MRF Melanoma Research Foundation





(Left to right: Director of Education and Patient Engagement, Miriam Kadosh, Dr. Vito Rebecca and MRF CEO, Kyleigh LiPira)

As we approach the close of the year, we are reminded that end-of-year giving has the power to shape the future of melanoma research in real and lasting ways. A gift made now does more than support ongoing work, it helps launch ideas, investigators and discoveries that can change outcomes for patients for years to come.

Earlier this month, we had the opportunity to visit Johns Hopkins and tour the laboratory of Dr. Vito Rebecca, whose work exemplifies the impact of sustained philanthropic investment. During our visit, we saw firsthand how a Melanoma Research Foundation grant awarded in 2019 played a pivotal role in launching Dr. Rebecca's independent research career. That early support provided critical momentum—allowing him to establish his lab, pursue innovative questions and build a research program focused on acral melanoma, a rare and understudied subtype that disproportionately affects people of color and is often diagnosed at later stages.

Today, Dr. Rebecca's work is contributing meaningful insights to the field and the Career Development Award he received from the MRF in 2019 resulted in a publication in 2021 in Cancer Research, underscores how early-career funding can translate into high-impact science and tangible progress for patients facing limited treatment options.

Waiting for the lab to make those breakthroughs are patients. People like Terry Tucker who received a Courage Award at this year's Denver Gala. Terry Tucker's journey with acral melanoma began when a small callous on the bottom of his left foot would not heal. What seemed minor was

diagnosed as acral lentiginous melanoma, a rare and aggressive form of melanoma that appears on the soles of the feet or palms of the hands and is unrelated to sun exposure. Over the next 13 years, Terry faced relentless challenges, including major surgeries, toxic treatments and multiple amputations. Interferon nearly cost him his life, immunotherapy proved ineffective and by 2018 his foot was amputated, followed by the loss of his leg above the knee in 2020 during the height of the COVID 19 pandemic. Throughout it all, Terry leaned on what he calls his three Fs: faith, family and friends. Choosing chemotherapy not for himself but for his wife and daughter, Terry was eventually able to access a clinical trial that gave him more time. Today, he views his experience as a source of purpose, hoping to inspire others by showing that while cancer can break you, resilience, love and perseverance can make you stronger on the other side.

As we close out the year, we invite you to make a gift that fuels the next breakthrough and empowers the next generation of melanoma researchers. Together, we can continue to transform possibility into progress.

Donate Today!

Kyleigh LiPira, MBA

CEO



10 Ways to Make a Meaningful Impact in 2026

As we welcome 2026, we invite you to stand with the MRF and commit to a year of awareness, prevention and meaningful support for everyone affected by melanoma. Every action—big or small—moves us closer to a future with earlier diagnoses, better treatments and healthier communities. Explore our new list of impactful New Year's resolutions and choose the ones that speak to you. Together, we can inspire change, save lives and bring hope to countless families in 2026.

1. **Spread Awareness and Encourage Lifesaving Exams**: Make 2026 the year you champion prevention and awareness. Promote routine skin checks, annual dilated eye exams and early detection practices. Raise awareness for the rare melanoma subtypes — and consider sharing your own melanoma story to inspire others to prioritize their health.

2. **Advance Groundbreaking Research**: Your support fuels the MRF's innovative research initiatives — driving progress toward better treatments, improved outcomes and ultimately, a cure. One of the most meaningful ways to make an impact is by funding a $3,000 Medical Student Research Grant. These one-year grants empower early-career medical students to pursue clinical or laboratory-based melanoma research, helping to cultivate the next generation of scientists and physicians dedicated to transforming melanoma care.

3. **Start a Monthly Giving Commitment**: Small monthly gifts create powerful, consistent support for research, patient programs and advocacy. Becoming a recurring donor ensures hope thrives all year long.

4. **Commit to Joining the Patient Forum**: Get involved by asking questions, sharing your journey, offering support and collaborating with others who understand what you're facing.

5. **Advocate for Policy Change**: Lend your voice to the MRF's advocacy efforts by helping secure federal research funding, protecting patient access to care and championing sun-safety policies in schools and communities nationwide. Make your voice heard at Advocacy Days on Capitol Hill, March 1–3.

