

New Coalition of Leading Cancer Research Organizations Launched to Accelerate Early Detection of Deadly Cancers

\$12 million awarded to six research teams working toward earlier detection and diagnosis of pancreatic, ovarian and esophageal cancers.

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NEW YORK—The Mark Foundation for Cancer Research today announced the launch of a coalition of leading nonprofit organizations dedicated to solving the critical problem of early detection and diagnosis for some of the world’s deadliest cancers. In partnership with the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), Lustgarten Foundation, Break Through Cancer, and The Honorable Tina Brozman Foundation (Tina’s Wish), the coalition will invest \$12 million in six collaborative research projects focused on pancreatic, ovarian, and esophageal cancers, as well as cancer predisposition syndromes.

These cancers often grow and spread silently in their early stages, contributing to persistently poor long-term survival rates. Existing cancer screening technologies have largely failed to detect these cancers early enough to meaningfully improve patient outcomes. Addressing this challenge will require new biological insights as well as innovative technologies to develop screening tests that can detect tumors before they become lethal. By pooling \$12 million in joint investment and aligning the expertise of top scientists across disciplines, this coalition aims to overcome these scientific hurdles to change the paradigm of cancer care.

“We can’t cure what we can’t detect, and late-stage diagnosis often limits treatment options,” said Ryan Schoenfeld, PhD, CEO of The Mark Foundation. “For too long, significant advances in early detection of these deadly cancer types have been lacking. This coalition breaks down barriers between funders, scientists, and research disciplines to drive faster progress.”

“Knowledge-sharing is central to solving the most pressing challenges in cancer research,” said Margaret Foti, PhD, MD (hc), CEO of AACR. “By leveraging our collective expertise, we have

brought together a network of international experts across various scientific disciplines to address cancers that have historically been very difficult to detect. This partnership offers a unique opportunity to expand the reach of our research network and foster creative, synergistic approaches that extend beyond traditional funding mechanisms.”

A Global Model for Collaboration

This initiative represents an ambitious shift in how cancer research is funded by aligning strategy and uniting expertise to accelerate solutions that no single organization could achieve alone. In addition to providing research funding, the initiative is designed to build a global early detection ecosystem. In January 2025, three of the partners (AACR, Lustgarten Foundation, and The Mark Foundation) organized a scientific workshop in Philadelphia focused on early detection, bringing together dozens of scientists as well as several other cancer research funding organizations, including Break Through Cancer, to forge the partnerships that are now being formalized through the grant program.

“Pancreatic cancer alone has a five-year survival rate of just 13%, largely due to late detection,” said Linda Tantawi, CEO of the Lustgarten Foundation. “Early detection research is a promising frontier that could give doctors and patients the time and resources they need to drastically improve the treatment of recalcitrant cancers.”

“Progress in early detection and interception of the deadliest cancers remains far too slow,” said Tyler Jacks, PhD, President of Break Through Cancer. “However, new cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence and single-cell profiling are providing new opportunities to decipher hidden early disease biology, predict patient outcomes, and accelerate translational progress. It’s an exciting moment.”

“Ovarian cancer exemplifies why accelerating early detection is critical”, said Amy Kyle, Board Chair of Tina’s Wish. “There is currently no effective screening test, and even cancers caught at a so-called early stage are incredibly difficult to eradicate. Advancing early detection will require the kind of coordinated, cross-disciplinary collaboration this coalition represents.”

Awarded Research Projects

The following six teams have been awarded up to \$2 million each to pursue research aimed at overcoming the most pressing obstacles in the early detection of cancer:

Mark Foundation-AACR-Lustgarten Foundation Early Detection Awards

- [Programmable Recognition of KRAS Neoantigens for Early Cancer Diagnostics Across Patients](#)

Nikolaos G. Sgourakis, PhD, Children's Hospital of Pennsylvania and University of Pennsylvania; Mark A. Sellmyer, MD, PhD, University of Pennsylvania; Possu Huang, PhD, Stanford University

- [Detection and Interception of KRAS-mutant Pancreatic Cancer Using Small Molecule RAS\(ON\) Inhibitors](#)

Brian M. Wolpin, MD, MPH, and Andrew J. Aguirre, MD, PhD, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute; Julie L. Sutcliffe, PhD, University of California, Davis; Laura D. Wood, MD, PhD, Johns Hopkins University

- [Towards a Unified Platform for Li-Fraumeni Syndrome Cancer Risk Prediction and Cell-free DNA Surveillance](#)

Trevor J. Pugh, PhD, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, UHN, Ontario Institute for Cancer Research; Brian D. Crompton, MD, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute; Paul A. Northcott, PhD, St. Jude Children's Hospital; Kara N. Maxwell, MD, PhD, University of Pennsylvania

Mark Foundation-AACR-Lustgarten Foundation-Break Through Cancer Early Detection Awards

- [Digital Pathology Diagnostics for Robust Stratification of Esophageal Cancer Risk](#)

Christina Curtis, PhD, and Greg Charville, MD, PhD, Stanford University; William M. Grady, MD, University of Washington; Rebecca Fitzgerald, MD, University of Cambridge

- [Molecular Profiling of Ovarian Cancer Precursors to Transform Early Detection and Precancer Stratification](#)

Peter K. Sorger, PhD, David R. Walt, PhD, and Sandro Santagata, MD, PhD, Harvard University; Ronny I. Drapkin, MD, PhD, University of Pennsylvania

Mark Foundation-AACR-Lustgarten Foundation-Tina's Wish Early Detection Award for Ovarian

Cancer

- [Harnessing Extrachromosomal DNA \(ecDNA\) and Aneuploidy Signals in Plasma Whole Genome for Early Detection of Ovarian Cancer](#)

Dan Landau, MD, PhD, Weill Cornell Medicine; Ronny I. Drapkin, MD, PhD, University of Pennsylvania; Paul S. Mischel, MD, FAACR, Stanford University; Adam Widman, MD, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

For more information about the coalition and the funded projects, please visit [The Mark Foundation's website](#).

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