

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

DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW PROCEDURES

The FY25 PRCRP called for applications in response to program announcements (PAs) for two award mechanisms released in May 2025:

- Career Development Award – Fellow and Resident Option
- Career Development Award – Scholar Option

The PRCRP received applications for the Career Development Award – Fellow and Resident Option and Career Development Award – Scholar Option in July 2025, and they underwent peer review in September 2025. The PRCRP conducted programmatic review in November 2025.

In response to the Career Development Award – Fellow and Resident Option PA, the PRCRP received 37 compliant applications and recommended funding 10 (27.0%) for a total of \$5.48 million (M).

In response to the Career Development Award – Scholar Option PA, the PRCRP received 33 compliant applications and recommended funding 10 (30.3%) for a total of \$11.00M.

Table 1 shows submission and award data summarized for the FY25 PRCRP.

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

Mechanism	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
Career Development Award – Fellow Option	29	8 (27.6%)	\$4.37M
Career Development Award – Resident Option – Research Level 1	3	0 (0.0%)	\$0.0M
Career Development Award – Resident Option – Research Level 2	5	2 (40.0%)	\$1.12M
Career Development Award – Scholar Option	33	10 (30.3%)	\$11.00M
Totals	70	20 (28.6%)	\$16.49M

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

Table 2. FY25 PRCRP Application Data by Topic Area

Topic Area	Compliant Applications Received	Applications Recommended for Funding (%)	Total Funds
Bladder Cancer	3	2 (66.7%)	\$2.20M
Blood Cancer	11	1 (9.1%)	\$1.10M
Brain Cancer	7	1 (14.3%)	\$1.10M
Colorectal Cancer	5	1 (20.0%)	\$1.10M
Endometrial Cancer	3	1 (33.3%)	\$1.10M
Esophageal Cancer	0	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Germ Cell Cancer	0	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Kidney Cancer	1	1 (100.0%)	\$0.56M
Liver Cancer	4	1 (25.0%)	\$0.52M
Lung Cancer	2	2 (100.0%)	\$1.59M
Lymphoma	1	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Mesothelioma	0	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Metastatic Cancer	4	1 (25.0%)	\$0.56M
Myeloma	0	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Neuroblastoma	2	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Neuroendocrine Tumors	0	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Pancreatic Cancer	9	3 (33.3%)	\$1.68M
Pediatric, Adolescent and Young Adult Cancers	7	1 (14.3%)	\$1.10M
Pediatric Brain Tumors	2	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Sarcoma	7	4 (57.1%)	\$3.32M
Stomach Cancer	1	0 (0.0%)	\$0.00M
Thyroid Cancer	1	1 (100.0%)	\$0.56M
Totals	70	20 (28.6%)	\$16.49M

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 PRCRP conducted peer review of Career Development Award – Fellow and Resident Option and Career Development Award – Scholar Option applications in September 2025

utilizing nine panels (56 scientists and 11 consumer reviewers). The panel members based their evaluations on the criteria specified in the PAs.

Each peer review panel included a Chair, an average of six 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 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: 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 the DHA R&D-MRDC policy, Summary Statements are available to each applicant after completion of the 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 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 PAs were as follows: ratings and evaluations of the scientific peer review panels, adherence to the intent of the funding opportunity, program portfolio composition, relative impact, programmatic relevance to the FY25 PRCRP military health focus areas and programmatic relevance to the FY25 PRCRP strategic goals. After programmatic review, the PRCRP routed the applications recommended for funding to a designated official for review and approval.