

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 24, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20421

Dear Secretary Collins:

We write to express our deep concerns regarding the impact of the ongoing federal hiring freeze on Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) research and the research programs funded by external entities that improve care and services for our nation's veterans. The VA research enterprise has long been a pillar of medical innovation, responsible for groundbreaking advancements that have improved the lives of millions of veterans and Americans, and is a major recruitment tool in bringing top talent to the Department. Researchers at VA have been responsible for revolutionary medical achievements, including implanting the first successful cardiac pacemaker, developing the nicotine patch and other therapies for smokers, maintaining the nation's largest genomic biorepository, and advancing prosthetics technology.¹ Without immediate action to address the recent hiring constraints imposed by the Trump Administration, critical research efforts—and the veterans who rely on them—are at risk.

Hundreds of VA research-funded positions are in jeopardy due to the hiring freeze. This freeze impacts researcher positions funded by grants, which are awarded as part of competitive funding mechanisms based on peer-review. These roles are essential to the safe and effective conduct of ongoing VA-funded research, by ensuring compliance with biological safety, data security, and other critical protocols. Further, according to the National Association of Veterans' Research and Education Foundations, during the next 90 days alone, VA could lose an additional 200 research personnel who directly support research to advance veterans' health and healthcare access. These positions are either funded by non-VA entities, such as other federal agencies or philanthropic organizations, or are short-term assignments from academic institutions to allow VA to capitalize on specific expertise.

These mechanisms are not only fiscally responsible, but essential to sustaining VA's research mission. At a time when the Trump Administration claims to be hyper-focused on efficient use of taxpayer dollars, it is unacceptable that the Department has targeted cost-effective research aiming to improve veterans' health outcomes. If these appointments are not processed, an

¹ <https://www.research.va.gov/about/history.cfm>

estimated 370 studies and clinical trials could be canceled or suspended in the next 90 days, directly impacting up to 10,000 veterans currently participating in research studies.

As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of VA research, we have a responsibility to safeguard its future. VA has been at the forefront of medical breakthroughs for a century, and continued investment in its research workforce is essential to ensuring that legacy endures. We strongly urge VA to swiftly reverse the hiring freeze and any related personnel decisions to prevent disruptions to research that directly contributes to improving veteran health outcomes.

We appreciate your attention to this critical issue and stand ready to support swift efforts that will allow VA research to move forward without disruption.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patty Murray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patty Murray
Vice Chair of Appropriations

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Blumenthal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member, Committee on Veterans' Affairs