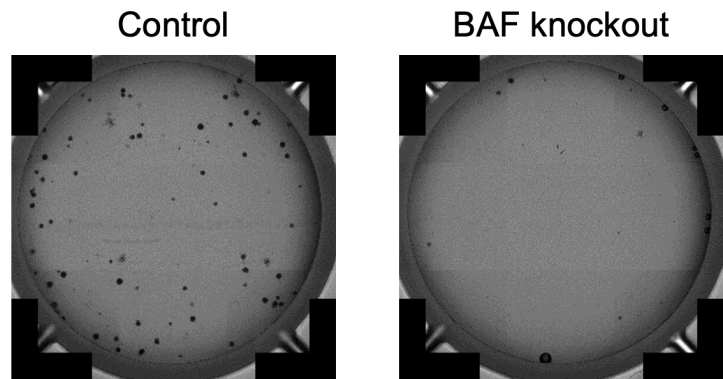


J. Craig Venter Institute awarded \$200,000 St. Baldrick's Foundation grant to advance childhood leukemia treatment

Grant will support novel dual-action therapy research targeting MLL-rearranged leukemias in children

LA JOLLA, CA, UNITED STATES, July 23, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The J. Craig Venter Institute (JCVI) today announced it has received a two-year, \$200,000 Emily Beazley Kures for Kids Fund St. Baldrick's Research Grant from St. Baldrick's Childhood Cancer Research Foundation, the largest charity funder of childhood cancer research grants in the U.S. The grant, announced as part of St. Baldrick's 2026 grant cycle, will support research led by Associate Professor Nan Zhu, Ph.D., a researcher at JCVI, into new therapies for MLL-rearranged leukemias, a particularly challenging form of childhood cancer. Dr. Zhu's leukemia research spans nearly 20 years.



The ability of leukemia cells from a mouse model of MLL leukemia to replicate and propagate itself was severely reduced in BAF knockout as indicated by the reduced number of colonies on the plate.

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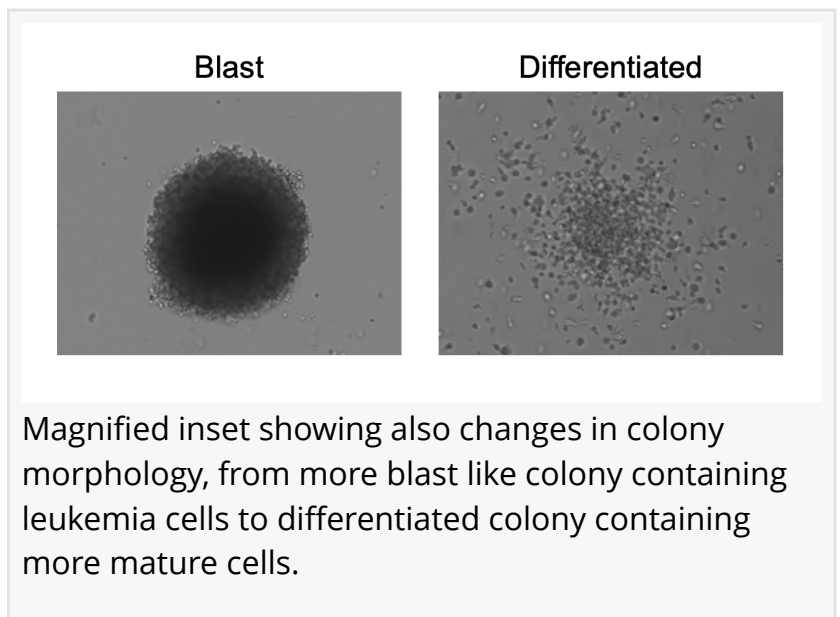
With this support, we can move from compelling preliminary findings toward a potential novel therapy that could meaningfully change outcomes for children diagnosed with MLL-rearranged leukemias.”

