



Melanoma Research Alliance Announces \$12.6 Million Investment in Cutting Edge Melanoma Research

Washington, DC, May 1, 2024 – [The Melanoma Research Alliance \(MRA\)](#), the world’s leading non-profit funder of melanoma research, announced its \$12.6 million commitment to fund melanoma research supporting more than 30 scientists at leading academic and medical institutions in the United States and across the globe. Melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, remains a public health threat. This year, over 100,000 people in the United States will be diagnosed with melanoma and one person, every hour of every day will die from melanoma.

“MRA is a world leader in advancing transformational science that has caused paradigm shifts in what it means to be diagnosed with and treated for melanoma,” said MRA’s Chief Executive Officer Marc Hurlbert, PhD. “When MRA was founded in 2007, melanoma research was stagnant and treatment options were few. Today, a person with advanced melanoma has access to 17 FDA-approved treatments. MRA’s progress is not just benefiting patients with melanoma, it is also transforming the field of oncology. We remain grateful to our supporters who made another groundbreaking year of research investments possible.”

“Melanoma research has made tremendous progress over the last 15 years,” said MRA Chief Science Officer Joan Levy, PhD. “Even as we’ve made significant, lifesaving advances in understanding and treating melanoma, nearly 50% of patients with advanced melanoma do not respond to current treatments. Our focused research agenda aims to improve treatment options, unravel the complexities of rare melanomas, understand why melanoma metastasizes so rapidly, and develop more tools and technologies for better early detection. At MRA, we remain committed to supporting a global brain trust of scientists who are leading the charge.”

MRA funds a diverse array of scientists working across the entire spectrum of melanoma in the following high-priority focus areas (MRA grant awards may be found at www.curemelanoma.org/24grants):

ADVANCING IMMUNOTHERAPY AND TREATMENT OPTIONS

While half of advanced melanoma patients benefit from current treatments, MRA-funded researchers are actively exploring new therapies and novel immune interventions to bridge the gap for those whose melanomas are resistant to currently available therapies. MRA’s funded research is investigating a better understanding of causes leading to the development of resistance and various types of immunotherapy strategies to fight melanoma and prevent recurrence.

UNRAVELING THE COMPLEXITIES OF RARE MELANOMAS

Patients with rare melanomas – acral, mucosal, uveal, and pediatric – face unique challenges ranging from later diagnoses, poorer prognoses, and a lack of treatment options designed specifically to address the unique features of their tumors. Melanoma can be diagnosed in anyone, but rare melanomas, in particular acral and mucosal, are proportionally more common among people with darker skin tones, such as African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics. MRA’s investments in rare melanoma research have begun to advance the field’s understanding of the biology of these rare melanomas and their molecular differences from cutaneous (skin) melanoma. MRA is the largest non-profit funder of rare melanoma research in the world.

TACKLING BRAIN METASTASES

Melanoma has a high propensity to metastasize and spread to the brain and other central nervous system areas. Approximately 60% of patients with advanced melanoma develop brain metastases during their disease. MRA is seeking answers to why melanoma spreads to the brain and can go dormant, evading immune system detection, and what triggers melanomas out of that dormancy to initiate growth. MRA research funding is focused on having a better understanding and developing treatments for brain metastases and ensuring clinical trials are inclusive of these patients.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND MACHINE LEARNING

With a shortage of dermatologists nationwide and many at-risk individuals lacking access to necessary care, innovative solutions are urgently needed. MRA-funded researchers are pioneering the development of AI and machine learning algorithms, enabling consumers to conveniently monitor suspicious moles using their smartphones. Additionally, MRA is dedicated to equipping primary care practitioners with advanced tools to swiftly identify potentially concerning lesions and streamline the patient referral process to dermatologists. MRA's Precision Detection and Diagnosis Initiative supports providing dermatologists and pathologists with AI and machine learning algorithms designed to enhance diagnostic accuracy, ensuring that patients receive optimal care and treatment.

THE MICROBIOME'S ROLE IN IMPROVING MELANOMA TREATMENT RESPONSES

MRA-funded investigators are focusing on research connecting nutrition, the microbiome, and the immune system axis as a significant contributor in a patient's response to immunotherapy. MRA's investment in microbiome research is exploring how lifestyle factors including diet, exercise, stress, and anxiety as well as the trillions of microorganisms living with the gut microbiome, can be modified to improve outcomes for patients with melanoma.

About the Melanoma Research Alliance

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 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 17 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.

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