Melanoma Research Alliance Announces $6.3 Million in Grants to Advance Melanoma Prevention, Detection & Treatment

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 1, 2023 – In recognition of Melanoma Awareness Month and Melanoma Monday, the Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA), announced its new $6.3 million commitment to fund melanoma research, supporting 24 scientists at leading academic and medical institutions across the US and Europe. MRA-funded research spans the entire spectrum of the disease including melanoma prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and metastatic disease. Melanoma is the deadliest form of skin cancer and the fifth most common cancer in the United States with nearly 100,000 new cases of melanoma that will be diagnosed in the U.S. alone in 2023.

"As the largest non-governmental funder of melanoma research, MRA is uniquely positioned to accelerate research needed to better prevent, treat, and ultimately cure melanoma," says MRA Chief Executive Officer Marc Hurlbert, PhD. "MRA-funded investigators are leading the charge and have been involved in every major breakthrough in the field over the last decade. We remain tremendously grateful for MRA's generous donors, partners, supporters, and volunteers, who each year ensure MRA's ability to fund lifesaving research."

MRA funds a diverse array of researchers. This year's newly funded awards include the focus areas of:

- Understanding how melanoma develops and progresses to advanced disease, and novel approaches to detection, diagnosis, and disease monitoring.
- Developing innovative immunotherapy treatment approaches and strategies to overcome treatment resistance.
- Advancing artificial intelligence and machine learning approaches for predicting recurrence of early-stage melanomas.
- Exploring novel targets for new treatment development.
- Determining how melanoma metastasizes to various body tissues with a particular emphasis on the brain and central nervous system.
- Studying rare melanoma subtypes including acral and uveal/ocular melanoma.

The funding will support eight (8) Established Investigator Awards, 11 Young Investigator Awards and five (5) Pilot Awards. The grant applications were selected by MRA's Grant Review Committee made up of world-renowned scientists and physicians through a rigorous peer review process and approved by the MRA Board of Directors. Including the current awards, MRA has now directly invested over $150 million to accelerate melanoma research.

"We congratulate this outstanding group of scientists, and we are excited by the innovative and meritorious proposals that they put forward," said MRA Chief Science Officer Joan Levy, PhD. "The melanoma research community has transformed our understanding of melanoma biology and the progression and treatment of the disease, but additional investment in basic and translational research is essential to keep the momentum."

2023 Melanoma Research Alliance Grant Awards

Established Investigator Awardees

The MRA Established Investigator Awards supports established luminaries and scientists with a record of accomplishment of scientific excellence, breakthroughs, and productivity.

Memory T cell responses in primary melanoma
MRA Established Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by University of Michigan
Christina Angeles M.D., The University of Michigan

Armoring CD8+ T cells against energetic deficiency in melanoma
Leveraged Finance Fights Melanoma – MRA Established Investigator Award
Timothy Bullock Ph.D., University of Virginia

Therapeutic targeting of Hdm2/HdmX E3 ligase in melanoma
MRA Established Investigator Award
Julio Camarero Ph.D., University of Southern California

Genetic mechanisms early melanoma progression
Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation – MRA Established Investigator Award
Adam Dupuy Ph.D., The University of Iowa

Mechanisms underlying the oncogenic role of ORAI2 in melanoma
MRA Established Investigator Award
Stefan Feske M.D., New York University Grossman School of Medicine

Dissecting the mechanisms of melanoma cell adaptation to the brain
MRA Established Investigator Award
Eva Hernando Ph.D., New York University Grossman School of Medicine

Precision, plasma-only, melanoma ctDNA residual disease monitoring
Ellen and Gary Davis – MRA Established Investigator Award
Dan Landau M.D., Ph.D., Weill Medical College of Cornell University

Sustaining metabolic fitness of antitumor CD8+ T cells
MRA Established Investigator Award
Bin Zhang M.D., Ph.D., Northwestern University

Young Investigator Awardees

The MRA Young Investigator Awards empower the next generation of early career researchers. In addition to funding bold new ideas, MRA's Young Investigator Award program is also a training ground for researchers as they prepare for the future of their science careers.

