

March 17, 2017

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

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

Dear Chairman 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 at the Department of Defense (DoD), funded at \$20 million. One of every three veterans lives with arthritis; it is the second leading cause of medical discharge from the U.S. Army; and it is the top cause of disability among veterans. The consequence is a severe negative impact on military readiness and retention. Research supporting better prevention strategies, interventions and innovative treatments are critical to reduce 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 (OA) rates to be 26% higher in the 20-24 year age group compared with the same age group in the general population. Individuals over age 40 were twice as likely to develop arthritis after returning to civilian life. As early as basic training, service members are carrying 60-100+ lb. packs that can injure and weaken their joints, which can 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 increase the risk of getting PTOA, but they also increase the risk of getting it within 2 years of injury, compared to 10 years in the civilian population. Data from the Army's Physical Evaluation Board revealed that among permanently disabling conditions, arthritis was the most common unfitting condition, with 94.4% of cases attributed to combat injury. Wounded service members will need costly life-long care for this progressively degenerative condition. This translates to potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars in disability and health costs over the lifetime of the veteran that is ultimately born by the U.S. 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. 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. 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 are asking you to designate a \$20 million stand-alone arthritis program within the DoD Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program. We need more dedicated arthritis research funding to address the growing burden arthritis is placing on our active duty military personnel and veterans. We thank you for your consideration of this request. Should you have any questions, please contact Sandie Preiss, Arthritis Foundation National Vice President of Advocacy and Access, at 202-887-2910 or [spreiss@arthritis.org](mailto:spreiss@arthritis.org).

Sincerely,

American College of Rheumatology  
Arthritis Foundation  
American Osteopathic Association  
Association of Rheumatology Healthcare Professionals  
Coalition of State Rheumatology Organizations  
National Athletic Trainers' Association  
Rheumatology Nurses Society  
Rheumatology Research Foundation