

March 12, 2020

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) 2021 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 osteoarthritis of any military branch, followed by Air Force, Coast Guard, 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. We have had this same important discussion with DoD's Defense Health Agency (DHA).

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. According to the FY 2018 Annual Benefits Report from the VA, more than 9.2 million veterans received disability compensation for musculoskeletal conditions such as degenerative arthritis, post-traumatic OA, or limited range of joint motion – a 44 percent increase over FY 2014. 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. 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 2021 to ensure our service members and veterans get the care they have earned.

Sincerely,

Air Force Association  
Air Force Sergeants Association  
American Veterans

Armed Forces Retirees Association  
Association of United States Army  
Association of United States Navy  
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc.  
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the US  
Fleet Reserve Association  
Gold Star Wives  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America  
Jewish War Veterans of the USA  
Marine Corps League  
Marine Corps Reserve Association  
Military Chaplains Association  
Military Order of Purple Heart  
National Guard Association of the United States  
National Military Family Association  
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association  
Non Commissioned Officers Association  
Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)  
The Association of Military Surgeons of the United States, the Society of Federal Health Professionals  
The Reserve Officers Association  
Transition Assistance Program for Survivors  
TREA: The Enlisted Association  
United States Army Warrant Officers Association  
U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association & Enlisted Association  
USCG Chief Warrant and Warrant Officers Association  
Vets First  
Vietnam Veterans of America  
Wounded Warrior Project