

# Melanoma

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## Research Alliance

**For Immediate Release**

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### **Melanoma Research Alliance Announces \$8.2 Million for 33 Grant Awards to Advance Melanoma Research**

**WASHINGTON, D.C., April 30, 2019** – In advance of Melanoma Awareness Month, the Melanoma Research Alliance (MRA), the largest non-profit funder of melanoma research, today announced funding for 33 innovative research awards totaling \$8.26 million.

The newly selected research awards will address critical unmet needs in melanoma detection, prognostication and treatment. Five awards – three of which were generously funded by the *Michael and Jacqueline Ferro Family Foundation* – will investigate ways to better harness artificial intelligence to improve the early detection and prognosis of melanoma. Several other projects will examine novel drug targets, new treatment approaches for brain metastases, and ways to overcome targeted therapy resistance.

“For so many patients and loved ones who have been affected by melanoma, research is hope,” said Debra Black cofounder and chair of MRA. “While progress is steadily being made, we won’t stop until we have cured melanoma. MRA-funded research is accelerating our progress toward better treatments and ultimately a cure for this disease.”

These new research awards come at a critical time, as rates of melanoma have doubled over the last 30 years. This year in the United States more than 96,000 people will be diagnosed with melanoma and over 7,000 people will succumb to the disease.

“While the explosive rate of new melanoma cases is alarming, I am encouraged by the reduced rate of mortality from melanoma. This is a testament to the vast progress we are making in the lab and in the clinic,” said MRA Chief Science Officer, Marc Hurlbert, PhD. “We still have a long way to go, but we are making headway. Additional investment in basic and clinical research is essential to keep the momentum.”

The new awards will support research at 28 institutions in seven countries, comprising 16 Established Investigators, 12 Young Investigators and five Pilot awards. The grants were selected by MRA’s [Grant Review Committee](#) through a diligent peer review process and confirmed by the MRA Board of Directors. The awards announced today bring MRA’s total investment in life-saving melanoma research to over \$110 million, in addition to \$150 million in outside, leveraged funds.

“At MRA, we’ve seen our funded research translate to true real world improvements in the prevention, detection and treatment of melanoma. We have no doubt that these new awards will take us even closer to achieving our goal of ending pain and suffering due to melanoma,” said MRA President & CEO Michael Kaplan.

MRA’s 2019 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.

## 2019 Grant Awards

### Established Investigator Awards

#### **Epigenetic Regulation of Resistance to Targeted Therapies in Melanoma**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Rhoda Alani M.D., Boston University

#### **Targeting MAPK and PI3K signaling via CK2 inhibition in acral melanoma**

*MRA Established Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by Columbia University*

Angela Christiano Ph.D., Columbia University

#### **Applying AI to Assess Histologic Features to Improve Melanoma Diagnosis**

*Michael and Jacqueline Ferro Family Foundation - MRA Established Investigator Award for Artificial Intelligence Applied to Melanoma*

Joann Elmore M.D., M.P.H., University of California Los Angeles

#### **DGAT1 is a novel melanoma oncogene**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Adam Hurlstone Ph.D., University of Manchester

#### **Eradicating melanoma drug-tolerant cells**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Jean-Christophe Marine Ph.D., VIB

#### **Enhanced-OCT for discriminating nevi from melanomas**

*Michael and Jacqueline Ferro Family Foundation - MRA Established Investigator Award for Artificial Intelligence Applied to Melanoma*

Mohammadreza Nasiriavanaki Ph.D., Wayne State University

#### **Developing a predictive tool using machine learning algorithm in melanoma**

*MRA Established Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by New York University School of Medicine*

Iman Osman M.D., New York University School of Medicine

#### **Metabolic Control of T cell Senescence for Melanoma Immunotherapy**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Guangyong Peng M.D., Ph.D., Saint Louis University

**Preclinical development of a disrupter of BRAF-containing dimers**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Neal Rosen M.D., Ph.D., Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center

**Studying the effects of intra-tumor heterogeneity on anti-tumor immunity**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Yardena Samuels Ph.D., Weizmann Institute

**Nanomedicine targeting melanoma-astrocytes interplay in 3D brain metastases**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Ronit Satchi-Fainaro Ph.D., Tel-Aviv University

**Targeting CD39 in melanoma**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Mark Smyth Ph.D., The Council of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research

**Mechanism of EBF3 Tumor Suppression in Melanoma**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Hensin Tsao MD, PhD, Massachusetts General Hospital (The General Hospital Corp.)

