For Immediate Release

Cody R. Barnett, Director of Communications
M: (717) 880-7100
E-mail: cbarnett@curemelanoma.org

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

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

###

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.

Additional Media Contact:
Anreder & Company
917.923.7011
Steven S. Anreder -- steven.anreder@anreder.com Michael Wichman -- michael.wichman@anreder.com