Harnessing the immunomodulatory effects of NK cells in melanoma
Bristol Myers Squibb – MRA Young Investigator Award
Kevin Barry Ph.D., Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center

Dissecting the dynamic immune ecosystem during melanoma evolution
Leveraged Finance Fights Melanoma – MRA Young Investigator Award
Diego Chowell Ph.D., Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

Vaccine-tunable TME-restricted CAR T therapy for long-term melanoma control
Bristol Myers Squibb – MRA Young Investigator Award
Leyuan Ma Ph.D., The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

Dissecting melanoma brain metastasis and response to immunotherapy
MRA Young Investigator Award
Eva Perez-Guijarro Ph.D., Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Catabolic plasticity in acral melanoma metastases and drug tolerance
The Black Family – MRA Young Investigator Award
Vito Rebecca Ph.D., Johns Hopkins University

Bioengineering approaches for advancing targeted-immunotherapy in melanoma
MRA Young Investigator Award
Tanmoy Saha Ph.D., Brigham and Women's Hospital

Multi-modal machine learning for early-stage melanoma recurrence prediction
L'Oréal Dermatological Beauty – MRA Young Investigator Award
Yevgeniy Semenov M.D., Massachusetts General Hospital

Image-based three-dimensional radiation dosimetry for Ac-225-MTI-201
ASTRO – MRA Young Investigator Award
Chris Tichacek Ph.D., H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute

Resolving the spatial clonal architecture of acral lentiginous melanoma
L'Oréal Dermatological Beauty – MRA Young Investigator Award
Meng Wang Ph.D., The University of California, San Francisco

Monitoring early response to immunotherapy with ultrasensitive plasma WGS
The Black Family – MRA Young Investigator Award
Adam Widman M.D., Sloan Kettering Institute for Cancer Research

Tumor immune evasion through STING-mediated T cell death in melanoma
MRA Young Investigator Award
Jianjun Wu Ph.D., Cleveland Clinic Foundation

Pilot Awardees

The MRA Pilot Awards provide early support for conceptually novel, exploratory, high risk and high impact projects with the potential to change the face of melanoma research and treatments.

The CoREST repressor complex as a mediator of RNA splicing and tumor growth
Leveraged Finance Fights Melanoma – MRA Pilot Award
Rhoda Alani M.D., Boston University

Epigenetic determinants of melanoma progression and immunotherapy response
The Denise and Michael Kellen Foundation – MRA Pilot Award
Alfonso Bellacosa M.D., Ph.D., The Research Institute of Fox Chase Cancer Center

Identifying genetic sex biasing factors in melanoma progression
The Denise and Michael Kellen Foundation – MRA Pilot Award
Nora Engel Ph.D., Temple University

Targeting ASAP1-induced transcription factors in metastatic uveal melanoma
ACIS – MRA Pilot Award in Metastatic Uveal Melanoma
Shannon Odelberg Ph.D., The University of Utah

A drug-binding assay platform to optimize therapies for RAS-mut melanomas
MRA Pilot Award
Poulikos Poulikakos Ph.D., Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

About Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA)

The Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA) stands as the largest non-profit funder of melanoma research. Founded in 2007 by Debra and Leon Black, MRA's mission is to end suffering and death due to melanoma by advancing the world's most promising science and research. MRA provides critical funding for melanoma cancer research that propels advances in prevention, diagnosis, treatment, metastasis, and survivorship. MRA-funded researchers have been behind every major melanoma research breakthrough. Since MRA's inception, more than 15 new therapeutic approaches for melanoma have earned FDA approval. MRA is recognized as one of the most fiscally efficient non-profits in the country. Because MRA's Founders generously cover 100% of MRA's administrative and operating costs, every dollar donated is invested directly into MRA's scientific and research program. For more information, please visit: www.CureMelanoma.org.

LinkedIn: melanoma-research-alliance
Twitter: @MelanomaReAlli
Instagram: @melanoma
Facebook: MelanomaResearchAlliance

Media Contacts:
KWT Global
mra@kwtglobal.com

Cody R. Barnett, MRA Senior Director of Communications
cbarnett@curemelanoma.org