

# Melanoma Research Alliance

For Immediate Release

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## Melanoma Research Alliance Announces \$8.1 million in Research Awards

**WASHINGTON, D.C., April 27, 2021** – The Melanoma Research Alliance, the largest non-profit funder of melanoma research, is proud to announce \$8.1 million in funding for 34 new research awards. The awards, issued near the start of Melanoma Awareness Month, provide critical funding to address urgent unmet needs in melanoma.

“COVID-19 has impacted so much, including research and clinical trials. This investment in melanoma research is needed now more than ever,” said MRA Board Chair and Co-Founder Debra Black. “We’re proud to support and stand with melanoma researchers at this critical time.”

MRA research awards support innovative ideas that offer the promise to rapidly improve outcomes for patients facing melanoma.

“This year’s grant awards focus on a variety of topics including rare melanoma subtypes, new treatment approaches, strategies to overcome treatment resistance, and more,” says Senior Director for MRA’s Scientific Program Kristen Mueller, PhD. “We also are supporting creative partnerships between researchers, including, for example, a multi-national team of scientists in Mexico, Brazil and the United Kingdom focused on unraveling the ways in which acral melanoma – which forms on the palms, soles of feet, or under finger or toe nails – spreads throughout the body.”

“MRA grant awards are supporting scientists who are pushing the envelope in order to address some of the biggest unanswered questions in melanoma,” says MRA Chief Science Officer Marc Hurlbert, PhD. “These include researchers working on modulating the microbiome to improve patient outcomes, and others exploring strategies to understand and overcome resistance to therapies.”

The 34 awards will support research at 27 institutions in 7 countries. Each award was selected by MRA’s [Grant Review Committee](#) through a rigorous peer review process and confirmed by the MRA Board of Directors. Since its founding in 2007, MRA has supported 380 projects, representing a \$131 million investment. To learn more about MRA’s full research portfolio, go to [CureMelanoma.org/grants](https://CureMelanoma.org/grants)

## 2021 MRA Awards

### Young Investigator Awards

#### **Enhancing an abscopal response by elucidating the role of stem-like T-cells**

*ASTRO-MRA Young Investigator Award in Radiation Oncology*

Zachary Buchwald MD, PhD, Emory University

#### **Targeting Liver Metastases to Enhance Immunotherapy Efficacy in Melanoma**

*MRA Young Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by The University of Michigan*

Michael Green MD, The University of Michigan

#### **Dissecting the role of CD58 in cancer immune evasion and T cell exclusion**

*Tara Miller Melanoma Foundation – MRA Young Investigator Award*

Benjamin Izar MD, PhD, Columbia University Medical Center

**Dissecting Tumor and Immune Evolution in Unresectable In-Transit Melanoma**

*Amanda and Jonathan Eilian – MRA Young Investigator Award*

David Liu MD, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

**Targeting SPP to activate antigen presentation in melanoma via HLA-E**

*MRA Young Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by the Broad Institute*

