

ANRF Announces Largest Scholar Cohort and Research Investment in Foundation History

As demand reaches an all-time high, ANRF answers with a class of scientists tackling rheumatology's most urgent questions.

IRVINE, CA, UNITED STATES, June 18, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Arthritis National Research Foundation (ANRF) today announced its [2026-2027 Scholar Cohort of grantees](#): 24 early-career investigators selected from a record 131 applications, more than

double the number the foundation received just two years ago, highlighting the need among early-career researchers for this kind of support. This cohort represents the largest class and the single greatest financial investment in the foundation's more than 55-year history. Their research spans rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, osteoarthritis, psoriatic arthritis, scleroderma,

spondyloarthritis, juvenile idiopathic arthritis, and, for the first time, Juvenile Psoriatic Arthritis.

“

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Emily Stormoen, ANRF CEO

The application volume reflects a pivotal shift. As federal research funding has grown increasingly uncertain, early-career scientists are turning to foundations in unprecedented numbers. ANRF, long regarded as one of the field's most rigorous and mission-focused supporters of early-stage science, has become a critical lifeline for researchers who might otherwise see their most promising

work stall before it starts.

“Science doesn't wait, and neither can we,” said Emily Stormoen, CEO of ANRF. “Every one of these scholars represents a question that matters and a patient somewhere who is counting on what they find. We received more applications than at any point in our history, and because our supporters continue to believe in the power of early-career research, we responded with the largest financial commitment we have ever made to arthritis and autoimmune disease science.”



Each application underwent a rigorous review by ANRF's Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), chaired by Craig Walsh, PhD — himself a former ANRF scholar — and composed of physician-scientists and researchers who hold every submission to the highest standard.

“The breadth of scientific vision in this applicant pool was unlike anything I’ve seen,” said Dr. Walsh. “These scholars are working at the earliest, critical edges of discovery — mapping the molecular origins of autoimmunity, developing precision diagnostic tools, exploring entirely new biological pathways for treatment. The science is ambitious and the potential for impact is real.”

Together, the [2026-2027 scholars](#) represent the next generation of leaders who will shape the future of immunology and inflammation. Their work spans some of the field’s most pressing challenges — from understanding why disease begins and progresses to identifying better ways to diagnose, treat, and ultimately improve outcomes for patients. Supported at a pivotal stage in their careers, these researchers are pursuing discoveries that have the potential to influence the field for decades to come.

This year’s funding was awarded through four grant mechanisms: The Arthritis and Related Autoimmune Disease Research Grant provides \$125,000 per year for two years. The Psoriatic Arthritis Research Grant, supported by Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine, provides \$125,000 per year — awarded this year to Dr. Jimin Tan, whose work applies machine learning to identify new therapeutic targets in PsA. The Rheum for Kids: Pediatric Joint and Skin Disease Research Grant, developed in collaboration with the Pediatric Dermatology Research Alliance (PeDRA), expands ANRF's reach into pediatric rheumatic disease with \$50,000 in support. And the ANRF Postdoctoral Clinical Research Fellowship, supported by Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine, bridges early research and clinical application with \$50,000 in support. This year's cohort also includes three named fellows: Sokratis Apostolidis, MD, the Carl F. Ware Fellow, Megan Hanlon, PhD, the Gale "Morrie" Granger Fellow, and Kathryne Marks, PhD, the Elizabeth D. Mellins Memorial Fellow — honors that reflect the lasting generosity of individuals who believed in this mission.

Since the 1970s, ANRF has invested \$36 million in arthritis and autoimmune disease research, funding 273 scholars across 109 institutions. Ninety-eight percent remain in research, a number that speaks to what early investment in the right people at the right moment can do. The 2026-2027 cohort carries that legacy forward — 24 scientists with the possibility of answers that change everything.

[2026-2027 ANRF Scholars](#)

- Sokratis Apostolidis, MD — Carl F. Ware Fellow — University of Pennsylvania | Research focus: Autoimmune
- Satomi Arimoto, DDS, PhD — College of Medicine-Phoenix, University of Arizona | Research focus: Psoriatic Arthritis
- Yuriy Baglaenko, PhD — Cincinnati Children’s Medical Center | Research focus: Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis

- Rebecca Blank, MD, PhD — NYU School of Medicine | Research focus: Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Nicholas Borchering, MD, PhD — Washington University | Research focus: Psoriatic Arthritis
- Anna Costello, MD — Children's Hospital of Philadelphia | Research focus: Juvenile Psoriatic Arthritis
- Naomi Dirckx, PhD — Washington University | Research focus: Osteoarthritis
- Adam Dourson, PhD — Washington University | Research focus: Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis
- Megan Hanlon, PhD — Gale "Morrie" Granger Fellow — Harvard Medical School | Research focus: Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Paul Hoover, MD, PhD — Brigham and Women's Hospital | Research focus: Lupus
- Aakanksha Jain, PhD — University of Washington | Research focus: Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Nikhil Jiwrajka, MD — University of Pennsylvania | Research focus: Scleroderma
- Sakeen Kashem, MD, PhD — University of California, San Francisco | Research focus: Psoriatic Arthritis
- Sivakanthan Kasinathan, MD, PhD — Stanford University | Research focus: Lupus
- Alexander Knights, PhD — Washington University in St. Louis | Research focus: Osteoarthritis
- Wei Li, PhD — Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center | Research focus: Lupus
- Kathryne Marks, PhD — Elizabeth D. Mellins Memorial Fellow — Brigham and Women's Hospital | Research focus: Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Kristen Mengwasser, MD, PhD — Postdoctoral Research Fellowship — University of California, San Francisco | Research focus: Lupus
- Alisa Mueller, MD, PhD — Palo Alto Veterans Institute for Research | Research focus: Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Hailyn Nielsen, MD, PhD — University of California, San Francisco | Research focus: Autoimmune
- Amara Seng, MD, PhD — Postdoctoral Research Fellowship — Cedars-Sinai Medical Center | Research focus: Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Melanie Smith, MD, PhD — Hospital for Special Surgery | Research focus: Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Jimin Tan, PhD — Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine Psoriatic Arthritis Fellow — New York University School of Medicine | Research focus: Psoriatic Arthritis
- Holly Wobma, MD, PhD — Boston Children's Hospital | Research focus: Rheumatoid Arthritis

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