

A close-up photograph of the American flag, showing the blue field with white stars and the red and white stripes. The flag is slightly wrinkled and draped. The text "Executive Summary" is overlaid in the bottom right corner.

# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

Recent scientific breakthroughs, exciting new opportunities in research, and the decline in cancer death rates in the United States since 1990 have increased anticipation for cures for cancer and other diseases. The Office of Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP) is one funding organization that is striving for this realization. The CDMRP is a research area directorate within the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command. The CDMRP was created in response to a grass roots advocacy movement within the breast cancer community in the early 1990s, when the CDMRP received its first appropriation of \$25 million (M), in 1992, for a “peer-reviewed breast cancer research program with the Department of the Army as executive agent.” Thus the Breast Cancer Research Program (BCRP) was established, and its success combined with additional advocacy movements and the need for focused biomedical research led to the continuation of the BCRP and the addition of several other targeted biomedical research programs managed by the CDMRP. Since its inception, the CDMRP has managed 84 research programs that total \$4.8 billion in congressional appropriations focused on

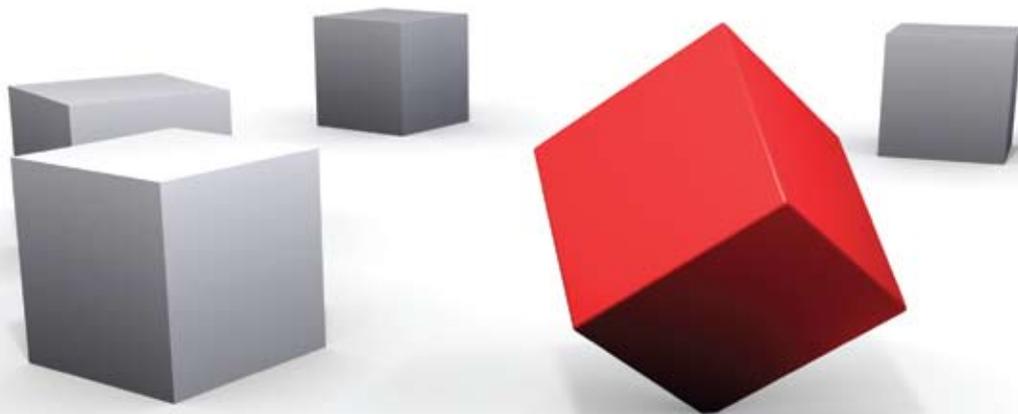
**breast, prostate, and ovarian cancers; neurofibromatosis; tuberous sclerosis complex; autism; Gulf War Illness; psychological health and traumatic brain injury; amyotrophic lateral sclerosis; deployment-related medical research; peer-reviewed medical research; and other diseases.**

The achievements of the CDMRP can be attributed, in part, to continual process improvements. Through the years, the CDMRP has developed business practices that are applied to all aspects of program management and execution. The following best practices have proven effective over time and continue to drive the organization toward excellence:

- ❖ “Outside-the-box” thinking
- ❖ Innovative and rigorous proposal submission and review processes
- ❖ Exceptional people and partnerships
- ❖ Sound stewardship
- ❖ Effective dissemination strategies

# Thinking Outside the Box

The vision of the CDMRP is to find and fund the best research to eradicate diseases and support the warfighter for the benefit of the American public. Accomplishing this task requires a culture of innovation and flexibility that spans the entire program cycle. This includes the recruitment of visionary leaders in research, clinical practice, and advocacy to serve on each program's Integration Panel (IP), where they advise each program regarding scientific trends and new discoveries that will advance research toward the eradication of specific diseases. This vision guides the development of an investment strategy, which often includes novel funding mechanisms to support groundbreaking research and gaps within each research community. These funding mechanisms frequently emphasize the exploration of revolutionary concepts or ideas that could have a large impact on the health and welfare of American people. Such ideas are often viewed as risky, and therefore are not supported by other, more traditional funding agencies. Alternatively, funding mechanisms may be designed to recruit talented new investigators into a field of research, either through training the next generation of researchers or by supporting established researchers who wish to apply their expertise to a new field of research. The incorporation of new ideas taken from other fields and alternative approaches to research problems is critical to the advancement of science and the eradication of disease.



