

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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The Honorable Jon Tester
Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Defense
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Defense
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

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. Stomach cancer is a recalcitrant cancer, with an overall 5-year survival rate of 33 percent. At advanced stages, the five-year survival rate is just six percent. The dismal statistics are largely because most patients present with advanced disease and tumor recurrence remains a significant challenge despite therapy. Despite marginal gains in stomach cancer survival rates over the past decade, incidence among young individuals, and particularly young women, continues to increase.

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. Further, due to poor sanitary conditions and improper food storage, U.S. military personnel who serve overseas have a higher encounter rate with the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*), which is a primary identified cause of stomach cancer.

Funding for the PRCRP creates important opportunities to study diseases like stomach cancer for which military service confers a higher risk. Stomach cancer was first included in the PRCRP for FY 2015; and from FY15 through FY21, the PRCRP has invested \$30.7 million in stomach cancer research across 50 awards.

PRCRP-supported projects are advancing the field of stomach cancer research, with the potential to make a tremendous difference in understanding this historically under-researched cancer. This includes research to understand the risk factors that contribute to stomach cancer and the disturbing upward trend in its incidence among young adults — a demographic that substantially

overlaps with active-duty military personnel. 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, investigators may discover more effective ways to diagnose and treat premalignant tumors, preventing cancers from forming. Regarding treatment, PRCRP researchers are close to bringing to trial therapeutic agents that have the potential to suppress the growth of cancer tumors, offering a novel treatment for stomach cancer.

PRCRP for Stomach Cancer Research continues to benefit 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. 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.

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