

Melanoma

Research Alliance

For Immediate Release

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Melanoma Research Alliance Announces \$11 Million for 26 Grant Awards to Advance Melanoma Research

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 30, 2020 – With the world’s attention focused on the response to COVID-19, the Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA) knows that long after this pandemic has ended, melanoma research will still be urgently needed. To this end, and in recognition of Melanoma Awareness Month, the Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA), the largest non-profit funder of melanoma research, is proud to announce funding for 26 research awards totaling \$10.9 million.

"As many people begin to focus on how to safely reopen our communities, MRA is committed to a continued and robust pipeline of research that can eliminate pain and suffering due to melanoma," says Debra Black MRA co-founder and board chair. "We are delighted to invest in critical melanoma research during these difficult times."

In addition to providing an influx of funding as researchers return to their labs, MRA research awards support innovative ideas having the potential to rapidly improve outcomes for patients with melanoma. Project goals are expansive, and include research aimed at validating the use of artificial intelligence to improve early melanoma diagnosis, exploring CAR-T Cell therapy as a future melanoma treatment option, and evaluating how best to combine surgery, radiotherapy, and systemic treatments to treat metastatic disease, including neoadjuvant approaches.

"This year, for the first time ever, we estimate that more than 100,000 people in the United States will be diagnosed with invasive melanoma," says MRA Chief Science Officer Marc Hurlbert, PhD. "While our efforts over the last decade have reduced melanoma mortality rates – we still must continue to advance research needed to improve outcomes for all patients facing melanoma."

The 26 awards will support research at 23 institutions in five countries. The grants were vetted by MRA’s [Grant Review Committee](#) through a rigorous peer review process and confirmed by the MRA Board of Directors. Including the current awards, MRA has now invested over \$122.5 million directly into research.

"Over the last decade, the impact of research has been transformational to patients facing melanoma. We have no doubt that these new awards will continue that momentum and bring us closer to achieving our mission of ending suffering and death due to melanoma," said MRA President & CEO Michael Kaplan.

MRA’s grant awards are made possible through the significant contributions of individuals, families, institutions and corporate allies. Donors and partners providing financial support for 75% or more of an award are listed below within the named award.

2020 Grant Awards

Team Science Awards

Genomic instability in acral melanoma as a therapeutic vulnerability

The Black Family-MRA Team Science Award in Acral Melanoma

Boris Bastian M.D., Ph.D., The University of California, San Francisco

Overcoming upfront resistance to neoadjuvant CTLA-4 plus PD-1 blockade

MRA Team Science Award with Young Investigator supported by Amanda and Jonathan Eilian

Christian Blank M.D., Ph.D., Netherlands Cancer Institute

Evolution of metabolic and immune dysfunction in in-transit melanoma

The Black Family-MRA Team Science Award in In-Transit Melanoma

Greg Delgoffe Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh

Germline biomarkers of melanoma immunotherapy: an international consortium

Leveraged Finance Fights Melanoma-MRA Team Science Award

Tomas Kirchhoff Ph.D., New York University

AI-Augmented Melanoma Triage and Diagnosis: A Prospective Multi-Site Study

L'Oreal Dermatological Beauty Brands-MRA Team Science Award

Roberto Novoa M.D., Stanford University

IL13Ra2 Chimeric Antigen Receptor (CAR) T cells for Metastatic Melanoma

The Black Family-MRA Team Science Award, with YIA generously supported by the Sokoloff Family

Antoni Ribas M.D., Ph.D., The University of California, Los Angeles

Effective therapies for patients with high risk in-transit disease

MRA Team Science Award, with generous support from the Helman Family

Richard Scolyer M.D., Melanoma Institute Australia

Next-generation computational biomarker development for PD-(L)1 efficacy

BJ's Wholesale Club-MRA Team Science Award

Janis Taube, M.D., Johns Hopkins University

Investigating melanoma metastases

MRA Team Science Award, Generously Supported by Rosetrees Trust

Samra Turajlic Ph.D., The Francis Crick Institute

The effects of age on tumor dormancy

MRA Team Science Award, collaboratively funded by Johns Hopkins University and Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

