

March 23, 2020

Chairman Peter Visclosky
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Defense
H-405 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Ken Calvert
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Defense
H-405 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Visclosky and Ranking Member Calvert:

The National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention (National Council) respectfully writes to thank you for creating a separate line item for Defense-funded melanoma research in the Fiscal Year 2020 Defense Appropriations bill and request that the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee provide \$35 million for melanoma research in the Fiscal 2021 Department of Defense Appropriations bill. This program is funded within the Defense Health account.

The National Council is an organization with the mission of serving as a “united voice to prevent skin cancer through education, advocacy and raising awareness.” The National Council’s members represent the nation’s premier researchers, clinicians, and advocates for melanoma and skin cancer prevention, and it plays a unique role in connecting more than 45 organizations, agencies, and associations in pursuing its mission.

Melanoma is a unique and major threat to our military community, who carry out their missions in environments of extreme solar radiation. Decades of studies from WWII to the current generation of war fighters confirm the linkage of this exposure to the development of deadly melanoma. Continued innovation in melanoma prevention, detection, and treatment is only possible with continued investment in high quality research.

A 2000 "Annals of Epidemiology" study comparing mortality among WWII veterans of the Pacific and European Theaters found that Pacific Theater Prisoner of War veterans had an estimated 3 times greater risk of dying from melanoma than veterans of the European Theater.^[1] The article concluded that these data are "consistent with the hypothesis that exposure to high levels of solar radiation in young adulthood is associated with a higher risk of melanoma mortality."^[2]

According to *The Pulse*, the online source for the Uniformed Services University, “melanoma is the most significant cancer to affect the active duty military population.”^[3] A Vanderbilt School of Medicine study cites that only 22 percent of military personnel were made aware of the risks of sun exposure, 77 percent reported being exposed to bright sunlight for more than 4 hours a day, and only 27 percent had regular access to sunscreen.^[4] The study concluded that “the past decade of

United States' combat missions, including operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, have occurred at a more equatorial latitude than the mean center of the United States population, increasing the potential for ultraviolet irradiance and the development of skin cancer."^[5]

Recent studies have borne out these conclusions. A study published in the Military Service Monthly Report found that in a 10-year surveillance period from 2005 to 2014, malignant melanoma was one of the most frequent cancer diagnoses among male service members, and the second most frequent cancer diagnosis among female service members.^[6] Another 2014 Military Medicine Study found that the overall incidence rate of melanoma in active duty military personnel between 2000 and 2007 was 62 percent greater than among the general population during the same period.^[7]

Given the clear threat melanoma poses to our service members, and the volume of high-quality research proposals, the endorsing National Council organizations listed below, respectfully request that the committee provide \$35 million for melanoma research in the Fiscal Year 2021 Defense Appropriations bill.

Thank you for considering this important request. Should you have any questions, please contact me, at antonishak@skincancerprevention.org or call 301.801.4422.

Sincerely,



John D. Antonishak
Executive Director

Endorsing Organizations:

AIM at Melanoma
American Academy of Dermatology Association
American Melanoma Foundation
American Skin Association
American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association
American Society for Mohs Surgery
Children's Melanoma Prevention Foundation
Colette Coyne Melanoma Awareness
IMPACT Melanoma
Melanoma Research Alliance
Melanoma Research Foundation
Outrun the Sun
Polka Dot Mama Melanoma Foundation
Prevent Cancer Foundation
Society for Pediatric Dermatology
Sun Safety for Kids
The Skin Cancer Foundation
Warriors Against Melanoma

-
- [1] Page, William F., David Whiteman, and Michael Murphy. "A comparison of melanoma mortality among WWII veterans of the Pacific and European theaters." *Annals of epidemiology* 10, no. 3 (2000): 192-195.
- [2] Ibid.
- [3] Mason, V. (2018). Improving the Detection of Melanoma in Active Duty Military. [online] The Pulse. Available at: <https://usupulse.blogspot.com/2018/02/improving-detection-of-melanoma-in.html> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2020].
- [4] Powers JG, Patel NA, Powers EM, Mayer JE, Stricklin GP, Geller AC. Skin cancer risk factors and preventative behaviors among United States military veterans deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan [published online ahead of print June 25, 2015]. *J Invest Dermatol*. doi: 10.1038/jid.2015.238.
- [5] Ibid.
- [6] Lee, T., V. F. Williams, and L. L. Clark. "Incident diagnoses of cancers in the active component and cancer-related deaths in the active and reserve components, US Armed Forces, 2005-2014." *MSMR* 23, no. 7 (2016): 23-31.
- [7] Lea, C. Suzanne, Jimmy T. Eford, Amanda E. Toland, Denise R. Lewis, and Christopher J. Phillips. "Melanoma incidence rates in active duty military personnel compared with a population-based registry in the United States, 2000–2007." (2014): 247-253.