



## **The Lustgarten Foundation Announces Extraordinary Year of Research Grants Fueling Bold and Innovative Pancreatic Cancer Research**

WOODBURY, NY, Aug 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 /PRWeb/ -- The Lustgarten Foundation, the nation's largest private funder of pancreatic cancer research, today announced a remarkable year of funding, awarding 17 new grants to researchers at 13 leading institutions. These grants, totaling \$23 million, support Lustgarten's collaborative, science-focused strategy, which drives outcomes across three research pillars—early detection, new drug development, and personalized medicine. With the addition of these new grants, the Lustgarten Foundation supports a total of 59 active grants across 30 institutions. The Foundation concentrates on translating its understanding of the underlying biology of pancreatic cancer into clinical applications for patients.

“The Lustgarten Foundation was founded on the principle that funding innovative, cutting-edge research is the only way to improve patient outcomes and ultimately transform pancreatic cancer into a curable disease,” said Linda Tantawi, CEO of the Lustgarten Foundation. “For 25 years, Lustgarten has been an industry trailblazer, driving progress and inspiring hope throughout the community. Our commitment remains resolute as we build on this momentum with a clear vision of a future with pancreatic cancer cures.”

Of the \$23 million awarded:

- 24% supports early detection and interception efforts, aiming to develop and deliver tools enabling early diagnosis of pancreatic cancer; develop and optimize biomarkers enabling early detection in the general population; develop approaches for risk assessment and management of high-risk groups.
- 60% supports new drug development projects, aiming to accelerate the development of therapies; identify novel drug targets based on an understanding of the biology of pancreatic cancer initiation and progression; accelerate preclinical and clinical testing of novel drugs and combinations in pancreatic cancer.
- 16% supports personalized medicine studies, aiming to implement a personalized medicine program; better characterize and understand the heterogeneity of pancreatic cancer; develop tools to guide treatment decisions matching the right treatment to the right patient at the right time.

This investment reflects Lustgarten's dedication to advancing pancreatic cancer research faster than ever before, driving new breakthroughs, and giving patients the best chance for survival and quality of life.

This year's grants included:

The [LABS \(Lustgarten Advancing Breakthrough Science\) Program](#), a hallmark of the Foundation's unique research strategy, had an especially momentous year, with three out of the six dedicated laboratories

up for renewal. After rigorous review, Lustgarten continued funding for all three labs, located at [Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory](#), led by [David Tuveson](#), MD, PhD, [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#), led by [Tyler Jacks](#), PhD, and [Dana-Farber Cancer Institute](#), led by [Brian Wolpin](#), MD, MPH. The LABS Program provides long-term funding to promote the development of innovative ideas and speed the pace of discovery by incentivizing interdisciplinary team science, including groups with complementary expertise across the pipeline from target discovery and validation to preclinical development and clinical testing. Additionally, funding was also renewed for Dr. Tuveson's study "Organoid Personalized Therapeutics Phase 4 Project-OPT4." OPT4 will build on previous phases, which leverage patient-derived organoid (PDO) models to study pancreatic cancer and drive forward the development of early detection tools and therapeutic options.

[Lustgarten Foundation-AACR Career Development Awards Honoring Ruth Bader Ginsburg and John Robert Lewis](#) awarded to [Ashley Kiemen](#), PhD, Assistant Professor of Oncology and Pathology, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, for her study "3D Morphological Analysis of Human Pancreatic Cancer Liver Metastases," and [Christina Ferrer](#), PhD, Assistant Professor of Pharmacology, University of Maryland, Baltimore, for her study "Metastasis-Initiating Cells in Pancreatic Cancer." These awards foster and grow the number of early-career women and underrepresented scientists working in pancreatic cancer research and honor the lives and legacies of two iconic Americans lost to pancreatic cancer. The awards support trailblazing investigators committed to increasing the understanding and treatment of pancreatic cancer.

[LEAD \(Lustgarten Equity, Accessibility, and Diversity\) Grants](#) awarded to [Karyn Goodman](#), MD, MS, Vice Chair of Radiation Oncology and Associate Director of Clinical Research at Tisch Cancer Institute, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, for her study "Navigating Pancreatic Cancer Multidisciplinary Care to Address Cultural and Language Barriers to Clinical Trial Enrollment among Mandarin and Spanish Speaking Patients with Pancreatic Cancer," and [Rebecca Snyder](#), MD, MPH, Associate Professor in the Departments of Surgical Oncology and Health Services Research at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, for her study entitled "IMPACT Diversity: An Integrated Multi-level Plan to Address Clinical Trial Diversity." The LEAD Grants were created to increase the recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups in pancreatic cancer clinical trials.

