

Recognizing International Childhood Cancer Day 2026

AICR looks at the latest efforts to improve childhood cancers through smart scans, AI chatbots, nutrition, exercise and more.

February 18, 2026 By American Institute for Cancer Research

Key Takeaways

- February 15th is International Childhood Cancer Day, where global attention is focused on children with diagnosed cancer.
- This blog outlines research projects that are funded by American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) and our partner organizations within the World Cancer Research Fund International.
- The research projects scan the globe and explore different angles, but all ultimately help children and adolescents with cancer, plus their families and caregivers.

On International Childhood Cancer Day, AICR marks the occasion by highlighting the research programs that are dedicated to improving outcomes for children.

AICR Executive Director of Research and Policy, Dr Giota Mitrou, said: “On International Childhood Cancer Day, it is heartening to see global attention focused on the children and young people, and their loved ones, whose lives are changed by cancer. We are proud to support studies that help us better understand how nutrition, physical activity and other lifestyle factors influence both risk and survivorship, and to ensure that childhood cancer remains firmly on the health agenda.”

Each year, over 400,000 children and adolescents are diagnosed with cancer.

The rate of survival depends on the region. Children and young people with cancer have an 80

percent chance of survival in most high-income countries, but this drops to as low as 20 percent in low- and middle-income countries.

International Childhood Cancer Day is held on February 15th each year. Childhood cancer affects people all year round. The day itself provides a moment to raise awareness and develop a deeper understanding of the unique issues and challenges faced by those whose lives are touched by childhood cancer.

It also highlights the need for more equitable and better access to treatment and care for all children with cancer everywhere.

Increasing Survival Rates: The World Health Organization's Global Childhood Cancer Initiative aims to increase global survival rates to at least 60 percent by 2030, while improving quality of life for children with cancer everywhere. Achieving this goal requires expanded treatment capacity, and a commitment to prioritizing childhood cancer at every level, from local communities to national strategies. Part of this focus will require sustained research into childhood cancer that will strengthen our knowledge of how early-life exposures, diet, physical activity and environment shape both risk and survivorship.

Across the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) network, we are funding studies that explore diet, physical activity and environment, and how these factors impact on the lives of children affected by cancer. Here are some studies that are being funded within the WCRF network:

Real-Time Tracking of Environments and Well-Being in Young Adults with Cancer

Dr. Katie Darabos is [being funded by AICR](#) to assess how aspects of the lived environment of young adult cancer survivors influences health behaviors.

Using GPS technology and real-time surveys, Dr. Darabos and team hope to understand how the environments young adults move through each day influence their stress levels, health behaviors and overall well-being.

By identifying the types of neighborhoods or daily settings that increase stress or make healthy choices harder, this research will help pinpoint potential high-risk environments. The long-term impact is significant. It could enable the development of targeted, mobile-based interventions that support young cancer survivors exactly when and where they need it most.

Smart Scans, Stronger Futures: AI and Body Composition in Pediatric Cancer Survivorship

Funded by AICR, Dr. Paul Yi is developing [an AI-powered tool to analyze routine CT scans](#) and uncover how changes in body composition, such as muscle and fat levels, relate to treatment

outcomes in children with cancer.

Right now, it is challenging to predict which survivors of childhood cancer will face serious health impacts down the line.

By revealing patterns that clinicians may not otherwise detect, the insights from this work could transform ongoing survivorship care. This research has the potential to help cancer survivors achieve better long-term health, reduce serious complications that often arise years later and improve their quality of life.

Diet and Exercise to Improve Treatment Outcomes in B-cell Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia

Obesity contributes to the risk for developing acute lymphoblastic leukemia. It is also known to increase the chance of chemotherapy being less effective and the disease returning in those being treated for it.

Dr. Etan Orgel is testing whether [targeted diet and physical activity interventions](#) can reduce obesity risk during treatment for B-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

This study, funded by AICR, has the potential to identify practical, evidence-based strategies that make chemotherapy more effective and improve survival outcomes for children and adolescents living with this common childhood cancer.

Digital Technologies to Understand and Improve Physical Activity in Adolescents and Young Adults

Dr. Lisa Schwartz is using innovative tools, including wearable activity monitors and real-time surveys, to [understand the daily factors that influence physical activity](#) in adolescents and young adults with cancer.

By capturing the barriers that prevent young people from being active, this AICR-funded research could pave the way for personalized interventions that help them overcome these challenges.

Ultimately, the aim of this research is to assist adolescents and young adults undergoing cancer treatment to be more physically active, which may ease their treatment symptoms and improve their mood and quality of life.

Using AI Chatbots to Support Families of Children with Cancer

Dr. Micah Skeens was funded by [World Cancer Research Fund \(WCRF\)](#) – our network charity in the United Kingdom – [to test an AI powered chatbot](#) called DAPHNE, which is designed to identify and manage the social and emotional needs of families caring for a child with cancer.

The research team found that the tool had high usability. Positive feedback from caregivers suggest that it can be an important resource in supporting families. By integrating AI technology into cancer care, it has the potential to revolutionize the identification and management of social needs in pediatric oncology.

Studying Burkitt Lymphoma Among Children in Sub-Saharan Africa

Dr. Rita Khoueiry is funded by [Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds \(WKOF\)](#) – [our network charity in the Netherlands](#) – to understand whether exposure to mycotoxins and infection with Epstein-Barr virus puts children at risk of Burkitt lymphoma.

The research is exploring how in-utero and early-life exposure to mycotoxins (toxic compounds produced by fungi) may contribute, in combination with viruses and parasites, to the development of diseases such as Burkitt lymphoma, the most common childhood cancer in sub-Saharan Africa.

This project will set the basis for translational approaches leading to the development of biomarkers for prevention strategies for pediatric cancers.

Since food contamination with mycotoxins is expected to increase due to climate change, the results are of growing interest worldwide.

The FITco Study: Can Nutrition and Exercise Give Children with Cancer a Better Chance of Survival?

Professor Wim Tissing and Dr. Dieuwertje Kok are [leading on FITco](#) – a unique long-term study looking at body composition, nutritional intake and exercise in children with cancer.

The FITco study, launched in May 2025, is run by the [Princess Máxima Center](#) and [Wageningen University & Research](#), and funded by WKOF.

FITco will follow 500 children newly diagnosed with cancer, tracking their diet, physical activity and body composition. By understanding how these factors influence treatment, side-effects and long-term health, the team aims to identify better ways to support children during and after cancer therapy.

With strong international collaborations, this research has the potential to shape global standards of supportive care in pediatric oncology.

[This article](#) was originally published February 13, 2026, by the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR). It is republished with permission.

