



Multiple Sclerosis Research Funding in the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs

Request

We ask Congress to support a \$15 million appropriation to the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP) for multiple sclerosis (MS) research in Fiscal Year 2012. For the more than 20,000 U.S. veterans diagnosed with MS and more than 400,000 people living with the disease nationwide, this funding will provide the necessary resources so researchers can explore potential environmental risks, new treatments, and a cure for MS.

Position

Multiple sclerosis, an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system, interrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body. Symptoms range from numbness and tingling to blindness and paralysis. The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted, but advances in research and treatment are moving us closer to a world free of MS.

Emerging evidence indicates a potential link between combat service and an increased incidence of MS. Over the past three federal funding cycles, Congress provided approximately \$13 million for the MS Research Program in the CDMRP. While this is a great start, the overwhelming number of grant submissions demonstrates a clear need for additional funding. The \$15 million for this program can give scientists the means to better understand the causes of MS and help find a cure.

On behalf of people living with multiple sclerosis nationwide, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society urges increased federal investment in MS research through the CDMRP.

The CDMRP is funded through the Department of Defense (DoD) via the Defense Appropriations Act. Dollars for the CDMRP are added every year during the budget process by members of Congress, in response to requests by advocates and disease survivors. Given emerging evidence linking combat service to increased incidence rates of MS, we believe this is an appropriate source for MS research funding.

Supporting Rationale

- Preliminary evidence suggests that Gulf War veterans could have an increased risk of MS. The evidence includes a study in the *Annals of Neurology* that identifies 5,345 cases of MS among veterans deemed “service-connected,” which represents a significant increase from previous studies.
- An epidemiologic study found an unexpected, two-fold increase in MS between 1993 and 2000 in Kuwait, which suggests neurotoxin exposure as a potential environmental trigger for MS.
- More than 20,000 veterans with MS receive care through the Veterans Health Administration. The VA currently is funding two MS Centers of Excellence to provide clinical care and education. Physicians at those institutions have published a professional hypothesis that Gulf War veterans are at an increased risk for MS due to exposure to neurotoxins.
- An advisory committee commissioned by the VA recently recommended further study into the potential link between combat service and the increased risk of developing MS. By studying this population, scientists might be able to understand the cause and triggers of MS and develop effective treatments.
- The CDMRP is a peer-reviewed program that funds high-risk, high-reward research. This nimble program takes prudent measures to ensure that none of its work duplicates or unnecessarily overlaps that done by other research organizations, such as the National Institutes of Health.
- In FY 2008, MS was listed as a topic area eligible to compete with other diseases for funding through DoD’s Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP). That was the first time MS was ever listed in the program. The DoD received 108 grant applications for MS funding of which the DoD was able to fund three. Since then, Congress has established a specific MS program within the CDMRP that has received nearly \$10 million in funding.

*** Please note: This request is considered programmatic.