Lustgarten Foundation-Swim Across America-AACR Early Detection Research Grant awarded to [Ajay Goel, PhD](#), Professor and Chair, Department of Molecular Diagnostics and Experimental Therapeutics Beckman Research Institute of the City of Hope, for his study "A Circulating Epigenetic Signature for Early Detection of Pancreatic Cancer." This new partnership with Swim Across America will stimulate innovative work in the early detection of pancreatic cancer and bring new talent to the field.

Advancing pancreatic cancer detection efforts grants awarded to [Elliot Fishman](#), MD, Director, Diagnostic Imaging and Body CT, and Professor of Radiology and Radiological Science, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, for his study "Felix 2.0: The Integration of AI into the Early Detection and Management of Pancreatic Cancer with Novel AI Algorithms and Advanced Data Analysis," and [Alan Yuille](#), PhD, Bloomberg Distinguished Professor, Department of Computer Science, Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering, for his study "Felix Civitas." These projects build on the success of the [FELIX Program](#), funded by Lustgarten since 2016. The FELIX Program uses data from thousands of CT scans to teach computers to detect tumors small enough to be missed by even the most experienced radiologists.

[Innovation and Collaboration Program](#) grants awarded to [Kacper Rogala](#), DPhil, MRes, Assistant Professor of Structural Biology and of Chemical and Systems Biology, Stanford University School of Medicine, for his study “Establishing Choline Transport as Selective Vulnerability of Pancreatic Cancers,” and [David Kashatus](#), PhD, Associate Professor, Microbiology, Immunology, and Cancer Biology, University of Virginia, for his study “The Role of Lipid Droplets in Pancreatic Cancer Metastasis.” This program provides seed funding for highly innovative research projects with significant potential to accelerate Lustgarten Foundation’s mission to transform pancreatic cancer into a curable disease.

[Dr. Robert F. Vizza Lustgarten Clinical Accelerator Initiative \(CAI\)](#) grants awarded to [Dafna Bar-Sagi](#), PhD, Executive Vice President, Vice Dean for Science, and Chief Scientific Officer, NYU Langone Health, for her study “Evaluation of the Mechanism and Efficacy of IL-15 Superagonist-based Neoadjuvant Chemo-Immunotherapy for Pancreatic Cancer,” [Andrew Lowy](#), MD, Director of Surgical Oncology and Associate Professor, Moores Cancer Center at UC San Diego Health, for his study “A Phase 2 Trial of FOLFIRINOX plus Eganelisib in Patients with Borderline Resectable Pancreatic Cancer,” [Michael Pishvaian](#), PhD, MD, Director of Gastrointestinal, Developmental Therapeutics and Clinical Research Programs Associate Professor of Oncology, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, for his study “A Phase II Trial of Olaparib, Pembrolizumab, and Lenvatinib as Second-Line Therapy for BRCA1, BRCA2, or PALB2-Mutated Metastatic Pancreatic Adenocarcinoma,” and [Peter Allen](#), MD, Chief, Division of Surgical Oncology, Duke University School of Medicine, for his study “A Window-of-Opportunity Trial Using Neoadjuvant Hepatic Artery Chemotherapy for Patients With Localized Pancreas Cancer.” The CAI reduces the time from clinical trial concept to launch using a Lustgarten-developed process based on the best available science and employing innovative biomarkers. With four new trials added this year, there are now eight trials supported through this innovative program.

“We will continue to bring new and transformative research to light to help patients and families impacted by pancreatic cancer and to ensure that discoveries can move to the clinic as quickly as possible,” said Andrew Rakeman, Vice President of Research at the Lustgarten Foundation. “Now is our time to empower pancreatic cancer researchers and propel critical research forward.”

To date, the Lustgarten Foundation has funded more than \$250 million in research grants and has been a leading force in every major advancement in pancreatic cancer research.

### **About Lustgarten Foundation**

The Lustgarten Foundation funds the world’s preeminent pancreatic cancer researchers, driving the pursuit of bold and innovative science toward earlier detection, better treatments and transforming pancreatic cancer into a curable disease. Our mission is rooted in the belief that research is fundamental, in fact, it is the only way to produce real results. The Lustgarten Foundation is a catalyst in the field of pancreatic cancer research. Lustgarten-funded science has been a driving force in every major advancement in pancreatic cancer research since 1998. We believe time is everything for pancreatic cancer patients and their families. The Foundation funds research where creative risks yield high rewards to accelerate and expand life-saving treatment options. And we believe in the power of community. Lustgarten programs and events provide people affected by pancreatic cancer a voice and a place to create hope, together. The Lustgarten Foundation is the largest private funder of pancreatic cancer research and 100% of all donations fuel the research to advance understanding of this complex, devastating and historically underfunded cancer. For more information, visit <http://www.lustgarten.org>.

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Alexas Santiago

Lustgarten Foundation

845-558-6314

[asantiago@lustgarten.org](mailto:asantiago@lustgarten.org)