

May 14, 2024

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chair
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Defense
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Defense
Washington, D.C. 20515

To Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum:

As you work to complete the FY25 Defense Appropriations bill, the undersigned organizations respectfully urge you to include \$20 million to create a Colorectal Cancer Research Program within the Department of Defense Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program. Our organizations represent thousands of colorectal cancer survivors and their loved ones, physicians and researchers committed to reducing the burden of this disease.

As the second leading cause of cancer death for men and women combined, the leading cause of cancer death for men under 50 and the second leading cause of cancer death for women under 50, it is clear that more resources must be dedicated to colorectal cancer research.¹

Incidence rates have been increasing among individuals under 50 years of age - a key demographic for our active and reserve duty military personnel whose average age is 29.6 years – at an alarming rate.² Individuals born in the 1990s have double the risk of colon cancer and quadruple the risk of rectal cancer as those born in the 1950s.³ Additionally, three of four colorectal cancer patients under the age of 50 have no family history of the disease, and over 60 percent are diagnosed at a late stage when the disease is far more difficult to treat.⁴ In those later stages, it becomes more expensive for patients and becomes an overwhelming financial burden on those patients and their families.

¹ American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures 2024. Atlanta: American Cancer Society, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/annual-cancer-facts-and-figures/2024/2024-cancer-facts-and-figures-acf.pdf>

² Total DoD Military Force. 2022 Demographics Dashboards. (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://demographics.militaryonesource.mil/chapter-1-total-force-characteristics>

³ Siegel, Rebecca L. et al. "Colorectal Cancer Incidence Patterns In The United States, 1974–2013". JNCI: Journal Of The National Cancer Institute, vol 109, no. 8, 2017. Oxford University Press (OUP), doi:10.1093/jnci/djw322.

⁴ K Robin Yabroff, PhD, Angela Mariotto, PhD, Florence Tangka, PhD, Jingxuan Zhao, MPH, Farhad Islami, MD, PhD, Hyuna Sung, PhD, Recinda L Sherman, PhD, S Jane Henley, MSPH, Ahmedin Jemal, DVM, PhD, Elizabeth M Ward, PhD, Annual Report to the Nation on the Status of Cancer, Part 2: Patient Economic Burden Associated With Cancer Care, JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute, Volume 113, Issue 12, December 2021, Pages 1670–1682, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jnci/djab192>

Over 13,000 active-duty service members were diagnosed with colorectal cancer between 2001 and 2021, with the highest rates being seen in the Army, followed by Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. Several substances frequently used in military operations have been linked to increased risk of colorectal cancer including hexavalent chromium, asbestos, petrochemicals, and benzo(a)pyrene.⁵ This represents a readiness issue for our Armed Forces. We owe it to our active-duty and veteran servicemembers to invest in finding solutions.

We are grateful that colorectal cancer has been eligible for funding through the Peer-Reviewed Research Program (PRCRP) since FY 2010. The PRCRP has supported research exploring issues important to both the warfighter and the civilian population, including whether environmental chemicals are associated with an increased risk of colorectal cancer and looking at ways to develop a colorectal cancer vaccine.

But we are leaving good science on the table. In FY2022, the DoD received 66 colorectal cancer applications. Of those, 25 were deemed “meritorious,” but only nine applications were funded. Those projects could be the key to more effective treatment options or uncovering why more young people are being diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

We understand that this is a challenging budget environment, but the cost of doing nothing is far greater. In 2020, the United States spent an estimated \$24.3 billion on colorectal cancer care.⁶ Investment in colorectal cancer research is critical to change the trajectory of this disease. As you draft the FY25 Defense Appropriations bill, we urge you to provide \$20 million to create a Colorectal Cancer Research Program within the Department of Defense Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you on this important matter.

Sincerely,

⁵ Hunter Seven Foundation. (n.d.). Colon Cancer: Facts, Risk Factors, and Screening for Military Veterans. <https://hunterseven.org/tag/colon-cancer/>

⁶ Mariotto AB, Enewold L, Zhao JX, Zeruto CA, Yabroff KR. Medical Care Costs Associated with Cancer Survivorship in the United States. *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev.* 2020;29(7):1304-12.
Mariotto AB, Yabroff KR, Shao Y, Feuer EJ, Brown ML. Projections of the cost of cancer care in the United States: 2010-2020. *J Natl Cancer Inst.* 2011;103(2):117-28.
Bluethmann SM, Mariotto AB, Rowland JH. Anticipating the "Silver Tsunami": Prevalence Trajectories and Comorbidity Burden among Older Cancer Survivors in the United States. *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev.* 2016;25(7):1029-36.

Fight Colorectal Cancer

Association of Black Gastroenterologists and Hepatologists

AliveandKick'n

American College of Gastroenterology

American Gastroenterological Association

California Colorectal Cancer Coalition (C4)

Cancer Support Community

Champions for Colorectal Cancer Inc

Collaborative Group of the Americas on Inherited Gastrointestinal Cancer (CGA-IGC)

Colon Cancer Coalition

Colon Cancer Prevention Project

Colontown

Colorectal Cancer Alliance

Colorectal Cancer Equity Foundation

FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered

Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education

GH Foundation

GI Cancers Alliance

Hitting Cancer Below the Belt

Man Up to Cancer

National Comprehensive Cancer Network

Nevada Cancer Coalition

ONE CANCER PLACE

Prevent Cancer Foundation

Raymond Foundation

Tell5Friends Foundation

The Blue Hat Foundation

The Gloria Borges WunderGlo Foundation

United Ostomy Associations of America, Inc.

Washington Colon Cancer Stars