

## MACH Coalition: Where Are We Going? Why?

Aviator cancer advocacy dates from late 2019 while the MACH Coalition was founded in mid-2024. To guide our legislative advocacy and ensure our effort is fully aligned, questions require answers: *where is the Av Cancer effort going? Why did we choose this course over others?*

From the outset, the basis of our Av Cancer strategy is our assessment of the Agent Orange (dioxin) experience of Veterans who fought in Southeast Asia. Their campaign was instructive: studies, laws, and outcomes. Where practical, we should work smarter rather than harder. We do this when we wisely apply the experiences of the Vietnam generation to our contemporary Av Cancer work; where appropriate, informed by changes and improvements since that era.

This Av Cancer advocacy rests on a three-phase strategy. **Phase One** of the strategy is complete. The objective of Phase One was to compile extensive data to determine if a Veteran flyer cancer problem exists. After successful Veteran aviator advocacy in mid-2020, Congress mandated DOD conduct a series of aviator cancer studies, these in addition to the 2021 Air Force Aviator Cancer Study. The data from those three studies is presented in the MACH Coalition paper, *“Got 2 Minutes... Can We Talk About Aviator Cancers?”* Phase One successfully concluded with the publication of the DOD Phase 1b Aviator Cancer Study in MAY 2024.

**Phase Two** of the Av Cancer strategy is the present phase, the effort to enact the **Aviator Cancer Examination Study (ACES) Act**. As envisioned by legislation carried forward from the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress through the 118<sup>th</sup> and into the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress, the ACES Act is a study to be designed by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) to identify the causes of aviator cancers in the military aviation operating environment(s). Some may question the need for such a study. Other voices advocate the Av Cancer effort proceed directly to an initiative to improve Veteran health outcomes. While this approach seems more efficient in time, it does not align to Agent Orange campaign lessons learned nor would it comply with how the law underwrites Veteran care. To satisfy provisions in 38USC and 38CFR, the cancers that afflict Veteran aircrews must be shown to be present in military aviation. This conclusion is merely inferred in elevated cancer rates. The point of the ACES Act is to identify Veteran cancer causes. Cancer causation identification establishes a linkage and a pivot to Phase Three.

**Phase Three** is the enactment of three priorities. The **first** priority involves cancer detection improvement in DOD; the **second** priority is cancer detection improvement in the VA. Both priorities will require Phase One and ACES Act data. With these inputs, future legislation should require that DOD and VA continuously deploy state of art detection technology. The **third** priority should create lifetime testing using state of art technologies for active duty and Veteran aircrews. *The outcome of such technology deployment is to reduce the number of late-stage diagnoses and increase early-stage diagnoses. The consequence of this diagnostic shift could boost Veteran survival odds and improve treatment outcomes.*

**What this strategy does not do.** This strategy does not call for the establishment of a new presumptive category. This strategy would provide Veteran flyers with annual testing irrespective of screening criteria recommendations for civilians. When ACES Act data is eventually published, Veterans will be able to seek disability relief through secondary service connection—conditions that continue after cancer is treated and in remission. This Av Cancer strategy does not reinforce PL117-168, (PACT Act). This is discussed in the MACH paper, *“The Case For The ACES Act.”* In conclusion, military aviation trains aircrews to cope with numerous threats, e.g., terrain, enemy air forces, enemy air defenses, midair collision...except the health risks of modern military aviation. Speaking openly about Av Cancer does not harm military aviation, doing so strengthens it.