



NEWS RELEASE

## Merck Foundation Launches \$20 Million Initiative to Advance Equity in U.S. Cancer Care

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National effort builds on Foundation's longstanding commitment to helping patients in underserved communities receive high-quality, equitable care

RAHWAY, N.J.--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- The Merck Foundation (the Foundation) announced today the launch of the Alliance for Equity in Cancer Care (the Alliance), a \$20 million, five-year initiative, designed to make cancer care more equitable in the United States by helping patients living in underserved communities receive timely access to high-quality, culturally responsive care.

"The severity of the need to take action on advancing equity in cancer care cannot be overstated and will not be overlooked," said Carmen Villar, CEO of the Merck Foundation. "We must move with urgency and work together to provide all people living with cancer access to high-quality care and treatment. The creation of the Alliance is an important step toward ensuring social determinants of health no longer factor into an individual's ability to receive vital health care."

As part of the initiative, the Foundation is providing grants to select non-profit health care organizations to help develop and implement evidence-informed, innovative programs that advance equity in cancer care. Grantees will work collectively to improve the coordination of patient care from diagnosis through survivorship; strengthen patient engagement in treatment decisions and overall patient-provider communication; build community partnerships that address barriers to care related to social determinants of health; and provide essential psychosocial support services.

Alliance program grantees include:

- **Boston Medical Center** (Boston, Massachusetts)
- **Case Comprehensive Cancer Center, Case Western Reserve University** (Cleveland, Ohio)
- **Conquer Cancer®, the ASCO Foundation** (Montana)
- **Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center** (Baton Rouge, Louisiana)
- **Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center** (New York, New York)
- **RWJBarnabas Health** (New Jersey)
- **University of Kentucky Markey Cancer Center** (Kentucky)

Nearly 40% of Americans will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. Members of racial and ethnic minority groups, those living in rural areas, low-income individuals and the uninsured are disproportionately affected by cancer, yet often have limited access to cancer screenings, care and treatment. As a result, they may experience later stage diagnoses, delays in treatment and decreased adherence to cancer therapies – with serious negative consequences to their health.

The Foundation is also supporting a National Program Office at **Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Massey Cancer Center**, in partnership with the **VCU Center on Health Disparities**, which will assist Alliance program grantees in building partnerships with community-based organizations and provide technical assistance to support their programs. Additionally, the National Program Office will evaluate the effectiveness of Alliance programs and identify and promote best practices to enhance the delivery of cancer care in the United States.

“There is no one-size-fits-all approach to making sure that cancer care is equitable,” says Robert Winn, M.D., director of VCU Massey Cancer Center and director of the Alliance National Program Office. “We are supporting diverse approaches – driven by local community needs – to reduce the unacceptable disparities in cancer care. We hope to improve the lives of people living with cancer and help transform how health systems deliver care so that it meets the medical and social needs of patients.”

The Alliance builds on the Foundation’s legacy of investing in community-focused programs that advance health equity as it follows other national, multi-year program investments to reduce health disparities and improve access to high-quality care, such as the **Alliance to Advance Patient-Centered Cancer Care**, **Bridging the Gap in Diabetes Care** and **HIV Care Connect**.

## About the Merck Foundation

The Merck Foundation is a U.S.-based, private charitable foundation. Established in 1957 by Merck, a leading global biopharmaceutical company, the Foundation is funded entirely by the company and is Merck’s chief source of

funding support to qualified non-profit charitable organizations. Since its inception, the Foundation has contributed nearly \$1 billion to support important initiatives that address critical global health and societal needs that are consistent with Merck's purpose: to save and improve lives around the world. For more information, visit [www.merck.com/company-overview/esg/philanthropy/](http://www.merck.com/company-overview/esg/philanthropy/)

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