



March 3, 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 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) 2020. One in three veterans lives with arthritis and it 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 are afflicted with arthritis at higher rates than civilians. One study found osteoarthritis rates to be 26 percent higher for service 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 osteoarthritis 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 progressive 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.

We are also concerned about the impact arthritis has on the readiness of our military and the rate at which military service members are discharged as a consequence of an arthritis diagnosis. The most recent research available indicates military physicians diagnosed over 108,000 cases of osteoarthritis between

1998 and 2008. The physical demands of service and clinical needs of active duty military and veterans means dedicated funding to understand the growing disease burden is critical.

Research can help identify better joint injury management 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, osteoarthritis, 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.

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 2020. We need dedicated arthritis research funding not only to understand the impact on military readiness but to discover and implement treatments that prevent disease progression. We thank you for your consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to reach out to Vincent Pacileo, the Arthritis Foundation's Director of Federal Affairs, at vpacileo@arthritis.org or 202-843-0114, with questions or for more information.

Sincerely,

American College of Rheumatology
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association
Arthritis Foundation
Association of Rheumatology Professionals
Association of Women in Rheumatology
Coalition of State Rheumatology Organizations
National Athletic Trainers' Association
National Organization of Rheumatology Managers
National Osteoporosis Foundation
Rheumatology Nurses Society
Rheumatology Research Foundation
United States Bone and Joint Initiative
warrior2warrior foundation