

University Researchers Awarded Grants to Study the Health Benefits of Music

New grants explore how music can improve the health and wellbeing of adults with dementia, children with cancer, youth with autism, and more.

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, November 24, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Amidst cuts to clinical research trials and National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding, [The Music Man Foundation](#) and University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) today announced \$120,000 in new grants to study the power of music to improve health and wellbeing.

"From working in a dementia-focused community center, to telehealth music therapy for adults living with autoimmune diseases, to lab-based play and brain assessments with infants and toddlers – this group of researchers awarded Meredith Willson Pilot Research grants are exploring so many different areas of study," said Sarah Lyding, executive director of The Music Man Foundation. "We're excited to see new diagnoses being treated with music interventions, new platforms that leverage technology, and a diverse range of patient and caregiver populations being provided access to these interventions."

Meredith Willson Pilot Research grants were awarded to researchers at Appalachian State University, Emory University, Mayo Clinic Arizona, UCSF and University of Washington. Each institution will receive a \$20,000 grant and the opportunity to join learning sessions with other recipients to encourage dialogue and share best practices.

"Meredith Willson Pilot Research awards are fueling the next generation of researchers," said Julene K. Johnson, Ph.D, Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at UCSF. "One of the most exciting things about the new projects is that they look at music across fields – bringing together scientists, music therapists, healthcare clinicians, music educators, musicians, and community organizations – to better understand the impact of music on health."

Primary investigators receiving the grants are:

- Caitlin P. Kjeldsen, Ph.D., MT-BC, of Emory University School of Medicine, to test a music therapy program for children ages 0–3 with or at risk for neurodevelopmental disorders and their caregivers. It will examine how caregivers can use music at home to support their child's development.
- Basia Belza, Ph.D., RN, of University of Washington, to lead a study that builds a partnership

between a performing arts organization and a dementia-focused community center to provide music programs for elders living with memory loss.

- Peter Washington, Ph.D., of UCSF, to develop a music therapist-led digital music platform for young people living with autism that encourages teamwork and social skills.
- C. Robert Bennett, Ph.D., CPNP-AC, of Mayo Clinic Arizona, to explore musical instrument therapy designed to protect brain health and promote the mental wellbeing of youth undergoing radiation therapy for cancer.
- Christina Zhao, Ph.D., of University of Washington, to investigate how infants' everyday music experiences shape their language development. Through lab-based play and brain assessments, the team will study how caregiver behaviors and music can support early childhood development.
- Melody Schwantes, Ph.D., MT-BC, of Appalachian State University, to test telehealth music therapy tailored for adults living with autoimmune diseases and depression or anxiety.

About The Music Man Foundation

The Music Man Foundation is named after the Tony Award-winning musical written by Meredith Willson. Meredith's widow, Rosemary, started the Foundation in 1998 as The Meredith and Rosemary Willson Charitable Foundation. Today, the Foundation donates 100% of profits from licensing royalties to organizations using music to catalyze enduring change and to amplify our founders' musical legacy. Over the last decade, the Foundation has awarded more than \$25 million to 85 organizations. In addition to "It's Beginning to Look Like Christmas" and "The Music Man," Meredith Willson wrote the music for "The Unsinkable Molly Brown" and the University of Iowa fight song. Visit <https://musicmanfoundation.org> for more information.

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