# Innovative and Rigorous Proposal Submission and Review Processes

The CDMRP sought the advice of the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine (IOM) on how to best invest a \$210M congressional appropriation received in fiscal year 1993 (FY93) for breast cancer research. While the IOM made several important recommendations, a pivotal one outlining a two-tier review process for evaluating and selecting research proposals has become a cornerstone within the CDMRP. This novel two-tiered process involves reviewing every research proposal for scientific merit as well as programmatic relevance. These two levels of review are performed at separate times by separate panels of experts—the first by “peer reviewers” selected for their expertise in a given field of research, and the second by the IP. The two tiers of review work together to ensure that proposals selected for funding are both scientifically sound and able to address the unique vision and goals of the program.

Processes have been put in place to ensure the integrity of both peer and programmatic review. Potential conflicts of interest are avoided to ensure that individuals do not participate in both peer and programmatic review in the same funding cycle and that no one participates in the review of those proposals for which he/she has a potential conflict of interest. In addition, the CDMRP established an Inquiry Review process to address queries and complaints by applicants who feel an error was made during the review of their proposal. While fewer than 1 percent of all funding decisions are appealed across CDMRP programs, this process is critical to the integrity of the review and funding process.



## Exceptional People and Partnerships

The success of the CDMRP in eradicating diseases and supporting the warfighter depends on its ability to include exceptional people and partnerships in all aspects of program execution. Public, private, government, and military partnerships are some of the most important elements of the CDMRP, as they bring together spheres of interest that typically may not otherwise interact. For instance, the CDMRP collaborates with other organizations and communities to facilitate the exchange of ideas and knowledge, thereby reducing redundancy across the research spectrum. In addition, the CDMRP has recognized the value of firsthand experience with disease and has led the way in incorporating disease survivors (consumer advocates) into every aspect of program execution. Consumer advocates sit side-by-side with scientists and clinicians to recommend a vision and investment strategy, serve on scientific review panels, and, in certain instances provide oversight on research projects funded by the CDMRP.

The CDMRP has continued to enhance existing partnerships and form new relationships with other funding organizations to maximize its research investment and avoid duplication of efforts. For instance, the CDMRP is a founding member of the International Cancer Research Partners, which currently includes 51 cancer funding organizations across the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Through global collaboration and strategic coordination, this productive partnership is impacting research that will benefit all individuals affected by cancer. There are numerous other examples of collaborations and partnerships that are fundamental to the success of the CDMRP and its research programs. These include the multidisciplinary meetings hosted by individual research programs, research collaborations supported by team-oriented award mechanisms, and partnerships with other government agencies such as the Department of Defense Small Business Innovation Research/Small Business Technology Transfer programs and the Breast Cancer Research Semipostal Program. Each of these relationships allows the CDMRP to leverage its resources and make the largest possible impact on targeted areas of interest.



## Sound Stewardship

The CDMRP exists because of a unique partnership between the public, Congress, and the U.S. military. Appropriations for specific research programs managed by the CDMRP have no life cycle beyond that allotted by a single fiscal year and have tight restrictions regarding how and when funds may be spent. Therefore, the CDMRP has a responsibility to use its appropriations judiciously and maintain the highest standard of ethics in all its practices. The CDMRP strives to keep its management costs as low as possible and to utilize the most efficient and effective processes for managing the research funded by its programs. The CDMRP has developed electronic processes to facilitate efficient grants management and eliminate paper processing from proposal receipt through grant closeout. In addition, the CDMRP maintains a program evaluation division to continually examine CDMRP processes and ensure that each program is addressing its goals.

## Effective Dissemination Strategies

The CDMRP disseminates important program information to the public to foster awareness, increase understanding and knowledge, and ultimately achieve disease eradication and support for the warfighter. The CDMRP uses its website, this Annual Report, advertisements, e-mails, participation at national scientific meetings, and many other communication vehicles to communicate with its multiple audiences. The CDMRP website (<http://cdmrp.army.mil>) contains up-to-date program information that is available to the research community and the general public. Information on each of CDMRP's research programs, funding opportunities, consumer advocate involvement, and funded research projects, including information on published work arising from the project, can be found here. In addition, funding opportunities are distributed to research administrators, professional organizations, federal agencies, and consumer advocacy organizations, and they are also posted on other websites that focus on biomedical grant notification. Moreover, the CDMRP maintains a display that is exhibited at national scientific meetings and accompanied by personnel who are equipped to address questions and concerns raised by meeting participants and further propagate information about CDMRP programs and initiatives.