

November 14, 2024

W. Kimryn Rathmell, M.D., Ph.D.  
Director, National Cancer Institute  
National Institutes of Health  
9609 Medical Center Drive  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Rathmell,

Thank you for your leadership at the National Cancer Institute. As representatives of the childhood cancer patient community, we write to encourage the institute to expand its support of pediatric immunotherapy research through the Cancer Adoptive Cellular Therapy (Can-ACT) Network.

Our community was excited by the Institute's plan in 2022 to support 7 new Can-ACT awards, 4 adult and 3 pediatric studies (<https://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/advisory/bsa/0322/Ernstoff.pdf> - Slide 13). We note the pediatric award target was later revised downward to 2 in a December 2023 Request for Applications. We were disappointed to learn recently that only 1 pediatric grant was funded, while 5 adult grants were supported. NCI's decision in September to fund a fifth adult trial (ovarian cancer) simultaneous to the decision to fund only 1 pediatric trial has raised questions within our community.

As childhood cancer research advocates and funders, we know the quality of the science that pediatric investigators are pursuing in this space. Although we are not privy to how the Can-ACT applications were scored, we are confident there was a second, meritorious, multisite pediatric application that could have been funded. It appears that NCI decided to prioritize a 5th adult study, while leaving kids with 1 study.

This raises concerns among families looking to NCI for leadership in this promising field on behalf of children in desperate need of new treatment options. This is particularly true given the Can-ACT's goal of supporting some multicenter trials. The sole pediatric award – as important and meritorious as it is for kids with medulloblastoma - is a single site trial. This limits the ability of children and families from geographically diverse locations to potentially benefit from this work.

We would greatly appreciate your perspective as to why this reduction in pediatric awards occurred and what steps NCI can take to meet its pledge of supporting a second pediatric grant. Thank you very much for taking our views into consideration. Gavin Lindberg, President of The EVAN Foundation, will follow-up with you regarding this correspondence. We look forward to working together to improve care and outcomes for children and adolescents with cancer.

Sincerely,

CHILDHOOD CANCER PATIENT ORGANIZATIONS & ADVOCATES