**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**
**WASHINGTON**

November 25, 2025

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Blumenthal:

Thank you for your July 18, 2025, co-signed letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding the effects of the hiring freeze on medical research at VA. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to your letter.

VA's workforce is essential to the mission. To help our workforce, VA supports this Administration's efforts to streamline operations, find efficiencies to enable and empower VA's workforce, and ensure that the most dedicated employees VA has to offer serve Veterans.

VA is a leader in groundbreaking research that improves Veteran health and well-being. Research and clinical trials will always be an important priority for VA. The Department is on track this year to spend more than $900 million on research initiatives, which is in line with research spending in the past years. VA research led to critical advancements in medical care and cutting-edge therapies for chronic conditions affecting Veterans.

Many of these vital research efforts rely on employees hired under time-limited temporary, not-to-exceed term, Without Compensation, and Intergovernmental Personnel Act authorities, which are crucial in ensuring VA continues to deliver high-quality, evidence-based care. On May 30, 2025, VA approved hiring freeze exemptions for certain occupational series for VA researchers. In June 2025, VA exempted its research staff from the Federal hiring freeze, meaning new research employees could be brought on as needed. Then on August 1, 2025, VA extended existing employees supporting research through the end of the fiscal year to ensure all mission-critical VA research efforts continue uninterrupted. This extension will ensure continuity of all VA research efforts while VA conducts a comprehensive assessment of ongoing research initiatives to evaluate their impact on Veteran health care.

VA is in the process of rehiring researchers whose terms expired in February 2025 and March 2025. In response to the questions in your letter, researchers who left were those who chose to depart, retired, or declined to renew their appointment with VA. In fact, there were 33 researchers who had "not-to-exceed" appointments that expired in February 2025. Of these 33 researchers, 22 currently are being processed for

new appointments, 2 retired, 1 was retained, and 8 decided not to return. VA is processing new appointments after the Office of Personnel Management releases them.

VA communicated with researchers about extensions, reinstatements, or re-establishment of their appointments through a variety of means. These communications included:

- Two virtual meetings in May 2025 with 120 individuals, representing 89% of field programs,
- A presentation to research supervisors with over 170 attendees,
- A field webinar in June 2025 for 396 individuals detailing requirements and processes,
- A summary of the exemption and processes on a national field call in June 2025 with over 520 attendees,
- A discussion with the Field Research Advisory Committee in June 2025, and
- Bi-weekly office hours and presentations with field staff to address hiring issues and to provide information and updated processes.

Regarding research projects or clinical trials, VA is not aware of any studies that were terminated, and no VA research or clinical trials have been canceled. Further, VA is not aware of cancellations of National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants to VA researchers. NIH grants are awarded to and administered through individual VA-affiliated non-profit corporations (NPC) or affiliated academic institutions. Since VA is not the grantee institution (that is, not the recipient) for NIH awards, any matters related to the terms of these awards are outside the purview of VA, and the grantee would handle each grant individually. VA continues to work with local NPCs and academic affiliates to address the needs of VA researchers.

It should be noted that there are effectively two approaches for how VA research is tracked – one for VA-funded research and a set of varying activities for externally (non-VA) funded research. For VA-funded research that the Office of Research and Development (ORD) manages, ORD centrally maintains systems that track and manage its own awards including funding and project status. However, for studies that external entities fund and/or administer, such as NIH, other Federal agencies, industry, and philanthropic/non-profit organizations, there is limited tracking information and no single central system for managing them. Rather, each funder and each VA medical center is responsible for their own respective approach. To help enhance greater visibility among the VA research enterprise and for Veterans, VA recently began to identify possible solutions for aggregating all research activities as part of a uniform system. This effort will require examining tools and processes that external funders and individual VA medical centers use for managing their respective activities. ORD currently is evaluating common data elements that different funders use and determining how to link electronic systems that various entities use.

In answer to your question about VA funding research at external organizations, VA supports intramural research within VA and does not have the authority to fund grants to external organizations. As such, VA does not fund VA research grants at Harvard University. However, VA-funded researchers may obtain specialized expertise in bioinformatics and methodologies for medical science through contracts with Harvard University. At this time, VA approved nearly all contracts with Harvard University that support VA-funded research projects, including projects on prostate cancer screening, military exposures, and suicide prevention, to move forward.

VA maintains a policy to ensure the highest level of integrity in all aspects of VA's generation, communication, and use of scientific findings and products. VA Directive 0005, Scientific Integrity, is intended to instill confidence among Veterans and the broader public in VA research and other scientific endeavors by articulating the values, principles, and conduct necessary to uphold scientific integrity and the expectation that all VA employees, including career staff and political appointees, will adhere to these values and principles.

It is VA policy to promote a culture of scientific integrity. Science and the public's trust in science thrives in an environment that shields scientific data and analysis and their use in policymaking from political interference and inappropriate influences. Accordingly, VA does not suppress, delay from release, or alter for political purposes any scientific findings, publications, or products, and does not subject them to inappropriate influence (VA Directive 0005, section 4.b(5)).

Thank you for your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,



Douglas A. Collins

Cc: The Honorable Patty Murray
The Honorable Ruben Gallego