

DISABILITY AND REHABILITATION RESEARCH COALITION

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Press Release

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Washington, DC: A large coalition of rehabilitation, disability, research, and provider organizations today endorsed federal legislation intended to improve, coordinate and enhance rehabilitation research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to address the needs of people with injuries, illnesses, disabilities and chronic conditions.

The Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition (DRRC) commended Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD) for their bipartisan introduction of S. 1027, the Kirk/Johnson Rehabilitation Improvement Act, to spotlight the importance of advancing rehabilitation research at NIH and across other federal agencies.

“This legislation highlights the need to focus on rehabilitation and disability research so that all Americans can benefit from the same innovative rehabilitation services and devices that Senators Kirk and Johnson were afforded,” stated Peter Thomas of the DRRC. “We look forward to working closely with Senators Kirk and Johnson to advance this legislation and implement recommendations to enable rehabilitation research to thrive at NIH.”

It is a fitting day to commemorate Senator Kirk for his efforts in advancing rehabilitation research. Senator Kirk speaks in Chicago today at the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago (RIC), one of the premier rehabilitation research hospitals in the country, and the hospital where Senator Kirk recently received his own rehabilitation. RIC’s former President and CEO, Henry B. Betts, M.D., was instrumental in establishing the National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research (NCMRR) at NIH in 1991 and for twenty years, was a tireless advocate for greater stature, coordination and funding for rehabilitation science at NIH to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.

A statement endorsing S. 1027 and signed by organizational members of the DRRC is attached.

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Rehabilitation Research Coalition Supports Bipartisan Introduction of S. 1027 by Senators Kirk and Johnson

The undersigned members of the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition (DRRC) applaud Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD) for introducing S. 1027, bipartisan legislation intended to improve, coordinate, and enhance rehabilitation research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

DRRC enthusiastically supports the introduction of S. 1027 because we believe the time is now to enhance the stature and visibility of rehabilitation research at the world's premier medical research agency and, by so doing, send a clear and unequivocal message that rehabilitation services and devices are critical to the health of people with disabilities, chronic conditions, illnesses and injuries. Access to rehabilitation is the key to full functioning, independent living, return to work and a high quality of life.

We are particularly supportive of the provisions in the bill designed to enhance coordination within NIH and with other federal agencies, update and streamline rehabilitation research priorities, and facilitate implementation of recommendations published in December 2012 by a distinguished NIH Blue Ribbon Panel on Rehabilitation Research. That panel concluded that rehabilitation research is not thriving at NIH and offered a comprehensive set of recommendations for the agency to address.

The quality of health care that Americans receive is dependent, in part, on the specific research priorities established by NIH. Introduction of S. 1027 offers the opportunity for a national dialogue on the importance and relative priority of rehabilitation science. With disability rates on the rise and millions of Americans aging into their senior years, an enhanced focus on rehabilitation research at NIH is critical to identifying the most effective and innovative rehabilitation treatments for people with conditions such as stroke, brain injury, spinal cord injury, amputation, and a wide range of neuromuscular and musculoskeletal conditions that compromise health and the ability to perform daily functions.

Senators Kirk and Johnson have each experienced their own personal journey with intensive rehabilitation that helped forge their interest in introducing S. 1027 so that others can benefit from the same types of innovative treatments they were afforded. We look forward to working with them and all of Congress to advance this legislation and facilitate implementation of the NIH's Blue Ribbon Panel Report on Rehabilitation Research.

DRRC is a national coalition of nearly 30 consumer, disability, provider and scientific organizations with the mission to promote and enhance rehabilitation research across the federal agencies. For more information, please call Peter Thomas or Bobby Silverstein at (202) 466-6550 or email them at Peter.Thomas@ppsv.com or Bobby.Silverstein@ppsv.com.

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Organizational Sign-Ons:

American Academy of Neurology
American Academy of Orthotists & Prosthetists
American Academy of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation
American Association of Spinal Cord Injury Psychologists and Social Workers
American Association on Health and Disability
American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine
American Medical Rehabilitation Providers Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association
Association of Academic Physiatrists
Association of Rehabilitation Nurses
American Music Therapy Association
American Therapeutic Recreation Association
Amputee Coalition of America
Brain Injury Association of America
Child Neurology Society
Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
National Association for the Advancement Orthotics & Prosthetics
National Association of Rehabilitation Research Training Centers
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
North American Brain Injury Society
Paralyzed Veterans of America
RESNA
United Spinal Association