



July 14, 2026

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Collins and Vice Chair Murray:

On behalf of the thousands of melanoma patients, researchers, providers, survivors, and their families, we write to respectfully urge you to ensure the continuation of \$40 million in funding for the Melanoma Research Program (MRP) within the Defense-funded Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP) during your negotiations for the Fiscal Year 2027 Appropriations package.

We respectfully urge you to prioritize \$40 million in dedicated funding for the Department of Defense's Melanoma Research Program. This amount, which has been flat funded since FY22, will preserve ongoing progress in melanoma research and prevention. Skin cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in the US, and over 8,510 Americans are expected to die from the deadliest form of skin cancer, melanoma, in 2026¹ – including active and former military service members.

This is a disease that routinely disfigures, kills, and financially exhausts real Americans. Melanoma is a unique and urgent 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 exposure to the development of deadly melanoma. 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."² A Vanderbilt School of Medicine study cited only 22 percent of military personnel were made aware of the risks of sun exposure; while 77 percent reported being exposed to bright sunlight for more than 4 hours a day, and only 27 percent having regular access to sunscreen as it is not part of standard personal protective equipment (PPE). 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

¹ *Melanoma of the skin*. American Cancer Society. (2025). <https://cancerstatisticscenter.cancer.org/types/melanoma-of-the-skin>

² Mason V. Improving the Detection of Melanoma in Active Duty Military. The Pulse. Uniformed Services University. <https://news.usuhs.edu/2018/02/improving-detection-of-melanoma-in.html>. Published February 15, 2018.



States population, increasing the potential for ultraviolet irradiance and the development of skin cancer.”³

In addition to rising incidence rates, both active-duty personnel and veterans are faced with being diagnosed at a more advanced stage than non-military individuals. A 2022 study published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* found that veterans have a higher risk of stage III (18%) or stage IV (13%) melanoma at initial diagnosis, indicating that when veterans are diagnosed with melanoma, they face the additional challenge of fighting an advanced and deadlier disease.⁴ These disparities highlight the importance of targeted research to better understand disease progression and occupational risk factors for melanoma. A recent MRP-funded study found that Agent Orange exposure is associated with a higher risk of rare acral melanoma in veterans.⁵ This finding not only pushes the broader research landscape forward, but it also underscores the program’s unique position to fund research that is not otherwise captured in other portfolios.

Given the heightened disease burden faced by our men and women in uniform, is it critical to prioritize the lifesaving research needed to improve outcomes, strengthen military readiness, and protect those who serve from melanoma. The past decade has seen enormous gains for melanoma treatment and continued innovation in melanoma prevention, detection, and treatment is only possible with continued investment in high-quality research. We urge you to protect \$40 million for the CDMRP’s Melanoma Research Program and preserve the robust federal investment Congress sustained from FY22 through FY26.

Sincerely,

Melanoma Research Foundation
AIM at Melanoma Foundation
American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association
American Society for Mohs Surgery
Connect Melanoma
Dermatology Nurses’ Association
IMPACT Melanoma
Jason Farley All in For a Cure Foundation, Inc.
Melanoma Action Coalition

³ Powers JG, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. Skin cancer risks higher for soldiers serving abroad. *Vanderbilt Health News*. 2014 Sep 11. <https://news.vumc.org/2014/09/11/skin-cancer-risks-higher-for-soldiers-serving-abroad/>

⁴ Chang MS, La J, Trepanowski N, et al. Increased relative proportions of advanced melanoma among veterans: A comparative analysis with the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results registry. *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*. 2022;87(1):72-79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaad.2022.02.063>

⁵ Hwang JC, Huhmann LB, Cho K, et al. Identification of Risk Factors for Acral Melanoma in US Veterans. *JAMA Dermatol*. 2026;162(3):279–291. doi:10.1001/jamadermatol.2025.5827



Melanoma Research Alliance

Outrun the Sun, Inc.

Prevent Cancer Foundation

Skin of Color Society

Society for Pediatric Dermatology

Society of Dermatology Physician Associates

The American Melanoma Foundation

The Skin Cancer Foundation

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