

**DEFENSE HEALTH AGENCY RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT-MEDICAL
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND (DHA R&D-MRDC)
CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED MEDICAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS (CDMRP)
FISCAL YEAR 2025 (FY25) BREAST CANCER RESEARCH PROGRAM (BCRP)**

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES

The FY25 BCRP called for applications in response to program announcements (PAs) for four award mechanisms released in April 2025:

- Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2
- Clinical Research Extension Award
- Expansion Award
- Era of Hope Scholar Award

The BCRP received applications for these four PAs in June 2025, and they underwent peer review in August and September 2025. The BCRP conducted programmatic review (*Stage 1 for Era of Hope Scholar Award*) in November 2025.

In response to the Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2 PA, the BCRP received 689 compliant applications and recommended funding 28 (4.1%) for a total of \$50.3M.

In response to the Clinical Research Extension Award PA, the BCRP received 14 compliant applications and recommended funding 2 (14.3%) for a total of \$15.4M.

In response to the Expansion Award PA, the BCRP received 66 compliant applications and recommended funding 3 (4.5%) for a total of \$2.9M.

In response to the Era of Hope Scholar Award PA, the BCRP received 13 compliant applications, and no applications were recommended for invitation to stage 2 (oral presentation) programmatic review.

Tables 1 and 2 show submission and award data summarized for the FY25 BCRP.

Table 1. Submission/Award Data for the FY25 BCRP*

Mechanism	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2	689	28 [†] (4.1%)	\$50.3M
Clinical Research Extension Award	14	2 [‡] (14.3%)	\$15.4M
Expansion Award	66	3 (4.5%)	\$2.9M
Totals	769	33	\$68.6M

* These data reflect funding recommendations only. Pending FY25 award negotiations, final numbers will be available after September 30, 2026.

[†] Twenty-eight (28) projects recommended for funding representing 45 potential awards.

[‡] Two (2) projects recommended for funding representing 3 potential awards.

Table 2. Submission/Award Data for the FY25 BCRP from Stage 1 Programmatic Review

Mechanism	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Stage 2 Programmatic Review (%)
Era of Hope Scholar Award	13	0 (0%)

THE TWO-TIER REVIEW SYSTEM

The CDMRP 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 CDMRP 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 BCRP conducted peer review of Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2, Clinical Research Extension Award, Expansion Award and Era of Hope Scholar Award applications in August and September 2025 utilizing 39 panels of researchers, clinicians and consumer advocates. The panel members based their evaluations on the criteria specified in the PAs.

Each peer review panel included a Chair, an average of seven scientific reviewers, an average of two consumer reviewers 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 (Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2, Clinical Research Extension Award and Expansion Award): 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 CDMRP 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 (Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2, Clinical Research Extension Award and Expansion Award): 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 BCRP 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).

In contrast to the typical technical merit review process, no criteria or overall scores were assigned to the Era of Hope Scholar Award applications. Instead, reviewers were asked to address specific questions pertaining to the applicant's qualifications, accomplishments, research goals or ideas, and leadership skills. Each reviewer then voted confidentially on an overall level of enthusiasm (High, Medium or Low).

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 BCRP staff used this document to report the peer review results to the Programmatic Panel. In accordance with DHA R&D-MRDC policy, Summary Statements are available to each applicant after completion of the two-tiered review process.

THE SECOND TIER—Programmatic Review

The FY25 Programmatic Panel conducted programmatic review in November 2025. The panel included a diverse group of basic and clinical scientists and consumer advocates, each of whom contributed special expertise or interest in breast 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 Breakthrough Award Levels 1 and 2 PA were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers; adherence to the intent of the funding opportunity; program portfolio composition; relative impact; and relative innovation (Breakthrough Award Level 1 only).

The programmatic review criteria published in the Clinical Research Extension Award PA were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers; adherence to the intent of the funding opportunity; program portfolio composition; and relative impact.

The programmatic review criteria published in the Expansion Award PA were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers; adherence to the intent of the funding opportunity;

program portfolio composition; relative accomplishments and outcomes from the original BCRP-funded award; and relative impact.

The programmatic review criteria published in the Era of Hope Scholar Award PA for Stage 1 were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the peer reviewers; relative innovation; and adherence to the intent of the award mechanism. For Stage 2, the criteria are: understanding of barriers in breast cancer; articulation of a realistic vision with a high potential to impact breast cancer; and leadership skills to develop a vision for preventing and treating breast cancer beyond the PI's laboratory and institution.

After programmatic review, the BCRP routed the applications recommended for funding to a designated official for review and approval.