc: Members, House Appropriations Committee