Chairman Mark Takano
House Veterans Affairs Committee
B234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Phil Roe
House Veterans Affairs Committee
3460 O'Neill House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20024

September 8, 2020

Dear Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe:

We welcome the announcement on August 25 that the House Veterans Affairs Committee intends to consider legislation to improve suicide prevention at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We write in support of the VA Research Technology Act (H.R. 8172) and the VA Precision Medicine Act (H.R. 8149), which correspond to four research and development provisions in the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 (S. 785) Act. These provisions will not only lead to new tools that help doctors prevent suicide, but also advance diagnosis and treatment across medicine broadly.

We strongly believe that the VA can become a leading partner in the development of new therapies and diagnostics, which would improve the treatment of Veterans suffering from conditions that increase suicide risk, including post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and alcohol and other substance disorders, but also hearing loss, cancer, and other health conditions prevalent in the Veterans community. In May 2019, many of us wrote you to ask that the VA "take action to become '100 days faster' in clinical trial startup." The following month, before the House VA Committee Health Subcommittee, the VA adopted this goal as its own, and has since made remarkable progress: at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the VA launched multiple trials in under two weeks. H.R. 8172, which correspond to Sections 704 and 705 of S. 785, would codify two of the critical reforms that made this extraordinary transformation possible, including allowing the use of commercial institutional review boards in sponsored research trials.

We also support provisions in S. 785 and H.R. 8149 that boost the VA's research capabilities. Section 305 would create the "Precision Medicine for Veterans Initiative," to be modeled on the All of Us Precision Medicine Initiative. Section 306 would enable the VA to conduct advanced data analytics, an essential capability across the medical field for advancing research and identifying new diagnostic and therapeutic candidates. The reform is a strategic priority for VA Research.

We ask that you do everything in your power to enact these important bills before the end of 2020. Given the uncertain prospects for the time and scope of a possible lame duck session, we ask that Congress pass this important legislation before the October recess. A delay into 2021 would be a major missed opportunity to spur the research and development necessary to lead to better care for countless Veterans.

Sincerely,

Coalition to Heal Invisible Wounds
Washington, District of Colombia

National Association of Veterans' Research
and Education Foundations (NAVREF)
Washington, District of Colombia

Advantagene, Inc. DBA Candel
Therapeutics
Auburndale, Massachusetts

Alliance for AI in Health
Baltimore, Maryland

Code of Support Foundation
Alexandria, Virginia

Cohen Veterans Bioscience
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Endeavors
San Antonio, Texas

The Independence Fund
Charlotte, North Carolina

LUNGevity Foundation
Chicago, Illinois

Military Veterans Project
Topeka, Kansas

NAMI Montana
Helena, Montana

Navy SEAL Foundation
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Project Sanctuary
Granby, Colorado

Prostate Cancer Foundation
Santa Monica, California

Members of the Cohen Veterans Bioscience Veterans Advisory Council:
Bob Harward, VADM, U.S. Navy SEAL (Ret.)
Brian Losey, RADM, U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Frank J. Larkin, 40th US Senate Sergeant at Arms (Ret.), Suicide Survivor to Navy SEAL son
SO1 Ryan F. Larkin
Gayle Tzemach-Lemmon

Cc:

Representative Jim Banks
Representative Mike Bost
Representative Conor Lamb
Representative Elaine Luria