MRF Melanoma Research Foundation





Over the last 2 decades we have seen tremendous scientific advancements resulting in dozens of new treatment options for patients with high-risk and advanced cutaneous melanoma. The development of immunotherapy and BRAF targeted therapy has decreased the relapse rate for patients with surgically excised high-risk melanoma (Stage II and III) by over 50%. Further, for patients with distant metastatic disease (Stage IV), 10-year survival has increased from under 10% to over 50% for patients treated with checkpoint inhibitor immunotherapy combinations followed, if necessary, by molecularly targeted therapy or other novel treatment approaches. Nearly all of these surviving patients are free of cancer treatment and thriving. These amazing advances would not have been possible without transformative basic science research leading to clinical trials involving the participation of brave patients supported by their caregivers. Nonetheless, there is still work to be done to advance scientific discovery and continue to improve patient outcomes. Patients and caregivers remain critical this ongoing effort.

We invite you, the patient and caregiver community, to participate in the MRF's grant review process. As a Patient Advocate Grant Reviewer, you can lend your voice and experiences to the research process as ultimately, patients and caregivers are directly impacted by advancements in the laboratory. Your perspective is vital in helping to ensure that the Foundation funds the most promising research grants from young investigators, established investigators or teams of investigators. At a time when the research community is navigating uncertainty in traditional research funding, support from patient advocacy organizations like the MRF is imperative to fueling more treatments and more hope.

A special thank you to our 2025 advocate reviewers who represented the patient and caregiver community as well as the rare subtypes. If you are interested in participating this year, please complete the application form here by April 15, 2026. The review process is virtual and does not require a significant time commitment.

We look forward to having your voice be a part of the process that could lead to the next breakthrough for this community!

Learn More & Apply Today

Kyleigh LiPira, MBA

CEO

Use Your Voice to Affect Policy Change for the Melanoma Community



Advocacy Days will be held March 1-3 in Washington, DC, and we invite the entire melanoma community to use their voice and advocate for policies that advance melanoma research, prevention and access to care. Patients, caregivers, clinicians and supporters will come together to ensure lawmakers understand the real-world impact of melanoma—directly from you.

We are especially encouraging advocates from Delaware, West Virginia, Rhode Island, Maine, New Hampshire, Illinois, Kentucky and South Carolina to register. Please note, Advocacy Days are open to participants from all states. Every voice helps move policy forward.

Register Today!

MRF Responds to Anti-mRNA Legislation



On January 20, the MRF's Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, Kim Wezik (a native of South Carolina), testified before the South Carolina State House Medical and Health Affairs Subcommittee urging them not to advance H.4262, a bill that would ban the availability of mRNA vaccines and issue penalties for healthcare providers who use mRNA therapies. An excerpt from the submitted testimony is referenced below:

"It is an optional vaccine that folks can choose to get or not. For the melanoma community that I serve, and indeed anyone undergoing treatment for cancer, the benefits are clear. The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center and University of Florida just published a joint study that found patients with cancer, including melanoma, who received mRNA-based COVID vaccines within 100 days of starting immune checkpoint therapy were twice as likely to be alive three years after beginning treatment. Commercially available mRNA COVID vaccines like the kind you can get at CVS or Walgreens can train patients' immune systems to eliminate cancer even when the mRNA wasn't targeting tumors directly. Just the act of getting a COVID shot made the difference. There were approximately 35,000 new cancer cases in South Carolina alone last year. I'm sure every single one of them wants the best possible chance at beating this horrific family of diseases. This bill denies them that opportunity."

Following testimony from several healthcare providers and public health advocates, the subcommittee voted to suspend debate on the bill.

The South Carolina bill is part of an alarming trend nationwide of restricting or banning access to mRNA vaccine technology. Last year, MRF advocates defeated a similar bill in Texas. Despite the attacks to mRNA technology, its benefits to the melanoma community have been profound. Last week, Moderna and Merck issued a joint statement highlighting recent results of their personalized mRNA vaccine combined with Keytruda that showed a 49% reduction in the risk of disease recurrence or death at five years. "We continue to invest in our platform in oncology because of encouraging outcomes like these, which illustrate mRNA's potential in cancer care. We look forward to several additional milestones to come, including the results of our Phase 3 study in adjuvant melanoma in collaboration with Merck, and continued progress across the eight Phase 2 and Phase 3 studies in multiple tumor types and patient populations," said Kyle Holen, MD, Moderna's Senior Vice President and Head of Development, Oncology and Therapeutics.



Elevating Acral



Lentiginous Melanoma Awareness - #HandsFeetNails

The MRF will launch its first-ever Acral Lentiginous Melanoma Awareness digital campaign, a weeklong initiative beginning February 16. "Acral Melanoma Is Easy to Miss: Double-Check Your #HandsFeetNails" aims to raise awareness about this rare melanoma subtype, which often goes undetected because it appears on the hands, feet and nails.

Acral lentiginous melanoma accounts for approximately 1%–3% of melanoma cases annually and is more common in Black, Asian and Hispanic individuals, though it can affect anyone.

Throughout the week, we invite you to engage with our informative Ask the Expert webinar, review newly developed educational resources for acral melanoma patients and caregivers and hear powerful patient stories. Stay tuned for more details about the upcoming Ask the Expert.

The MRF is committed to elevating awareness of acral melanoma and providing educational resources to empower and inform patients and caregivers.

Learn More About Acral Melanoma

Education Corner



Finding Support Together: Patient Forum and Ask a Nurse

Have you visited the MRF Patient Forum? The Patient Forum is a patient led resource where patients and caregivers can post questions, share personal milestones, discuss treatment options, take mindful moments or simply connect with others who understand the melanoma journey.

