

Ten Swimmers Going Deaf and Blind Take on Alcatraz to Accelerate Usher Syndrome Research

Ten people living with Usher syndrome will swim from Alcatraz to San Francisco to raise awareness and funds for research toward treatments.

SAN FRANCISCO, MA, UNITED STATES, October 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On October 17, ten people living with Usher syndrome, a rare genetic disease that causes progressive deafness and blindness, will swim from Alcatraz to Aquatic Park in San Francisco to raise funds for research toward treatments. [USH X Swim Alcatraz](#) will benefit the [Usher Syndrome Society](#) to support the [Pipeline for Usher Syndrome Research \(PUSH\)](#), a research initiative they launched at Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School working to accelerate potential treatments for multiple forms of the disease.



Rebecca Alexander swimming from Alcatraz to shore over a decade ago. She is getting ready to swim it again this time without hearing and less than 8 degrees of usable vision.

For many of the swimmers, entering the water means removing the hearing devices they depend on every day. In the unpredictable waters of the Bay, they will swim with limited vision, some with no functional hearing, and no clear path to follow. Each will be accompanied by a support swimmer guiding them toward shore.

Among the swimmers is Bay Area native Rebecca Alexander, an award-winning author, psychotherapist, disability advocate and extreme athlete. Rebecca crossed Alcatraz more than a decade ago. This October, she will do it again, but with significantly less vision and no functional hearing without the use of her cochlear implants.

Her crossing will also become the final chapter of a feature documentary six years in the making, following Rebecca's experience with progressive hearing and vision loss and the journey of the

Usher Syndrome Society and its efforts to find treatments.

“More than a decade ago, two of my four children were unexpectedly diagnosed with Usher syndrome in their late teens. My husband and I were told there was nothing we could do and that eventually they would both lose their sight and ability to hear. So we did what desperate parents might do. We decided to try to change that,” said Nancy Corderman, founder and president of the Usher Syndrome Society. “For the first time, we’re seeing real paths to a treatment. That’s why every dollar raised matters.”

The Cordermans founded the Usher Syndrome Society, and the 501c3 nonprofit organization began directly funding research to find treatments. With the help of scientist Dr. Jeffrey Holt of Boston Children’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School, the Society began asking a larger question: Could they create a way to accelerate research across the many different forms of Usher syndrome?

That idea became the Pipeline for Usher Syndrome Research (PUSH), based at Boston Children’s Hospital and Harvard and collaborating with scientists around the world. Today, PUSH is advancing multiple targets through both platform and gene-specific therapeutic approaches, and the team is expanding to include a vision lab.

For the first time, there are potential paths forward to treat multiple forms of Usher syndrome, but funding is needed to keep that research moving.

For these ten swimmers, the immediate goal on October 17 is to reach shore. For those affected by Usher syndrome, there is an urgency to fund the science that is advancing toward promising treatments. When you are living with progressive hearing and vision loss, Every Second Counts.

Swimmers, families, and Usher Syndrome Society leaders will be available for interviews at Aquatic Park after the swim. Dr. Jeffrey Holt is available for remote interviews.

EVENT DETAILS

USH X Swim Alcatraz

When: Saturday, October 17, 2026

Where: Aquatic Park Beach/Bleachers, 700-898 Beach Street, San Francisco, CA 94109



Ethan and Gavin Morrobel are among the ten swimmers living with Usher syndrome who have been training for their open water swim from Alcatraz to Aquatic Park with their swim guides on October 17.

Swimmer Check-in: 6:15am
Board Boats: 7:15am
Jump in Water: 8:00am
Return to Shore: 8:40-9:30am

To donate and more details:
<https://www.ushersyndromesociety.org/event/ush-x-swim-alcatraz-2026/>



ABOUT THE USHER SYNDROME SOCIETY

The Usher Syndrome Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to raising public awareness and funding research toward treatments and a cure for Usher syndrome, the leading genetic cause of combined deafness and blindness.



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*Nancy Corderman, founder
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