6. **Pledge to Bring Sun Safe Practices to our Youth through SunAWARE™**: Help protect the next generation. SunAWARE™ is a free, engaging K–5 curriculum filled with fun visuals and interactive lessons that make sun safety easy to understand and remember. You can help them build knowledge they need to stay safe in the sun and inspire a sun-smart future.

7. **Lead or Join Community Events**: Captain a team at your local Miles for Melanoma 5K, rally your community or attend an MRF Gala to celebrate progress and honor those impacted by melanoma.

8. **Host a Peer-to-Peer Birthday Fundraiser**: Turn your next birthday or milestone into meaningful impact. Fundraise through Facebook, Instagram or MRF tools to support research and awareness efforts.

9. **Make a Smart, Tax-Savvy Gift**: Support the mission through stock donations, IRA charitable rollovers, cryptocurrency, Donor-Advised Funds and other smart giving options that maximize your impact.

10. **Attend a Patient Symposium**: Connect with leading experts, fellow patients, survivors and caregivers while learning about the latest research, emerging treatments and supportive resources.



Donor Spotlight: How Mark Lerch Uses His Donor-Advised Fund to Fuel Melanoma Research

(Left to right: Mark's late-wife Gayle, his late father-in-law Edward (Ted) Berry and Mark)

This holiday season, we're proud to spotlight longtime supporter Mark Lerch, whose family's melanoma journey has fueled years of meaningful generosity to the MRF. "We had started supporting the MRF when my father-in-law was diagnosed with late-stage melanoma back in 2011… As an early 'guinea pig' for all the drugs now being used with great results, he lived until 2020," Mark shares. To maximize his impact, Mark donates through his Donor-Advised Fund (DAF), explaining that "I use my Donor Advised Fund because of tax advantages and the simplicity of designating gifts allowing me to give more and do it effortlessly. Funding my DAF with appreciated securities allows the resultant tax savings to be donated to charities. Funding multiple years' worth of giving bundled into one year's addition to my DAF allows me to itemize deductions in those years which, once again, allows me to add the tax savings to my giving." His smart giving strategy allows him to give more and effortlessly support meaningful progress in melanoma research and patient care. We invite you to join Mark and make a difference this holiday season by exploring tax-smart giving options that can double your impact and bring hope to the melanoma community.

Learn More

Every Single Voice Matters: Share Your Story at Advocacy Days



Join melanoma patients, caregivers, researchers, supporters and advocates from across the country for MRF Advocacy Days, taking place March 1–3 in Washington, DC.

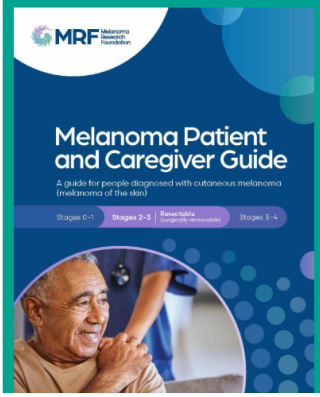
This annual advocacy program empowers the melanoma community to raise its collective voice, share personal experiences and take meaningful action on the issues that matter most to patients and families affected by melanoma. Participants will have the opportunity to share firsthand stories with lawmakers, engage with fellow advocates and help shape a future with improved prevention, treatment and care for the entire melanoma community.

Every single voice and story strengthens national advocacy efforts and helps ensure policymakers understand the real-world impact of melanoma directly from those it affects most.

Please note that scholarships for the 2026 Advocacy Days program have now been filled, but registration remains open to all participants.

Register Today!

Education Corner



Available For Download – Patient and Caregiver Stage 2-3 Resectable Cutaneous Melanoma

We are proud to introduce a new downloadable educational resource for individuals with stage 2 and 3 resectable cutaneous melanoma and their caregivers: **The Melanoma Patient and Caregiver Guide for Stages 2–3**.

This guide helps patients and caregivers understand what to expect—from diagnosis and staging to treatment options, side-effect management and emotional well-being. Written in clear, accessible language, it supports informed decision-making and meaningful conversations with care teams.

Recognizing the vital role of caregivers, the guide also offers practical insights and tools to help them feel informed, supported, and connected while caring for a loved one.

