

March 19, 2019

The Honorable Pete Visclosky  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Defense  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ken Calvert  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Defense  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Visclosky and Ranking Member Calvert:

On behalf of the undersigned military and veteran service organizations, **we urge Congress to designate a stand-alone arthritis program at the Department of Defense (DoD) within the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) and appropriate \$20 million for fiscal year (FY) 2020 to support this critically important work.** Arthritis is the second leading cause of medical discharge from the U.S. Army, and severely impacts military readiness and retention. It affects all branches of the military: Army personnel experience the highest rates of OA of any military branch, followed by Air Force, Marine Corps, and Navy. Junior enlisted service members have the highest rates of OA by rank, followed by senior enlisted, senior officers, and junior officers.

Arthritis is a serious, chronic, and progressively degenerative condition affecting the body's joints and connective tissues. One in three veterans lives with this condition and it is the leading cause of disability among veterans. For many service members, their arthritis story begins in basic training and worsens over time as a result of wear and tear and injury. We need dedicated arthritis research funding to address the growing burden arthritis is placing on our military personnel and veterans, and Congress must step up to address this important issue.

As so many of our veterans contend with the physical after-effects of military service, providers and researchers are trying to figure out how to best manage their care. Many service members are injured early in their lives, requiring years of ongoing therapy, medication intake, and potential surgeries. We also know that arthritis is responsible for rising DoD and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health costs because of its impact on disease management, joint pain, and joint replacement surgery.

Thorough and appropriately funded research can help identify better joint injury management protocols, assist in reducing long-term health costs related to arthritis, and help our troops and veterans live high quality lives. Research could also help DoD determine if specialties like artillery, special forces, loadmasters, flight engineers, medical flight crew, and other specialties have duties that lead them to develop arthritis. By doing so DoD could make safety changes to the work environment thereby reducing medical costs and time lost from the job. Providing adequate, stable funding for arthritis research would allow researchers and providers to meet the growing needs of active military personnel and veterans, who often possess irreversible and lifelong needs related to their service.

The CDMRP was established by Congress to provide medical research specifically for our military. Due to the significant impact arthritis has on military readiness and the health of our veterans, we urge Congress to create a stand-alone arthritis program within the CDMRP and sourcing \$20 million for FY 2020 to ensure our service members and veterans get the care they have earned.

Sincerely,

TREA: The Enlisted Association  
United States Army Warrant Officers Association  
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc.  
The Association of Military Surgeons of the United States, the Society of Federal Health Professionals  
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the US

The Reserve Officers Association  
Association of United States Navy  
Fleet Reserve Association  
Non Commissioned Officers Association  
Marine Corps League  
Military Order of Purple Heart  
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association  
Military Chaplains Association  
Wounded Warrior Project  
Jewish War Veterans of the USA  
American Veterans  
National Guard Association of the United States  
USCG Chief Warrant and Warrant Officers Association  
U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association & Enlisted Association  
Armed Forces Retirees Association  
Marine Corps Reserve Association  
Vietnam Veterans of America  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America