

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

APRIL 1, 2019

The Honorable Pete Visclosky
Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
H-405, The Capitol,
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Visclosky and Ranking Member Calvert:

We thank you for your support for the many exceptional medical research programs within the Department of Defense (DoD) Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP), including medical research specific to open-air burn pit exposure under the Peer-Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP). As the subcommittee develops an appropriations bill for FY 2020, we respectfully request the creation of a Burn Pit Exposure Medical Research Program similar to the Gulf War Illness Research Program (GWIRP).

The House Veterans' Affairs Health Subcommittee received testimony last year recommending the creation of peer-reviewed medical research program dedicated to burn pit exposure modeled after the successful GWIRP. Written testimony submitted by the VFW stated: "The use of open air burn pits in combat zones has caused invisible, but grave health complications for many service members, past and present. Particulate matter, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, volatile organic compounds and dioxins — the destructive compound found in Agent Orange — and other harmful materials are all present in burn pits, creating clouds of hazardous chemical compounds that are unavoidable to those in close proximity... More independent research is necessary. That is why the VFW supports establishing a Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) specifically for burn pits. The CDMRP has shown progress in identifying causes, effective treatments, and biomarkers for Gulf War Illness, and the VFW is confident a similar program for burn pits will help exposed veterans...."

Written testimony from Burn Pits 360 stated: "CDMRP is important for this treatment-focused research for several reasons. First, CDMRP has the ability to fund any qualified research team, not just those employed by the funding agency. By contrast, VA's medical research program is solely intramural and open only to VA-employed researchers. Much of the valuable medical research related to burn pits exposure has been led by researchers at independent, academic medical centers including Vanderbilt University, Stony Brook University, the Deployment-Related Lung Disease Center at National Jewish Health, and others. Second, CDMRP includes in all levels the active participation of consumer reviewers – patients (or their caregivers) who are actually affected by the disease. This is of critical importance. VA offers no opportunity for similar involvement in research decision-making by the patients who are ultimately affected by such decisions. Finally, CDMRP has already shown its effectiveness with regards to other complex post-deployment, toxic exposure health conditions including traumatic brain injury (TBI) and Gulf War Illness (GWI), including through its emphasis on collaboration, treatment focus, and effective two-tiered peer review."

We recommend a Burn Pit Exposure Medical Research Program develop a collaborative, inter-institutional, interdisciplinary, GWIRP-like research consortium while also funding other relevant research focused on achieving *the improved health and lives of veterans affected by burn pit exposures*, including the following goals, which may also help current and future military servicemembers similarly exposed:

- **Accelerating the development of treatments and their clinical translation** for affected veterans (e.g., lung, brain, injury, symptoms, diseases, prevalent comorbidities, etc.);
- **Improving definition, diagnosis, and scientific understanding of the pathobiology and symptoms resulting from these exposures**, including identifying biomarkers of exposure, exposure effect, and illness;
- **Assessing comorbidities**, including the incidence, prevalence, early detection and diagnosis, treatments for, or any unique factors related to exposed veterans' respiratory conditions (e.g. constrictive bronchiolitis, pulmonary fibrosis, etc.), cancers (e.g., lung, etc.), or other diseases.


We respectfully request that you provide the necessary resources in the FY20 DoD appropriations bill to establish this program. Furthermore, it is critical to the program's success and accountability that it be a stand-alone program within the CDMRP and not be combined as a topic area within broader, less-targeted research programs. Our goal is not research for research's sake, but the development of knowledge to guide recovery for veterans still suffering following their exposure to these airborne hazards.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.


Sincerely,



 JOAQUIN CASTRO
 Member of Congress



 PETER T. KING
 Member of Congress



 RAUL RUIZ, M.D.
 Member of Congress


 TULSI GABBARD
 Member of Congress


 JENNIFER GONZALEZ COLON
 Member of Congress


 HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR.
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