

April 30, 2018

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

Dear Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member Visclosky:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to designate a stand-alone arthritis program within the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) at the Department of Defense (DoD), funded at \$20 million, for fiscal year (FY) 2019. One in three veterans lives with arthritis and the disease is the second leading cause of medical discharge from the U.S. Army. Research supporting better prevention strategies, interventions, and innovative treatments is critical to reducing the number of service members and veterans suffering from arthritis.

Military service members and veterans live with arthritis at higher rates than civilians. One study found osteoarthritis (OA) rates to be 26 percent higher in services members aged 20 to 24 compared with the same age group in the general population. From the same study, individuals over age 40 were twice as likely to develop OA after returning to civilian life. As early as basic training, service members are carrying 60 to 100+ pound packs that can injure or weaken their joints and lead to arthritis. Such activities often result in our service members suffering injuries at a young age, which translates to more years of joint-related symptoms, activity limitations and risks associated with medical procedures.

Post-traumatic osteoarthritis (PTOA) is of particular concern. High-impact injuries can cause bone loss, soft-tissue damage and open and contaminated wounds prone to infection. Not only do these injuries heighten the risk of getting PTOA, but they increase the risk of the disease manifesting within 2 years of injury as well – compared to 10 years in the civilian population. Data from the U.S. Army's Physical Evaluation Board reveals that among permanently disabling conditions, arthritis was the most common unfitting condition, with 94.4 percent of cases attributed to combat injury. Wounded service members will need costly life-long care for this progressively degenerative condition, translating into potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars in disability and health costs over the lifetime of the veteran that are ultimately born by taxpayers.

Research can help identify better joint injury management to reduce the effects of joint degeneration in this population. It can also help identify ways to prevent joint injury during military training and service. DoD currently funds a limited amount of arthritis research through the Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP). This research is focused on reducing the impact of PTOA, OA, and rheumatoid arthritis, and ultimately preventing arthritis from occurring. However, this limited amount of research is not enough as these topics are not guaranteed inclusion in the PRMRP year-to-year.

It is clear there is a growing burden of arthritis among active duty military and veteran populations; arthritis is responsible for rising DoD and VA health care costs stemming from joint pain, loss of function, and joint replacement surgery. Further, this population has specific clinical needs, and

arthritis and clinical care research on both active duty military and veteran populations is significantly limited.

To meet the needs of our military and veteran populations, we respectfully request that you designate a \$20 million stand-alone arthritis program within the DoD CDMRP for FY 2019. We need more dedicated arthritis research funding to address the growing burden arthritis is placing on our active duty military personnel and veterans; the impact on military readiness is real. We thank you for your consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Arthritis Foundation's Anna Hyde, Vice President of Advocacy and Access, at ahyde@arthritis.org, or Vincent Pacileo, Director of Federal Affairs, at vpacileo@arthritis.org, with questions or for more information.

Sincerely,

American College of Rheumatology
American Physical Therapy Association
Arthritis Foundation
Association of Rheumatology Healthcare Professionals
Association of Women in Rheumatology
Coalition of State Rheumatology Organizations
National Organization of Rheumatology Managers
Rheumatology Nurses Society