



July 27, 2023

The Honorable Denis McDonough  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

A recent study comparing Parkinson's disease prevalence among veterans who served at two different military facilities demonstrated that veterans serving on Camp Lejeune had a 70 percent higher risk of Parkinson's than those who served at Camp Pendleton due to trichlorethylene (TCE) exposure.<sup>i</sup> On behalf of veterans living with Parkinson's disease, I write to request the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) further investigate TCE exposure of veterans to designate relevant locations and time periods as presumed connections to Parkinson's to eventually allow veterans exposed to TCE who develop Parkinson's to be eligible for VA disability compensation, as it does for veterans who served at Camp Lejeune for at least 30 days total between August 1, 1953, and December 31, 1987.<sup>ii</sup>

Parkinson's disease is a chronic, progressive neurological condition with motor and non-motor symptoms, and it occurs when dopamine neurons that coordinate movement weaken, are damaged, or die. Parkinson's is the fastest-growing neurological disease in the world, and researchers believe that it is caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors.<sup>iii,iv</sup> Currently, there is no treatment to slow, stop, or reverse the progression of the disease, nor is there a cure. More than one million Americans live with Parkinson's, and the VA estimates that 110,000 veterans have Parkinson's.<sup>v,vi</sup>

Camp Lejeune drinking water was contaminated with TCE, perchloroethylene (PCE), and other volatile organic compounds from 1953 until 1987. A recent study published in JAMA Neurology found that Navy and Marine Corps veterans who were exposed to TCE-contaminated water at Camp Lejeune had a 70 percent higher risk of developing Parkinson's compared with veterans who served elsewhere.<sup>i</sup> Throughout recent years, the VA and Congress have taken steps to recognize and address parkinsonian service connections. We applaud those efforts, including the enactment of the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act.

Military members and their loved ones who live on base make great sacrifices to serve our country. At the very least, their health care costs from exposure to environmental risk factors due to their service should be covered. This new study brings much-needed attention to service member exposure to risk factors that later result in Parkinson's and amplifies the obligation of the VA to address health and other challenges that arise due to these exposures.

I strongly encourage you to investigate the prevalence and exposures of TCE and associated degradation products across military operations and locations, both current and historical. Further knowledge would provide the foundation to designate exposures to TCE at other locations as presumed connections to Parkinson's and eventually allow veterans exposed to TCE who develop Parkinson's to be eligible for VA disability compensation. We also recommend the VA commit resources to research the health impact of toxic exposures to identify and eliminate or mitigate environmental risk factors.



Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. With your help, we can better understand veterans' TCE service-related connections to Parkinson's disease and ensure they are appropriately compensated. For questions or more information, please contact Mason Zeagler at [mzeagler@michaeljfox.org](mailto:mzeagler@michaeljfox.org) or 202.638.4101 ext. 230.

Sincerely,



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## References

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- <sup>ii</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. "Camp Lejeune water contamination health issues." Veterans Affairs, 12 June 2023, <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/camp-lejeune-water-contamination/>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Feigin VL, Nichols E, Alam T, et al. Global, regional, and national burden of neurological disorders, 1990–2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016. *Lancet Neurol* 2019; 18: 459–80.
- <sup>iv</sup> National Institute on Aging. "Parkinson's Disease: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatments." National Institutes of Health, 12 June 2023, <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/parkinsons-disease>
- <sup>v</sup> Yang W, Hamilton JL, Kopil C, et al. Current and projected future economic burden of Parkinson's disease in the U.S. *Npj Park Dis* 2020; 6: 15.
- <sup>vi</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. "VA Research on Parkinson's Disease." Office of Research & Development, 28 Oct. 2021, [www.research.va.gov/topics/parkinsons.cfm](http://www.research.va.gov/topics/parkinsons.cfm).