Ashani Weeraratna Ph.D., Johns Hopkins University

Targeting persister cell states that drive drug resistance and metastasis

Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation – MRA Team Science Award

Richard White M.D., Ph.D., Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Young Investigator Awards

Loss of CD226 in T cells drives resistance to melanoma immunotherapy

Bristol-Myers Squibb – MRA Young Investigator Award

Tobias Bald Ph.D., QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute

Identification of Druggable Transcriptional Drivers in Melanoma

MRA Young Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by Massachusetts General Hospital

Liron Bar-Peled Ph.D., Massachusetts General Hospital

Understanding Immunotherapy-Tolerant Melanoma Persister Cells

Bristol-Myers Squibb – MRA Young Investigator Award

Matthew Hangauer Ph.D., University of California, San Diego

Activating dsRNA sensing in melanoma to overcome immunotherapy resistance

Bristol-Myers Squibb – MRA Young Investigator Award

Jeffrey Ishizuka M.D., Ph.D., Yale University

Targeting interactions between melanoma metabolism and radiation therapy

MRA Young Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by Emory University

Aparna Kesarwala M.D., Ph.D., Emory University

Examining the role of blebs in melanoma metastasis

MRA Young Investigator Award in memory of Leon Sapsuzian, Jr.

Jeremy Logue Ph.D., Albany Medical College

Microenvironmental Regulators of Melanoma Brain Metastases

MRA Young Investigator Award

Berta Lopez Sanchez-Laorden Ph.D., Universidad Miguel Hernandez de Elche

Targeting 1-Carbon Metabolism in Melanoma Brain Metastases

Tara Miller Melanoma Foundation – MRA Young Investigator Award

Michael Pacold M.D., Ph.D., New York University

Ablative radiotherapy as consolidation for oligoprogressive melanoma

ASTRO-MRA Young Investigator Award in Radiation Oncology

Reid Thompson M.D., Ph.D., Oregon Health & Science University

The impact of tumor progression trajectory on immunotherapy treatment

Michael and Jacqueline Ferro Family Foundation - MRA Young Investigator Award

Lixing Yang Ph.D., The University of Chicago

Pilot Awards

Sensitizing melanoma to immunotherapy with novel DNA hypermethylating drugs

MRA Pilot Award

Alfonso Bellacosa M.D., Ph.D., The Research Institute of Fox Chase Cancer Center

Histone variant regulation of the melanoma immune microenvironment

Hess Foundation – MRA Pilot Award

Emily Bernstein Ph.D., Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

Targeting immune inhibitory gene transcription to reverse T cell exhaustion

MRA Pilot Award

Linda Bradley Ph.D., Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute

Tandem cytokine delivery with non-replicating herpes viral vectors

MRA Pilot Award

Stephanie Dougan Ph.D., Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

Uncovering Nodes of Convergence of Targeted and Immune Therapy in Melanoma

Hess Foundation – MRA Pilot Award

Poulikos Poulikakos Ph.D., Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

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About Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA)

Founded in 2007 under the auspices of the Milken Institute, with the generous support of Debra and Leon Black, the Melanoma Research Alliance exists to accelerate treatment options and find a cure for melanoma. As the largest nonprofit funder of melanoma research, it has dedicated over \$122.5 million and leveraged an additional \$205 million towards its mission. Through its support, MRA has championed revolutions in immunotherapy, targeted therapies, novel combinations and diagnostics. Due to the ongoing support of its founders, 100 percent of donations to MRA go directly to its melanoma research program. MRA's ability to fund wide-ranging research in melanoma is amplified by unique collaborations and partnerships with individuals, private foundations, and corporations. Visit <http://www.CureMelanoma.org> for more information.

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