Department of Children & Youth

PEDIATRIC CANCER RESEARCH GRANT FUNDING

Established as part of the state's fiscal year 2026/2027 biennial budget, the Pediatric Cancer Research Grant is awarded by the Ohio Department of Children and Youth to five Ohio-based healthcare and non-profit research organizations. Research must be completed in Ohio and grantees were selected by a review team and scored based on their experience, study design and objectives, and expected outcomes for children and families in Ohio impacted by pediatric cancer. Recipients include:

Recipient	Summary	Amount
Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center	This project expands the Engraft Learning Network, a collaboration led by Cincinnati Children's that links transplant and cellular therapy centers across Ohio to improve outcomes for children undergoing bone marrow transplant or cellular therapy. By sharing real-time data, best practices, and family input, the network works to reduce complications such as infection and organ injury. Funding will strengthen statewide coordination, enhance quality-improvement tools, and provide better education and support for families throughout treatment.	$1,480,141
Cleveland Clinic Children's	Cleveland Clinic Children's is developing a highly targeted self-amplifying RNA vaccine for Ewing sarcoma and DSRCT, two aggressive pediatric cancers with very poor survival after relapse. The vaccine trains the immune system to recognize tumor-specific fusion proteins and will be tested in a phase 1 trial, alone and with immune checkpoint inhibitors, to assess safety, immune activation, and early signs of tumor control. The project aims to offer a more precise and less toxic treatment option for children and young adults and to build Ohio's capacity for next-generation pediatric cancer vaccine research.	$1,499,537
Dayton Children's Hospital	The project aims to improve treatment for aggressive pediatric brain tumors by creating new patient-derived mouse models from tumors collected at Dayton Children's Hospital. The team will study Diffuse Midline Glioma and HGNET-MN1, test whether a common supportive medication blocks treatment effectiveness, and evaluate targeted drugs already available for clinical use. Funding will expand model development and generate evidence that could directly influence treatment options for children in Ohio.	$588,613

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Maple Tree Cancer Alliance	The funding will expand Maple Tree Cancer Alliance's work providing exercise-based support for children undergoing cancer treatment and recovery across Ohio. Their program aims to position Ohio as a national leader in pediatric cancer rehabilitation and youth fitness, aligning with statewide priorities such as the Lt. Governor's youth fitness initiatives. While adult cancer–exercise research is well established, pediatric research is limited, creating a strong opportunity for impact. Maple Tree has a proven track record, including more than $6 million in supported cancer programs through partnerships like the Gala of Hope Foundation and multiple published grant-funded projects. The organization is viewed as delivering innovative, high-quality care that may contribute to future federal insurance coverage for exercise-based cancer support.	$386,347
Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital	The Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital is proposing to test a blood-based liquid biopsy as a new way to detect pediatric cancers earlier and to monitor high-risk children without relying on invasive procedures or frequent MRI/CT scans. Their multi-cancer early detection assay analyzes cell-free DNA for cancer-related mutations, fragmentation patterns, and methylation signals, which may reveal tumors earlier than standard imaging. They plan to enroll about 1,000 high-risk pediatric and AYA patients, collect blood samples over time, and compare liquid biopsy results with traditional surveillance methods. The goal is to determine whether this approach can provide earlier, more accurate, and less burdensome cancer surveillance for children with hereditary cancer syndromes or a history of prior cancer treatment. If successful, this project could lay the groundwork for a clinically actionable blood test that improves early detection and long-term monitoring in vulnerable pediatric populations.	$1,045,361