

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 28, 2021

Senator Martin Heinrich  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Military Construction,  
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies  
United States Senate

Senator John Boozman  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Military Construction,  
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies  
United States Senate

Dear Chairman Heinrich and Ranking Member Boozman:

We write to reiterate the importance of fostering innovation in veterans' health care and request the United States Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies to support at least \$902 million in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 appropriation for the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Medical and Prosthetic Research program.

The VA's Office of Research and Development is the nation's only health research program dedicated to the specialized needs of veterans to improve the health care and overall well-being of veterans in the United States and around the world. Throughout its 95 years, the work of VA Research has not only helped veterans, but translated into breakthroughs in treatments for all Americans, producing an incredible return on investment. VA's premier researchers and clinicians also have collaborated with outside partners around the country as well as valued members of the research community. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need and the critical role VA research plays in emerging needs in veterans' health.

In FY 2022, it is critical for VA Medical and Prosthetic Research to have robust funding to address a wide variety of new challenges while still building on the successes made so far. In 2020 alone, the VA Research published 40 findings of their research that focus on key vulnerable populations in the veteran community, including how to decrease suicide among veterans experiencing homelessness, the risk of heart attack in veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or traumatic brain injury, and the risk of pregnancy complications in women veterans with elevated symptoms of PTSD and moral injury. VA also launched more partnerships with leading organizations such as American Kidney Fund, the Parkinson's Foundation, and Prostate Cancer Foundation to further improve veterans' health outcomes.

Notably, in 2020, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, VA Research quickly pivoted its resources to assist in national efforts to combat COVID-19 while still conducting its research priorities, demonstrating its strength to meet emerging veterans' needs. VA Research was part of two national research initiatives, Operation Warp Speed and the Accelerating COVID-19 Therapeutic Interventions and Vaccines initiatives, in evaluating several COVID-19 vaccines that now protect millions of Americans from complications from COVID-19. In addition, VA engaged in 279 research projects across the country on COVID-19 treatments and

mitigation. VA conducted this without emergency supplemental funding drawing upon existing funding. As the United States begins to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, VA Research will need increased support to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on research progress.

A major cornerstone of VA Research continues to be its Million Veteran Program (MVP), a national, voluntary program, which will be one of the largest genetic databases in the world, is already demonstrating results. More than 825,000 veterans have enrolled in MVP, and a number of current MVP studies have made discoveries in a multitude of illnesses and diseases, including COVID-19, cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, as well as conditions specific to veterans such as PTSD, TBI, and tinnitus.

While the VA continues to make strides in its research, researchers are in need of additional technical infrastructure to support the growth in research. Within the requested \$902 million for VA Research, \$29 million should be specifically designated to alleviate the strained IT capacity through computational science purchases to enhance the collection and use of big data.

We ask you to appropriate at least \$902 million for VA Medical and Prosthetic Research for FY 2022, an amount that reflects ten percent growth over FY 2021. This increase reflects the demonstrated extra need for VA research that quickly supported national COVID-19 research needs as well as ensuring real growth accounting for inflation, expanding opportunities, and sustaining ongoing research that already has been invested in. Growth rates that have not been reflected in the past two fiscal years due to the absence of the markup process during appropriations and FY 2022 provides the opportunity to account for the increased need in the future. These efforts will ultimately continue fostering innovative treatments to ensure quality health care for our nation's veterans.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,



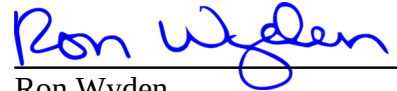
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

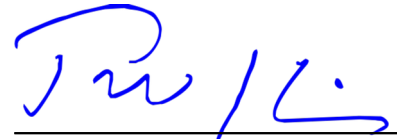
Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons

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Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



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Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



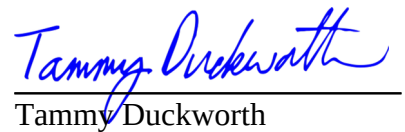
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Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator



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Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator



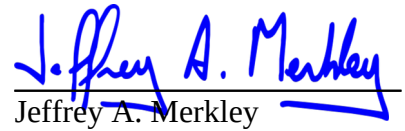
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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



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Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator



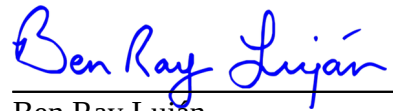
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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



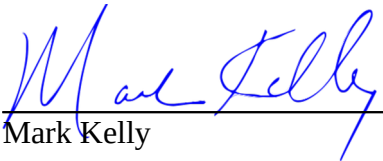
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Krysten Sinema  
United States Senator



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Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



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Mark Kelly  
United States Senator