



The Honorable Brian Bilbray  
2410 Rayburn House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

May 10, 2012

Dear Congressman Bilbray,

The Melanoma Research Foundation (MRF), the oldest and largest non-profit organization working exclusively in melanoma, applauds you for introducing the Melanoma Research Act of 2011, legislation that addresses the urgent need for dedicated and steady funding for melanoma and skin cancer research through revenues generated by a tax on tanning salons.

A few months ago, the MRF received an \$11 dollar contribution from two young children. They had organized, in their words, a "lemeade stad to raise mony" because their mother had been diagnosed with melanoma. Unfortunately, with the lack of adequate treatment options for melanoma, their mother succumbed to her disease just a few months later.

Stories like this highlight the role that the Melanoma Research Act can have in fueling research advances and, more importantly, ensuring that the growing number of people diagnosed with melanoma in the United States have effective treatment options. Historically, federal support of melanoma research has been disproportionately low to the impact this cancer has on our society and economy.

Melanoma is increasing at a rate that is faster than any other cancer.

- In the United States, someone is diagnosed with melanoma every eight minutes. More than 75,000 people are projected to receive this diagnosis in 2012<sup>1</sup>.
- The incidence of people under 30 developing melanoma is increasing faster than any other demographic group, with melanoma the second most common cancer in young people ages 15–29<sup>2</sup>. Melanoma diagnoses among young women have increased an alarming eightfold over the past 40 years<sup>3</sup>.

If the cancer is found early, it generally can be cured through surgery. Once melanoma has spread, the life expectancy is measured in months. The FDA approval in 2012 of two new drugs for metastatic melanoma provides new hope and a platform to develop important combination therapies such as those seen in the treatment of tuberculosis and HIV. But these new treatments have not brought sufficient improvements in the prognoses for people with melanoma.

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<sup>1</sup> National Cancer Institute, 2012. Melanoma. <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/melanoma>

<sup>2</sup> Cancer Epidemiology in Older Adolescents & Young Adults. SEER AYA Monograph, pages 53–57, 2007

<sup>3</sup> "Increasing Incidence of Melanoma Among Young Adults: An Epidemiological Study in Olmsted County, Minnesota," Mayo Clinic, April 2012. [http://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196\(12\)00209-1/fulltext?utm\\_campaign=2012+April+SPOTlight&utm\\_medium=socialshare&utm\\_source=2012+April+SPOTlight](http://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196(12)00209-1/fulltext?utm_campaign=2012+April+SPOTlight&utm_medium=socialshare&utm_source=2012+April+SPOTlight)

The scientific community is on the cusp of breakthroughs in melanoma research like never before. Researchers have achieved critical scientific advances in understanding the genetics of the disease, which offers the opportunity to explore new genetic and immunotherapy-based treatment approaches. These discoveries are the foundation for new treatments tailored to the specific sub-type of the disease. The most promising research exists in the combination of different therapies to fight tumors via multiple pathways, to achieve an effective and lasting effect for people with melanoma.

The MRF has an unparalleled connection with patients. Our patient forum receives 50,000 visits a month and we hear about the inadequacy of treatment options far too often from people fighting melanoma. Our work to raise awareness about the dangers of UV overexposure and tanning beds, educate the public about the importance of early detection, and support patients goes hand in hand with our work to fund research. The MRF's first melanoma grant was awarded in 1998 and now, 14 years later, we have distributed millions of dollars to dozens of institutions.

Federal support now and in the near future has the potential to catapult scientific progress and availability of meaningful treatment options for people with melanoma.

As the rates of this deadly disease continue to rise and gaps in treatment options persist, the MRF is pleased to offer its enthusiastic support for the Melanoma Research Act and to urge its rapid passing by the House.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Turnham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tim Turnham, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Melanoma Research Foundation