

Date TBD

The Honorable John Tester
Chair
Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Tester and Ranking Member Collins:

As you consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Department of Defense (DoD) Appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you maintain inclusion of stomach cancer among those cancers eligible for research funding under the Peer Reviewed Cancer Research Program (PRCRP). This year, it is estimated that roughly 26,500 Americans will learn they have stomach cancer, and more than 11,000 will die from the disease.¹

Stomach cancer is, by definition, a recalcitrant cancer.² According to the American Cancer Society, the overall 5-year relative survival rate of people with stomach cancer in the United States is distressingly low at 33 percent. At advanced stages, the five-year survival rate is just six percent.³ The dismal statistics are largely because most patients present with advanced disease and tumor recurrence remains a significant challenge despite therapy.

There have been marginal gains in stomach cancer survival rates over the past decade. There has been, however, a worrisome increase in the incidence of stomach cancer in young non-Hispanic White females.⁴ Disease- and treatment-associated morbidity remain major challenges and there are substantial disparities of disease burden across populations.

The Department of Veterans Affairs considers stomach cancer to be a service-connected malignancy for service members who experienced hazardous exposures, including ionizing radiation and other toxins.⁵ Additionally, U.S. military personnel who serve overseas have a higher encounter rate with the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) due to poor sanitary

¹American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures 2023. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2023. <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/annual-cancer-facts-and-figures/2023/2023-cancer-facts-and-figures.pdf>

² National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013. Public Law No: 112-239; <https://www.congress.gov/bills/112/congress/house-bill/4310?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22national+defense+authorization+act+2013%22%7D>

³ Ibid.

⁴ National Cancer Institute, Clinical Trials and Translational Research Advisory Committee Gastric & Esophageal Cancers Working Group Report; Nov. 9, 2022. <https://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/advisory/ctac/1122/Goodman-Rustgi2.pdf>

⁵ National Cancer Strategy, Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration, VHA Directive 2003-34. June 20, 2003.

conditions and improper food storage. *H. pylori* is a primary identified cause of stomach cancer.^{6,7}

Funding for the PRCRP creates important opportunities to fill gaps in stomach cancer research. For example, PRCRP researchers are working toward better understanding the process by which premalignant tumors turn into malignant tumors. Through improved understanding of this process, or cathartocytosis, investigators may discover more effective ways to diagnose and treat the premalignant tumors, preventing cancers from forming.

The PRCRP is also funding researchers who are collecting the necessary data to design an impactful clinical trial with Selinexor in gastric cancer. Selinexor is a first-in-class, oral Selective Inhibitor of Nuclear Export (SINE) compound. Selinexor functions by binding with, and inhibiting, the nuclear export protein, XPO1, leading to the accumulation of tumor suppressor proteins in the cell nucleus. Researchers have identified XPO1 as a probable therapeutic target for stomach cancer. With PRCRP funding support, researchers will launch the first study of its kind evaluating potential predictive biomarkers to Selinexor treatment, including whether there are differences in XPO1 expression between African American and Caucasian patients. The outcome of this PRCRP funded study is anticipated to result in a more focused clinical study for the treatment of stomach cancer.

PRCRP-supported projects are advancing the field of stomach cancer research, which have the potential to make a tremendous difference in understanding this historically under-researched cancer, including the array of risk factors and causal mechanisms that contribute to stomach cancer and the disturbing upward trend in its incidence among young adults — a demographic that substantially overlaps active duty military personnel.⁸

We respectfully request your support for maintaining stomach cancer's eligibility for research funding through the PRCRP and for continuing to grow the federal investment in the program. The PRCRP benefits military service members and their families and is helping to fulfill the unmet clinical advances that can have a material impact on the lives of patients with stomach cancer

Sincerely,

⁶ Program Booklet. Peer Reviewed Cancer Research Program September 2019 <https://cdmnp.army.mil/prcrp/pbks/prcrppbk2019.pdf>

⁷ Taylor, DN et al. Second International Workshop on Helicobacter pylori Infections in the Developing World: Helicobacter pylori Infection in Desert Storm Troops. Clin Infect Dis. (1997) 25 (5): 979-982 doi:10.1086/516074

⁸ William F Anderson, Charles S Rabkin, Natalie Turner, Joseph F Fraumeni, Jr, Philip S Rosenberg, M Constanza Camargo, The Changing Face of Noncardia Gastric Cancer Incidence Among US Non-Hispanic Whites, JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute, Volume 110, Issue 6, June 2018, Pages 608–615, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jnci/djx262>