Explore the Full Guide Here

Your Guide Through TIL Cell Therapy: What to Expect at Every Step

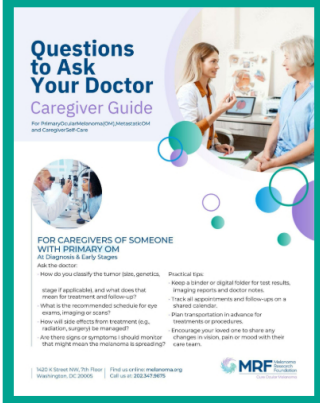


We are pleased to share a new resource to help patients and caregivers better understand Tumor Infiltrating Lymphocyte (TIL) Cell Therapy. TIL Therapy became an FDA approved treatment option in 2024, for people who have been previously treated for advanced melanoma.

This step-by-step guide walks patients through the full TIL therapy journey, from early conversations with a care team to treatment and follow-up care. It explains what TIL therapy is, how doctors determine whether it may be an option, how tumor samples are collected and grown, what happens during manufacturing and treatment and how patients can prepare for commonly reported side effects and recovery.

Created to empower informed decision-making, this resource will support meaningful conversations between patients, caregivers and healthcare teams throughout the treatment process.

View the Resource Here



Questions to Ask Your Doctor: Ocular Melanoma (OM) Caregiver Guide

Caring for someone with ocular melanoma can bring many questions. The MRF's new resource, Questions to Ask Your Doctor: Ocular Melanoma (OM) Caregiver Guide, was created to help caregivers feel more prepared and confident during medical appointments. This guide offers thoughtful, practical questions to support conversations about diagnosis, treatment options, side effects and ongoing care, helping caregivers advocate for their loved one while navigating the OM journey together.

View the Full Guide Here

In case you missed it: Watch our Ask the Expert recordings



How Early Detection Makes an Empowering Difference for the Ocular Melanoma Community

Our latest Ask the Expert brings together expert insight and lived experience to support the ocular melanoma (OM) community. Dr. Mandeep Sagoo shares key information on early warning signs, how ocular melanoma is diagnosed and the management approaches that guide timely, effective care. OM patient advocate Kristin Lindsey also reflects on her personal journey with early diagnosis, offering encouragement and perspective for others navigating similar challenges.

Together, this conversation underscores the empowering role early detection can play in understanding options and making informed decisions from the very beginning.

Watch Here



Exploring LAG-3 Inhibitors: A New Path in Melanoma Treatment

Our recent Ask the Expert webinar explores the emerging role of LAG-3 inhibitors in melanoma care, offering clear insight into this innovative treatment approach. Led by Dr. John Kirkwood, the session explained how LAG-3 inhibitors work, how they differ from other immunotherapy mechanisms and what current clinical trials are revealing their potential.

Patient speaker Eugene Bradmon also shared his perspective, highlighting the importance of informed conversations and shared decision-making throughout the melanoma journey.

Watch Here



Making an Impact: Miles for Melanoma 2025

We closed out an incredible year with two Miles for Melanoma 5K events this December in Tampa Bay and Fort Myers, Florida, where the melanoma community came together to raise an inspiring $58,820 in support of lifesaving research, education and advocacy. With 17 events held nationwide and more than $1.3 million raised this year, the impact this year has been nothing short of extraordinary. We are deeply grateful to every participant, donor, sponsor and volunteer who made this success possible. You truly are the heart of this movement.

The season is not over yet. We still have two exciting Miles for Melanoma events coming up in February, including Miami, FL on February 8 and our brand new event in Orange County, CA on February 22. Join us as we continue to build momentum and make a difference. Register today and be part of what is next!

Register Today!

Upcoming Events

February 8: Miami Miles for Melanoma

February 22: Orange County Miles for Melanoma

March 1-3: MRF Advocacy Days

In the News

Cure Ocular Melanoma Meets in Amsterdam - *Stanford Medicine*

Multimodal AI and tumour microenvironment integration predicts metastasis in cutaneous melanoma- *Nature*

DecisionDx-Melanoma GEP Test Accurately Predicts SLN Positivity and Refines Recurrence Risk Assessment, New Data Shows - *Dermatology Times*

Melanoma Cancer Cluster Found in Parts of Pennsylvania - *The ASCO Post*

A Closer Look at the Multidisciplinary Process of TILS for Melanoma - *Targeted Oncology*



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