Robert Manguso PhD, The Broad Institute

**Tumor microbiome potentiates cancer immunotherapy in melanoma**

*Bristol Myers Squibb – MRA Young Investigator Award*

Marlies Meisel PhD, University of Pittsburgh

**Uncoupling MEK and ERK To Treat Melanoma**

*MRA Young Investigator Award*

Gatien Moriceau PhD, The University of California, Los Angeles

**Delineating novel mechanism of immune evasion in melanoma brain metastases**

*MRA Young Investigator Award*

Inan Olmez MD, Pennsylvania State University

**Mitochondrial Uncoupling: A New Therapeutic Approach for Melanoma**

*Merck – MRA Young Investigator Award*

Rachel Perry PhD, Yale University School of Medicine

**Understanding and improving neoepitope-specific T cell response to melanoma**

*Leveraged Finance Fights Melanoma-MRA Young Investigator Award*

Cristina Puig Saus PhD, The University of California, Los Angeles

**Immunotherapeutic cytokine/antibody fusion proteins to treat melanoma**

*MRA Young Investigator Award*

Jamie Spangler PhD, Johns Hopkins University-School of Medicine

**Improving immunotherapy outcomes through solving irAEs**

*Bristol Myers Squibb – MRA Young Investigator Award*

Alexandra-Chloe Villani PhD, Massachusetts General Hospital

**Adipocyte remodelling in melanoma progression and immunotherapy response**

*MRA Young Investigator Award*

Amaya Viros MD, PhD, The University of Manchester

**Targeting CDK6 in T cells for melanoma therapy**

*Bristol Myers Squibb – MRA Young Investigator Award*

Haizhen Wang PhD, Medical University of South Carolina

## Pilot Awards

**Overcoming immunotherapy resistance by selective inhibition of Notch1**

*MRA Pilot Award*

Barbara Bedogni Ph.D, University of Miami, Miller School of Medicine

**Imaging Biomarkers for Immunotherapy Resistance in Melanoma In Vivo**

*MRA Pilot Award*

Pratip Bhattacharya PhD, University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

**Harnessing proteasome heterogeneity for sensitization to immunotherapy**

*MRA Pilot Award*

Yifat Merbl Ph.D, Weizmann Institute of Science

**Defining mediators of metastatic spread in acral melanoma**

*MRA Pilot Award*

Carla Daniela Robles-Espinoza PhD, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

**Dissecting the impact of noncoding structural variation in melanoma genomes**

*Leveraged Finance Fights Melanoma-MRA Pilot Award*

Eliezer Van Allen MD, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

**Identifying and targeting melanoma resident macrophages**

*MRA Pilot Award*

Andrew White PhD, Cornell University

**Established Investigator Awards**

**Role of opioid signaling in disabling immunity during melanoma progression**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Ana Anderson PhD, Brigham and Women's Hospital

**Formation and Function of Tertiary Lymphoid Structures in Melanoma**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Victor Engelhard PhD, The University of Virginia

**Targeting neuroinflammation for inhibition of melanoma brain metastasis**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Neta Erez PhD, Tel Aviv University

**Enhancing tumour immune detection by targeting replication stress**

*MRA Established Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by The University of Queensland*

Brian Gabrielli PhD, The University of Queensland

**CSDE1 proteoforms as novel targets for melanoma treatment and prognosis**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Fatima Gebauer Ph.D, Fundacio Centre De Regulacio Genomica

**Targeted Therapy of Melanoma with LZTR1 and CRKL inhibitors**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Ruth Halaban PhD, Yale University

**Identifying defects in nucleic acid sensing that drive anti-PD-1 resistance**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Rizwan Haq MD, PhD, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

**Tailoring T cell anti-tumor response with mitochondria-mediated regulations**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Ping-Chih Ho PhD, University of Lausanne

**PARP14 mediates adaptive resistance to immune checkpoint inhibitors**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Adam Hurlstone PhD, University of Manchester

**Balancing stem-like and effector T cells for maximal anti-tumor activity**

*MRA Established Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by Massachusetts General Hospital*

Thorsten Mempel M.D, Ph.D, Massachusetts General Hospital

**Targeting Acral/Mucosal Melanomas Using a Novel KIT-driven Murine Avatar**

*Leveraged Finance Fights Melanoma-MRA Established Investigator Award*

Hensin Tsao MD, PhD, Massachusetts General Hospital

**Protein Kinase C fusion – Rare Targetable Initiating Mutation in Melanoma**

*Leveraged Finance Fights Melanoma-MRA Established Investigator Award*

Iwei Yeh MD, PhD, The University of California, San Francisco

**Established Investigator Academic-Industry Partnership Awards**

**Multimodal GNAQ signaling-targeted precision therapy approach for MUM**

*MRA Established Investigator Academic-Industry Partnership Award*

J. Silvio Gutkind PhD, The University of California, San Diego

**CD8+ Cell Imaging during Neoadjuvant ImmunoTherapy (The C-IT Neo Trial)**

*MRA Established Investigator Academic-Industry Partnership Award*

Michael Postow MD, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center

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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 \$131 million and leveraged an additional \$415 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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