**Proof of practice: melanoma screening using computer vision**

*MRA Established Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by University of California, San Francisco*

Maria Wei M.D., Ph.D., University of California, San Francisco

**Understanding and targeting metabolic heterogeneity in melanoma**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Bin Zheng Ph.D., Massachusetts General Hospital

**Finding Pathways That Drive T-Cells Into Melanoma**

*MRA Established Investigator Award*

Leonard I. Zon M.D., Harvard University

**Young Investigator Awards**

**Identification of metabolic liabilities of melanoma cells**

*MRA Young Investigator Award*

Kivanc Birsoy Ph.D., The Rockefeller University

**Discovering unconventional CD8+ T-cell epitopes in metastatic melanoma**

*Bristol-Myers Squibb - MRA Young Investigator Award in Immunotherapy*

Yiwen Chen Ph.D., University of Texas, MD Anderson Cancer Center

**Optimization of GITR antibodies for melanoma immunotherapy**

*MRA Young Investigator Award, collaboratively funded by Weizmann Institute of Science*

Rony Dahan Ph.D., Weizmann Institute

**Targeting copy number alterations to overcome immune evasion in melanoma**

*Julie and Edward J. Minskoff - MRA Young Investigator Award*

Teresa Davoli Ph.D., New York University School of Medicine

**Microbial metabolites in immunotherapy of malignant melanoma**

*Bristol-Myers Squibb - MRA Young Investigator Award in Immunotherapy*

Simon Heidegger M.D., Klinikum rechts der Isar der Technische Universität München

**TANK-Binding Kinase 1 (TBK1) As A Novel Cancer Immunotherapy Target**

*Tara Miller Melanoma Foundation - MRA Young Investigator Award*

Russell Jenkins M.D., Ph.D., Massachusetts General Hospital

**Transcriptional and Epigenetic Regulators of Melanoma Initiation**

*MRA Young Investigator Award*

Charles K. Kaufman M.D., Ph.D., Washington University in St. Louis

**Dissecting tumor-immune cell interactions in uveal melanoma**

*Ellen and Gary Davis - MRA Young Investigator Award*

Ashley Laughney Ph.D., Weill Cornell Medical College

**Identifying new molecular targets and drugs to treat resistant Melanoma**

*Jill and Jay Bernstein - MRA Young Investigator Award*

Nir London Ph.D., Weizmann Institute

**Factors that Influence Artificial Intelligence-based Melanoma Diagnosis**

*Michael and Jacqueline Ferro Family Foundation - MRA Young Investigator Award for Artificial Intelligence Applied to Melanoma*

Veronica Rotemberg M.D., Ph.D., Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center

**Elucidating cross-presentation of melanoma-derived antigens**

*Lee Grinberg Family - MRA Young Investigator Award*

Stefani Spranger Ph.D., Massachusetts Institute of Technology

**The multifaceted Ambra1-based signaling in melanoma response to therapy**

*MRA Young Investigator Award*

Daniela De Zio Ph.D., Kraeftens Bekämpfung

**Pilot Awards:**

**Development of Novel YAP-TEAD Inhibitors for Uveal Melanoma**

*MRA Pilot Award*

Fernando Camargo Ph.D., Children's Hospital Boston

**Mitochondrial Control of Melanoma Initiation**

*MRA Pilot Award, collaboratively funded by Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai*

Jerry Chipuk Ph.D., Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai

**Blood vessel co-option by brain tropic melanoma cells**

*MRA Pilot Award*

Andrew Dudley Ph.D., The University of Virginia

**Spliced immune receptors for immune regulation and melanoma immunotherapy**

*MRA Pilot Award*

Michal Lotem M.D., Hadassah Hebrew University Medical Center

**Targeting ferroptosis to combat resistant forms of melanoma**

*MRA Pilot Award*

James Olzmann Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley

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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 \$110 million and leveraged an additional \$150 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.