

Melanoma Research Alliance

About Melanoma

Melanoma is a cancer of pigment producing cells and occurs in the skin, eye, and mucous membranes. It is one of the most common cancers in men and women ages 20-29, the sixth most common cancer in the United States, and its incidence has continued to rise over the past three decades. Each year more than 73,000 Americans are diagnosed with new melanoma—one every eight minutes—and more than 9,900 die of the disease.

If caught in its earliest stages, melanoma is curable with surgery; however, patients diagnosed with Stage IV metastatic melanoma have a median survival of less than one year after diagnosis.

About MRA

MRA is a public charity formed in 2007 under the auspices of the Milken Institute, with the generous founding support of Debra and Leon Black. MRA has dedicated more than \$67 million to research seeking to better prevent, diagnose, and treat melanoma, the most deadly type of skin cancer. Due to the ongoing support of its founders, 100% of every dollar MRA raises goes to support its melanoma research program. In 2014, MRA was ranked first out of the top 30 grant-giving disease foundations by Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology News (GEN). The organization is poised to build on recent momentum in the field, accelerating the pace of scientific discovery and translation in order to eliminate suffering and death due to melanoma. MRA's ability to fund wide-ranging research in melanoma is amplified by unique multi-faceted collaborations and partnerships with individuals, private foundations, and corporations.

MRA supported projects are vetted by a world-class Grant Review Committee. Funded research has outstanding scientific merit, pursues innovative research using novel approaches, and offers the potential for developments that could lead to high-impact, near-term clinical application in areas of melanoma prevention, diagnosis, staging, and treatment.

Scientific Retreat

MRA convenes an annual scientific retreat to bring together the world's leading melanoma researchers and thought leaders. The retreat highlights the latest progress made under MRA awards, facilitates early sharing of data to identify new opportunities, and enhances collaboration.

Total Commitments by Research Area



\$3.8M
Diagnosis/Staging

\$3.7M
Prevention

\$60.4M
Treatment

Research Program

To date, MRA has awarded more than \$67 million to 179 research programs to make transformational advances in the prevention, diagnosis, staging, and treatment of melanoma, including research in biological causes of carcinogenesis, skin screening, biomarkers, imaging, immunotherapy, molecularly targeted therapy, and combination therapy.

MRA solicits individual investigator, collaborative team scientific proposals, and academic-industry partnerships in the following areas:

- **Prevention:** Areas of interest include environmental, epidemiological, and biological factors in melanoma carcinogenesis
- **Diagnosis and Staging:** Emphasis includes identification of serological tumor markers, association of molecular tumor biomarkers with prognosis, and development of novel clinical methods for melanoma detection and imaging
- **Treatment:** Projects emphasize the translation of scientific findings to melanoma treatments, including studies of melanoma immunotherapy, therapeutic applications based on molecular mechanisms involved in melanoma formation and/or progression, and development of novel biomarkers of response to therapy

“There is so much excitement in the melanoma field as a result of recent, highly promising developments for treating advanced disease. Our goal is to accelerate that progress. We are committed to understanding more about how to better prevent, detect, and treat this terrible disease.”

—Debra and Leon Black
Founders, Melanoma Research Alliance

Research Awards

Young Investigator Awards: This program aims to attract early career scientists with novel ideas into melanoma research, thereby recruiting and supporting the next generation of melanoma researchers. Young Investigators are scientists within four years of their first academic faculty appointment. A mentorship commitment from a senior investigator is required.

Pilot Awards: Proposals test potentially transformative ideas that do not have extensive preliminary data but articulate a clear hypothesis and translational goals. Resources for such “high-risk, high-reward” projects are important to establish proof-of-concept, which may then leverage additional funding through more traditional avenues.

Established Investigator Awards: The Established Investigator Award program supports senior investigators with an established record of scientific productivity and accomplishment and who are past the initial four years of their first academic faculty appointment.

Team Science Awards: The Team Science Award Program is the centerpiece of the MRA research funding portfolio. This program fulfills one of MRA’s primary goals: to foster a collaborative research process. Multidisciplinary teams consist of Principal Investigators with complementary expertise who may be from the same institution, inter-institutional, and/or international. Team science projects promote transformational melanoma research advances with the potential for rapid clinical translation.

Development Awards: A subtype of a Pilot Award in which one year of funding is provided to test potentially transformative “high-risk, high-reward” ideas that do not have extensive preliminary data but would establish proof-of-concept. Investigators who are past the initial four years of their first academic faculty are eligible.

Academic-Industry Partnership Awards:

Designed to facilitate interactions between the academic and industrial research sectors, these were introduced in 2011 and are co-funded by MRA and an industrial collaborator whose involvement is essential to the project. This program is open to Established Investigators and Research Teams.

Collaboration

Collaboration is at MRA’s core—from the team approaches to research that we fund, to the way we find partners who can help us realize our vision. MRA is pleased to have the generous support of a growing list of allies to help amplify our message and garner the resources necessary to advance our mission. Together, we are working toward the day when no one will suffer or die from melanoma.



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