

The Defense Health Research Consortium

July 8, 2021

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chair
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
122 Senate Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
115 Senate Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tester and Ranking Member Shelby:

The undersigned members of the Defense Health Research Consortium (DHRC) write to express our support for retaining the existing structure at the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) utilized to solicit, review and award research grants, specifically the peer review grant process that is so unique to this program. We are concerned about proposals for awarding grants recently submitted to your committee that would establish a pilot initiative for several programs at CDMRP utilizing mechanisms such as other transaction authorities (OTAs).

As you know, each of the separate programs at CDMRP 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. 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.

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.

Proponents of utilizing OTAs claim that their use will reduce overhead costs at CDMRP. Overhead at CDMRP remains extraordinarily low compared to other similar grant funding federal programs. For the past year, CDMRP's management costs remains at approximately 6.8 percent, compared to other federal research funding agencies with overhead rates well over 10 percent. There is a cost associated with the rigor of a multi-tiered peer review process, but we believe that this expenditure is more than necessary to ensure that the best and most impactful research is funded by CDMRP. This comprehensive review process has more than paid for itself, as the outcomes of research that have been funded through this process have saved lives and reduced health care costs for millions of Americans.

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In short, the well-executed and efficient programs at CDMRP demonstrate responsible government stewardship of taxpayer dollars and benefit current and former military service members, the general patient population, and our nation's economy. Replacing the consumer input and rigor involved in the existing peer review process with mechanisms like OTAs would jeopardize the quality of research and its positive impact on the men and women of the U.S. Armed Services and our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,

Action to Cure Kidney Cancer
ALS Association
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Gastroenterological Association
American Urological Association
Aplastic Anemia & MDS International Foundation
Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization
Beyond Celiac
Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network
Celiac Disease Foundation
Children's Tumor Foundation
CURE Epilepsy
CureHHT
Fight Colorectal Cancer
GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer
Hydrocephalus Association
KidneyCAN
Kidney Cancer Association
Littlest Tumor Foundation
Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research
National Alliance of State Prostate Cancer Coalitions
National Fragile X Foundation
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
Neurofibromatosis Midwest
Neurofibromatosis Network
North American Spinal Cord Injury Consortium
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network
PKD Foundation
Prostate Cancer Foundation
Quinism Foundation
Sergeant Sullivan Circle
SHEPHERD Foundation
Solve M.E.
Texas NF Foundation

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TSC Alliance
Veterans for Common Sense
VHL Alliance

The Defense Health Research Consortium

July 8, 2021

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

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair McCollum and Ranking Member Calvert:

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