

**US ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND (USAMRDC)
 CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED MEDICAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS
 FISCAL YEAR 2024 (FY24) PEER REVIEWED CANCER RESEARCH PROGRAM
 (PRCRP)**

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES

The FY24 PRCRP called for applications in response to program announcements (PAs) for two award mechanisms released in May 2024:

- Career Development Award – Scholar Option
- Patient Well-Being and Survivorship Award

The PRCRP received applications for these two PAs in July 2024, and they underwent peer review in September 2024. The PRCRP conducted programmatic review in December 2024.

In response to the Career Development Award – Scholar Option PA, the PRCRP received 20 compliant applications and recommended funding 7 (35.0%) for a total of \$9.32 million (M).

In response to the Patient Well-Being and Survivorship Award PA, the PRCRP received 27 compliant applications and recommended funding 6 (22.2%) for a total of \$8.81M.

Table 1 shows submission and award data summarized for the FY24 PRCRP.

Table 1. Submission/Award Data for the FY24 PRCRP*

Mechanism	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
Career Development Award – Scholar Option	20	7 (35.0%)	\$9.32M
Patient Well-Being and Survivorship Award	27	6 (22.2%)	\$8.81M
Totals	47	13 (27.7%)	\$18.13M

*These data reflect funding recommendations only. Pending FY24 award negotiations, final numbers will be available after September 30, 2025.

Table 2. FY24 PRCRP Application Data by Topic Area

Topic Area	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
Bladder Cancer	3	1 (33.3%)	\$1.31M
Blood Cancers	5	3 (60.0%)	\$4.04M
Brain Cancer (excluding glioblastoma)	2	1 (50.0%)	\$1.44M
Colorectal Cancer	8	1 (12.5%)	\$1.32M
Endometrial Cancer	0	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Esophageal Cancer	2	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Germ Cell Cancers	1	1 (100.0%)	\$1.40M
Liver Cancer	1	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Lymphoma	2	1 (50.0%)	\$1.53M
Mesothelioma	0	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Metastatic Cancers	1	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Myeloma	2	1 (50.0%)	\$1.25M
Neuroblastoma	0	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Pediatric, Adolescent and Young Adult Cancers ¹	13	4 (28.6%)	\$5.84M
Pediatric Brain Tumors	4	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Stomach Cancer	0	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Sarcoma	3	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Thyroid Cancer	0	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Totals	47	13 (27.7%)	\$18.13M

THE TWO-TIER REVIEW SYSTEM

The USAMRDC developed a review model based on recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences report *Strategies for Managing the Breast Cancer Research Program: A Report to the Army Medical Research and Development Command*. The report recommended a two-tier review process that reflects not only the traditional strengths of existing peer review systems but is also tailored to accommodate program goals. The Command adheres to this proven approach for evaluating competitive applications. An application must be favorably reviewed by both levels of the two-tier review system to be funded.

THE FIRST TIER—Scientific Peer Review

The PRCRP conducted peer review of Career Development Award – Scholar Option and Patient Well-Being and Survivorship Award applications in September 2024 utilizing eight panels of

¹ The definition of adolescents and young adults is derived from the National Cancer Institute (<https://www.cancer.gov/types/aya>). Research should be targeted toward pediatric (ages 0-14 years), adolescents (ages 15-24 years) and/or young adults (ages 25-39 years).

researchers, clinicians and consumer advocates. The panel members based their evaluations on the criteria specified in the PAs.

The PRCRP conducted peer review via teleconference for the Career Development Award – Scholar Option utilizing five panel (20 scientists and six consumer reviewers) and for the Patient Well-Being and Survivorship Award utilizing three panels (20 scientists and four consumer reviewers).

Each peer review panel included a Chair, an average of four scientific reviewers, an average of one consumer reviewer and a nonvoting Scientific Review Officer. The panelists' primary responsibility was to review the technical merit of each application based upon the evaluation criteria specified in the relevant PA.

Individual Peer Review Panels

The Chair for each panel presided over the deliberations. The panels discussed each individual application. The Chair called on the assigned reviewers for an assessment of the merits of each application using the evaluation criteria published in the appropriate PA. Following a panel discussion, the Chair summarized the strengths and weaknesses of each application, and the panel members then rated the applications confidentially.

Application Scoring

Evaluation Criteria Scores: Panel members rated each application based on the peer review evaluation criteria published in the appropriate PA. The panel members used a scale of 10 to 1, with 10 representing the highest merit and 1 the lowest merit, using whole numbers only. The purpose of obtaining the criteria ratings was to (1) place emphasis on the published evaluation criteria and provide guidance to reviewers in determining an appropriate overall score and (2) provide the applicant, the Programmatic Panel and the Command with an informed measure of the quality regarding the strengths and weaknesses of each application. The evaluation criteria scores were not averaged or mathematically manipulated in any manner to connect them to the global or percentile scores.

Overall Score: To obtain an overall score, panel members used a range of 1.0 to 5.0 (1.0 representing the highest merit and 5.0 the lowest merit), with scoring permitted in 0.1 increments. The PRCRP averaged the panel member scores and rounded them to arrive at a two-digit number (1.2, 1.9, 2.7, etc.) that corresponds to the following adjectival equivalents used to guide reviewers: Outstanding (1.0–1.5), Excellent (1.6–2.0), Good (2.1–2.5), Fair (2.6–3.5) and Deficient (3.6–5.0).

Summary Statements: The Scientific Review Officer on each panel was responsible for preparing a Summary Statement reporting the results of the peer review for each application. The Summary Statements included the evaluation criteria and overall scores, peer reviewers' written comments and the essence of panel discussions. The PRCRP staff used this document to report the peer review results to the Programmatic Panel. In accordance with USAMRDC policy, Summary Statements are available to each applicant after completion of the review process.

THE SECOND TIER—Programmatic Review

The FY24 Programmatic Panel conducted programmatic review in December 2024. The panel included a diverse group of basic and clinical scientists and consumer advocates, each of whom contributed special expertise or interest in cancer. Programmatic review is a comparison-based process that considers scientific evaluations across all disciplines and specialty areas. Programmatic Panel members do not automatically recommend funding applications that received high scores in the technical merit review process; rather, they closely examine the eligible applications to allocate as wisely as possible the limited funds available.

The programmatic review criteria published in the Career Development Award – Scholar Option and Patient Well-Being and Survivorship Award PAs were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers, adherence to the intent of the funding opportunity, program portfolio composition, programmatic relevance to the FY24 PRCRP Military Health focus areas and programmatic relevance to the FY24 PRCRP overarching challenges. In addition, relative impact and relative impact on patient well-being, outcomes and health were published programmatic review criteria for the Career Development Award – Scholar Option and Patient Well-Being and Survivorship Award PAs, respectively.

After programmatic review, the PRCRP sent the applications recommended for funding to the Commanding General, USAMRDC, for approval.