

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 10, 2024

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) 2025 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 26,890 Americans will learn they have stomach cancer, and 10,880 will die from the disease.<sup>1</sup> Stomach cancer is a recalcitrant cancer, with an overall 5-year survival rate of 36 percent. At advanced stages, the five-year survival rate is just 7 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—particularly young women—continues to increase.

The Department of Veterans Affairs considers stomach cancer to be a service-connected malignancy for servicemembers who experienced hazardous exposures, including ionizing radiation and other toxins. Further, U.S. military personnel who serve overseas have a higher encounter rate with the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*)—a human carcinogen—which is a primary identified cause of stomach cancer.<sup>2</sup>

Based on a recently published study,<sup>3</sup> one-fourth of the U.S. veteran population is at risk for benign and malignant consequences of chronic *H. pylori* infection. As noted by the study's authors, there is a need for additional research to better understanding the genetic, environmental and other drivers, including socioeconomic and demographic differences, of *H. pylori* diagnosis in the veterans population so effective strategies can be employed to mitigate the downstream consequences of *H. pylori* infection, including stomach cancer.

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<sup>1</sup> American Cancer Society 2024 Facts & Figures. <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/annual-cancer-facts-and-figures/2024/2024-cancer-facts-and-figures-acf.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2024/infections-diseases/helicobacter-pylori#:~:text=pylori>

<sup>3</sup> Shah SC, Halvorson AE, Lee D, Bustamante R, McBey B, et al. Helicobacter pylori Burden in the United States According to Individual Demographics and Geography: A Nationwide Analysis of the Veterans Healthcare System. *Clin Gastroenterol Hepatol.* 2024 Jan;22(1):42-50.e26. doi: 10.1016/j.cgh.2023.05.016. Epub 2023 May 26. PMID: 37245717.

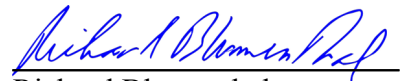
The PRCRP funds stomach cancer research with the potential to revolutionize treatment and prevention measures as well as advance our understanding of the risk factors that contribute to disease incidence. With the goal of preventing stomach cancer, the PRCRP has invested in the development of innovative approaches that identify pre-cancerous cells and reverse the course of pre-cancerous lesions before they evolve into malignant tumors. In addition, PRCRP-funded research is addressing important treatment gaps, such as unraveling the mechanisms driving immunosuppression to leverage the body's immune system and improve immunotherapies. The PRCRP investment in risk factor research includes investigations into genetic, environmental and infectious disease risk factors, including the increased exposure to external risk factors encountered by active-duty military personnel.

Funding for the PRCRP benefits military servicemembers and their families and is helping to fulfill the unmet clinical needs that would 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.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



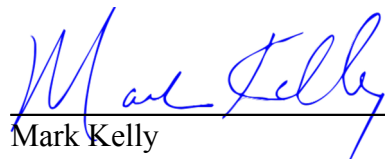
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



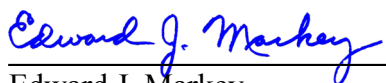
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



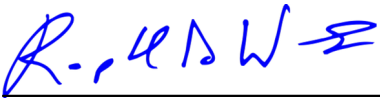
Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator



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Raphael Warnock  
United States Senator



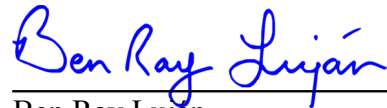
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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



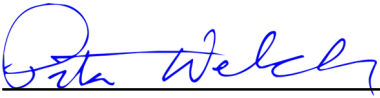
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Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator



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Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



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Peter Welch  
United States Senator