MRF Patient Forum

The MRF also offers the Ask a Nurse program, a free and private resource for melanoma patients and caregivers seeking extra support, clarity or guidance. Through this program, you can connect one-on-one with Whitney Baylor, MSN, RN, an oncology nurse.
Whether you're looking for answers or reassurance, these resources are here to remind you that you're never navigating melanoma alone.

MRF Patient Resources



Valentine's Day Giveback with See's Candies

Sweeten your Valentine's Day plans and make them meaningful. Through January 30, shop our See's Candies giveback and turn your treats into impact. When you purchase from our storefront, 50% of every sale supports the MRF, helping fund critical melanoma research, education and advocacy.

Whether you're gifting someone special or treating yourself, every box helps move our mission forward. Share the love. Give back!

Shop Today!

The Miles for Melanoma Journey Continues



There's still time to be part of the Miles for Melanoma movement this season! We have two exciting 5K events coming up in February—Miami on Sunday, February 8, and our brand-new Orange County event on Sunday, February 22. We're thrilled to close out the season with these impactful gatherings, bringing communities together to support life-saving melanoma research, education and advocacy. Register, form a team and join us in making every step count.

Looking ahead, we'll kick off the next Miles for Melanoma season—and Melanoma Awareness Month—this May with events in Washington, DC on Saturday, May 9, and New England, MA on Saturday, May 16. Registration opens in early February, so stay tuned! Be sure to check out our 2026 event map to see where we'll be heading next. Mark your calendars and join us as we walk, run and raise critical funds to help cure melanoma.

Register Now!

Securing Progress: The Legacy of Progress Endowment Fund

MRF Melanoma Research Foundation

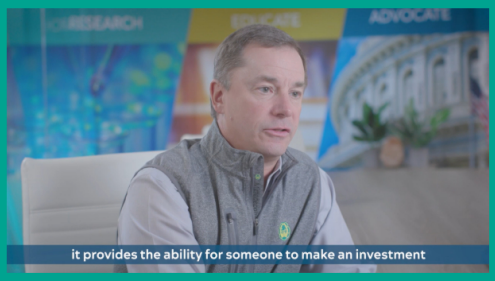
Legacy of Progress

Launched on November 1, 2023, the Legacy of Progress Endowment Fund was created to provide long-term, reliable support for melanoma research—regardless of future challenges. Thanks to the generosity of our community, the fund reached $6.5 million as of January 2026, marking a major milestone in securing sustainable research funding.

In 2025, the endowment supported its first grant: Dr. Emily Bernstein's Established Investigator Award, titled "Investigating the Role of Cancer-Associated Fibroblasts in Remodeling the Melanoma Tumor Microenvironment." Dr. Bernstein's work focuses on understanding how cancer-associated fibroblasts shape the melanoma tumor microenvironment to help improve treatment strategies.

As MRF Board Member Tom Westdyk explains, "I recall talking about the need for recurring revenue and recurring access to research funds. And the best way to go about that is through an endowment—something that throws off income every year so we don't have to start from zero in our quest for research dollars every year. The concept of a long-term vehicle to fund recurring research is really the goal here. The endowment provides the ability for someone to make an investment that will basically survive long-term, and contribute long-term to research that is going to cure this disease."

Click below to watch the Legacy of Progress Endowment Fund launch video.



With ongoing uncertainty in federal research funding, the Legacy of Progress Endowment Fund provides a critical, guaranteed foundation for melanoma research—protecting scientific progress and accelerating the search for better treatments and, ultimately, a cure.

Learn More

Upcoming Deadline to Submit Resident/Fellow Research Grant Applications





The Request for Proposals (RFP) for this year's MRF Resident/Fellow Research Grant program is now open with an upcoming application deadline of February 6 by 11:59pm ET.

Resident/Fellow Research Grants support early-career physician-scientists leading innovative melanoma research. The program offers $10,000 one-year awards, with designated funding available for specific topic proposals supporting pediatric, acral and ocular melanoma research, in addition to cutaneous melanoma research.

Eligibility and application questions may be directed to research@melanoma.org.

Learn More

Upcoming Events

February 8: Miami Miles for Melanoma

February 22: Orange County Miles for Melanoma

March 1-3: MRF Advocacy Days

April 17-19: Eyes on a Cure: Ocular Melanoma Patient & Caregiver Symposium

In the News

Personalized mRNA Vaccine Reduces Melanoma Relapse at 5 Years - *Cancer Health*

Moderna-Merck & Co cancer vaccine with Keytruda shows late-stage promise — *European Pharmaceutical Review*

Spotting skin cancer sooner with the help of artificial intelligence — *EurekAlert!*

Anticoagulation Therapies May Improve Survival in Advanced BRAF-Mutant Melanoma — *Cancer Therapy Advisor*

Tim Allen Says His Doctors Missed a Concerning Spot on his Nose Five Times Before He Finally Pushed For Answers - *Survivor Net*

Jennifer Marshall and Stage 3 Melanoma; Survival, Immunotherapy, and Life After Stranger Things - *OncoDaily*

Girl Scout earns prestigious Gold Award for melanoma awareness, prevention project - *Simi Valley Acorn*

Tanning Beds Triple Melanoma Risk, Potentially Causing Broad DNA Damage - *Northwestern Medicine*

MRF Melanoma Research Foundation melanoma.org

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The Melanoma Research Foundation (MRF) is leading the melanoma community to transform melanoma from one of the deadliest cancers to one of the most treatable through research, education and advocacy.

The Melanoma Research Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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