



May 3, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building 317
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McCarthy and Minority Leader McConnell:

As members of One Voice Against Cancer (OVAC), a broad coalition of public interest groups representing millions of cancer patients, researchers, providers, survivors, and their families, we are writing regarding the impact of COVID-19 on cancer care, research, and clinical trials, and the steps urgently needed to restore the research ecosystem.

The COVID-19 pandemic reduced access to care for cancer patients, including delays in cancer screening, diagnosis, and treatment. These delays will likely lead to a rise in late-stage diagnoses and cancer deaths in the years to come. Dr. Ned Sharpless, Director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI), has stated the pandemic will influence cancer deaths for at least the next

decade, with an estimated 10,000 excess breast and colorectal cancer deaths during this time. In fact, NCI reports we may see a rise in overall cancer mortality rates for the first time in almost 30 years because of the impacts from COVID-19.

The impact of COVID-19 on the cancer research ecosystem is severe, and relief is needed to address both short- and long-term impacts on labs, researchers, and clinical trials. Early in the pandemic, many cancer research labs were forced to close or significantly alter operations due to safety protocols, and resources including lab equipment and personal protective equipment were diverted to the immediate cause of fighting COVID-19. Thousands of researchers working on new discoveries that may one day alter the way we treat cancer had their projects disrupted, leading to increased costs and in some cases, having to restart research projects, losing data and productivity in the process.

The cost of these disruptions will likely come at the expense of research grants in current and future fiscal years and has the potential to be catastrophic for the medical research workforce, as research institutions have reported reductions in faculty and training positions in order to control costs, jeopardizing the careers of medical researchers. This impact has been felt most acutely by early-stage researchers, whose careers have been thrown into uncertainty. Without emergency funding allocated to the NIH to address the impacts on the research ecosystem, significant federal investments in medical research and the research workforce could be lost.

COVID-19 has also had serious consequences for cancer clinical trials, which play a pivotal role in advancing cancer care and treatment. The results of clinical trials and the broader drug development process can take years to realize, meaning that, without aggressive measures to mitigate the impact, the full effect of these disruptions on therapeutic innovation in cancer care is likely to be felt for years to come. During the first several months of the pandemic, accrual to cancer clinical trials plummeted across the country. One study found a 50 percent drop in clinical trial enrollment in the early months of the pandemic. Additionally, a 2021 study found a “60 percent decrease in new clinical trials for cancer drugs and biological therapies” during the pandemic.

Not only are cancer clinical trials critical in the over-all research and progress against the disease, for individual cancer patients, clinical trials often provide the best, and sometimes only, treatment option available. While adaptations including telemedicine visits and enhanced safety protocols have allowed sites to begin to recover, additional resources will be needed to make up for lost time and return to pre-pandemic operation levels.

Substantial costs have been incurred during the shutdown, and there will be significant costs for the ramp-up of research activities and clinical trials which have not been addressed in previous COVID-19-related emergency supplementals. **We therefore urge Congress to provide the National Institutes of Health (NIH) with at least \$10 billion to restore the research ecosystem so we can continue to make progress in the fight against cancer and other diseases.**

Once again, thank you for your continued leadership on funding issues important in the fight against cancer. Congress must act to ensure researchers have the tools they need to restart research and clinical trials impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Dermatology
Association
American Association for Cancer Research
American Cancer Society Cancer Action
Network
American College of Surgeons Commission
on Cancer
American Institute for Cancer Research
American Society for Radiation Oncology
American Urological Association
Association for Clinical Oncology
Association of American Cancer Institutes
Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network
Cancer Support Community
Charlene Miers Foundation for Cancer
Research
Children's Cancer Cause
Deadliest Cancers Coalition
Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing
Stomach Cancer
Dermatology Nurses' Association
Esophageal Cancer Action Network
Fight Colorectal Cancer
Friends of Cancer Research
GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer
Hematology/Oncology Pharmacy
Association
Intercultural Cancer Council Coalition
International Myeloma Foundation
KidneyCAN
Livestrong
LUNGevery Foundation
Men's Health Network
Mesothelioma Applied Research
Foundation

National Alliance of State Prostate Cancer
Coalitions
National Association of Chronic Disease
Directors
National Brain Tumor Society
National Cancer Registrars Association
North American Association of Central
Cancer Registries, Inc. (NAACCR)
Oncology Nursing Society
Ovarian Cancer Research Alliance
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network
Pennsylvania Prostate Cancer Coalition
Prevent Cancer Foundation
Prostate Cancer Foundation
Prostate Conditions Education Council
Sarcoma Foundation of America
Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer
Society of Gynecologic Oncology
St. Baldrick's Foundation
Susan G. Komen
The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
The Life Raft Group
Triage Cancer
Us TOO International Prostate Cancer
Education and Support Network
ZERO - The End of Prostate Cancer