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Infectious Diseases Society of America

July 26, 2017

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the House:

As the full House considers H.R. 3219, Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Defense Department (DoD) appropriations legislation, we ask that you support funding in the bill for DoD's Defense Health Program/Research, Development, Test & Evaluation (RDTE), which supports infectious disease research and development activities, particularly the Military Infectious Disease Research Program (MIDRP). We also ask you to support continued funding for the infectious disease projects funded by the Joint Warfighter Medical Research Program (JWMRP) and the Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP), including the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP), which are aligned with the MIDRP. Additionally, we urge your support for the Center for Infectious Disease Research at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research.

IDSA appreciates the \$33.931 billion of overall funding provided for the DoD's Defense Health Program in the House FY2018 DoD Appropriations bill, a \$150 million increase over FY2017 levels. We are also grateful for report language in the bill that acknowledges the work of the Department to respond to emerging infectious diseases including the valuable investment with partnering academic institutions to advance military infectious disease capabilities.

While biomedical research funded through other agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is essential for driving innovation to save lives, DoD-supported research fills a necessary role to meet the specific and often unique health needs of our military. This is particularly true in infectious diseases, as military service members stationed across the globe often face different pathogens than other U.S. civilian populations. Further, since the DoD coordinates its research activities closely with other agencies to avoid duplicative efforts, this research benefits multiple populations.

IDSA is grateful for the Committee's longstanding support for the MIDRP. The MIDRP was established to facilitate cutting-edge research and development that will yield improved detection, prevention, treatment, and mitigation of infectious diseases and threats to maximize military capability globally with minimal morbidity and mortality. The program supports extramural research throughout the world, and is an acknowledged leader in global infectious disease research. Thanks to partnerships with other federal agencies, private foundations, academic institutions, and industry, MIDRP has led to the development of ground-breaking diagnostics, vaccines, drugs, biologics, and disease control products.

MIDRP's core projects are primarily within the areas of Wound Infection Prevention and Management and Antimicrobial Countermeasures. The program's research efforts focus on the development of host immune response and pathogen biomarkers associated with wound infection to help inform clinical decisions. Additional areas include the development of tools for early detection of drug-resistant organisms, identification of nosocomial pathogens, and characterization of antimicrobial resistance patterns, and the development of novel and innovative delivery technologies to treat wound infections.

While the MIDRP shares some common research goals with other research organizations, the military has unique infectious disease needs that are inadequately addressed by other Federal agencies, international programs or private industry. The goal of developing a malaria vaccine is one example. The focus of the international community is to develop a malaria vaccine that will prevent death in young children and pregnant women in areas of the world where malaria infections provide some natural immunity in adults. However, the military needs a malaria vaccine that will protect service members with no prior natural immunity to avoid mission-degrading illness. Preventing death in children and keeping soldiers healthy and effective are distinct goals requiring different research strategies.

The MIDRP also supports key projects that help address antimicrobial resistance. Funding supports the expansion of the Multidrug-resistant Organism Repository & Surveillance Network (MRSN) into a DoD-wide capability. The MRSN is a unique asset that enables the DoD to collect, characterize, and cryopreserve drug resistant bacteria from (eventually) all DoD military medical treatment facilities (MTFs). It employs state-of-the-art technology (whole genome sequencing) to characterize recurrent and outbreak strains of bacteria for requesting MTFs, providers, and other stakeholders. It can assist clinicians to make informed decisions in the treatment of patients. This network is important to reduce healthcare costs by preventing infections by limiting the development and the spread of antimicrobial resistance while reducing unnecessary antibiotic use. Other MIDRP objectives which are not addressed by other programs include development of HIV/AIDS vaccines to protect the U.S. military against HIV strains found outside the US, and rapid diagnostic tests for tropical diseases where there is little national support outside of DoD.

We also urge you to continue to support the Joint Warfighter Medical Research Program (JWMRP) that is aligned with the MIDRP in FY2018. The JWMRP continues research initially funded under the CDMRP, primarily focused on development of advanced diagnostic technologies and development efforts. With this focus, the JWMRP offers a pathway for transitioning promising medical solutions from the laboratory toward the clinic benefitting all service members, the military health system and the public. Such JWMRP-supported infectious disease research projects include a norovirus vaccine clinical trial and a malaria clinical trial studying the first live attenuated vaccine against this protozoal disease in humans.

Additionally, IDSA asks the Subcommittee to continue support for the Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP). The PRMRP supports research across the full range of science and medicine to enhance the health and well-being of military service members, veterans, retirees, and their family members. The PRMRP funds research that has potential to impact the development and the implementation of medical devices and drugs. Such work will improve the prevention, the diagnosis and the treatment across a wide range of disciplines including infectious diseases.

For example, in FY2017, a key topic area of research is tuberculosis. Projects on this topic include the development of a diagnostic assay at the point of care to rapidly, accurately diagnose tuberculosis as well as development of novel tuberculosis vaccines and research on drug-resistant tuberculosis. Additional studies will determine appropriate measures for transporting patients with active tuberculosis patients and study of sustained release formulation of anti-tuberculosis drugs that facilitate long-term treatment while reducing the emergence of resistance due to poor compliance.

The Center for Infectious Disease Research at the WRAIR is an invaluable resource for study of infectious diseases with a focus on disease prevention. The Center's studies have included bacterial diseases, entomology, preventive medicine, and viral diseases. Importantly, the Center also manages the Military HIV Research Program (MHRP) and the Military Malaria Research Program (MMRP). The MHRP program is responsible for groundbreaking research that led to the trial of the first HIV/AIDS vaccine to demonstrate safety and some effectiveness in preventing infection. The program is continuing its vaccine efforts to better understand the earliest stages of the viral infection that may lead to development of robust prevention and future cures.

Once again, we thank you for supporting infectious disease research and development at the Department of Defense, and we urge you to continue to invest in these efforts in FY2018. If we can serve as a resource to you, please have your staff contact Lisa Cox, IDSA Director of Government Relations, at lcox@idsociety.org or (703) 299-0202.

Sincerely,



William G. Powderly, MD, FIDSA
President, IDSA