

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

[[DATE]]

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

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

Dear Chairman McConnell and Ranking Member Coons:

As you consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 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 30,300 Americans will learn they have stomach cancer, and approximately 10,780 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. Additionally, alarming inequalities in stomach cancer mortality persist.

The Department of Veterans Affairs considers stomach cancer to be a service-connected malignancy for servicemembers who experienced hazardous exposures, including burn pits, 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

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<sup>1</sup> American Cancer Society Key Statistics About Stomach Cancer. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/stomach-cancer/about/key-statistics.html#:~:text=trends%20over%20time-How%20common%20is%20stomach%20cancer%3F,6%2C400%20men%20and%204%2C380%20women>

<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, McBay 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.

in the veterans population so effective strategies can be employed to mitigate the downstream consequences of *H. pylori* infection, including stomach cancer.

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.

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