Nan Zhu, Ph.D., JCVI Associate Professor

MLL (Mixed Lineage Leukemia)-rearranged leukemias are among the most prevalent childhood leukemias, carrying poor to intermediate prognosis. Current therapies remain inadequate, creating an urgent need for more effective treatments for the youngest patients.

Dr. Zhu's research focuses on the BAF chromatin remodeling complex, a group of proteins that helps control how genes are turned on and off inside cells and plays a vital role in the survival of MLL-rearranged leukemia cells. Building on pilot study findings and previously published research by others demonstrating that loss of the BAF

complex can boost anti-tumor immunity, Dr. Zhu and her team hypothesize that targeting the BAF complex produces a powerful dual effect: directly eradicating leukemia cells while simultaneously enhancing the body's own immune response against the disease. The research will be tested in laboratory models that more closely reflect how leukemia behaves in the body, including models developed from human patient samples, to lay the groundwork for a potential novel therapy.



JCVI is deeply grateful to [St. Baldrick's Foundation](#) and [the Emily Beazley Kures for Kids Fund](#) for this award and for their enduring commitment to funding high-impact childhood cancer research. St. Baldrick's has invested more than \$380 million in grants since its founding, fueling discoveries that have changed and saved the lives of children with cancer. This partnership reflects the shared belief that bold, rigorous science—supported by dedicated philanthropy—is essential to giving every child the best possible chance.

Dr. Zhu remarked that, "Receiving the Emily Beazley Kures for Kids Fund St. Baldrick's Research Grant is truly an honor and a transformative opportunity for our work. This partnership provides not only the resources to pursue a promising new line of research but also connects us to a passionate community that understands, firsthand, the urgent need for better childhood cancer treatments. With this support, we can move from compelling preliminary findings toward a potential novel therapy that could meaningfully change outcomes for children diagnosed with MLL-rearranged leukemias. I am incredibly grateful for the foundation's trust and investment in this science."

Upon completion of this research, JCVI and Dr. Zhu's team hope to provide the rationale and foundational scientific evidence needed to advance a novel dual-action therapy targeting the BAF complex in pediatric MLL-rearranged AML into future clinical development. The work holds the promise not only of a new therapeutic strategy, but of a model for harnessing the immune system alongside direct cellular targeting in blood cancers.

JCVI and Dr. Zhu look forward to continued collaboration with the St. Baldrick's Foundation as this research progresses, and to sharing findings with the broader pediatric oncology community. Together, the goal is clear: to bring every child with cancer closer to a cure.

[About the J. Craig Venter Institute](#)

The J. Craig Venter Institute (JCVI) is a not-for-profit research institute in Rockville, Maryland and

La Jolla, California dedicated to the advancement of the science of genomics; the understanding of its implications for society; and communication of those results to the scientific community, the public, and policymakers. Founded by J. Craig Venter, Ph.D., JCVI is home to approximately 120 scientists and staff with expertise in synthetic biology, human and evolutionary biology, genetics, bioinformatics/informatics, information technology, high-throughput DNA sequencing, genomic and environmental policy research, and public education in science and science policy. JCVI is a 501(c)(3) organization. For additional information, please visit www.jcvi.org.

About the St. Baldrick's Childhood Cancer Research Foundation

Every 2 minutes, a child somewhere in the world is diagnosed with cancer. In the U.S., 1 in 5 will not survive. The St. Baldrick's Childhood Cancer Research Foundation, the largest charity funder of childhood cancer research grants, has awarded more than \$380 million to researchers to Conquer Kids' Cancer. When you give to St. Baldrick's, you don't just give to one hospital – you support every institution with the expertise to treat kids with cancer across the U.S. St. Baldrick's ensures that children fighting cancer now — and those diagnosed in the future — will have access to the most cutting-edge treatment, by supporting every stage of research, from new ideas in the lab to the training of the next generation of researchers, to lifesaving clinical trials. St. Baldrick's has played a role in virtually every advancement in the field over the past 25 years and remains essential in advancing progress and fostering innovation in childhood cancer research. Visit StBaldricks.org and help [#ConquerKidsCancer](#).

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