# 2026 NFCR YEAR END SNAPSHOT

NFCR™
National Foundation for Cancer Research
We Make Cures Possible

**FOUNDING VISION** In 1973, Nobel Prize-winning scientist Dr. Albert Szent-Györgyi, M.D., Ph.D., was joined by attorney and entrepreneur Franklin C. Salisbury, Sr. to found NFCR on a simple conviction: "Cancer Research Saves Lives." Their "Laboratory Without Walls" model — funding bold, collaborative science instead of a single institution — was ahead of its time. More than 50 years later, it's still how we work.

## NFCR GLOBAL SUMMIT 2026: WHERE THE NEXT BREAKTHROUGH BEGINS

Every year, the NFCR Global Summit brings the field's sharpest minds together at the National Press Club, and the conversations that follow don't just stay in the room. Some of the most important moments in cancer research don't happen in a lab — they happen in a room like this one. They turn into the research that defines what comes next.



Dr. Bruce Beutler, Nobel laureate

This year's Summit opened with a keynote from Nobel laureate **Dr. Bruce Beutler**, who traced a career built on his father's pioneering work in enzyme replacement therapy through his own Nobel Prize-winning discovery of Toll-like receptors to his latest research developing cancer prevention and treatment drugs. **Dr. Douglas Lowy** followed with a powerful reminder of what prevention can still do. He discussed new research showing that a single dose of the HPV vaccine provides durable, lasting protection — a finding already reshaping global health policy. More than 90 countries have now adopted single-dose vaccination, a shift expected to prevent an additional 1.4 million deaths in the years ahead

**Panel I: AI in Cancer Detection** turned to what's possible right now: tools that can spot breast cancer four to five years before symptoms appear, and flag pancreatic cancer risk using nothing more than a patient's existing medical records. Panelists described a future in which world-class diagnostic insight isn't limited to major medical centers, but reaches every corner of the globe.

**Panel II: AI in Real-World Oncology Care** is where this year's Summit became next year's research. **Dr. Ludmil Alexandrov** took the stage to share his latest work connecting early-life bacterial exposure to the mutations driving early-onset colorectal cancer — and his vision for "molecular twins"




Scientists, physicians, patients and supporters tackle the big questions of AI in Oncology care.

able to track a patient's cancer and guide treatment in real time. That vision didn't stay theoretical for long: conversations sparked on this very stage last year helped set in motion the multi-institutional project Dr. Alexandrov is now leading to build exactly that molecular twin. It's a reminder of what the Summit is really for — *not just reporting on progress, but creating it.*

The evening culminated with the **Szent-Györgyi Prize for Progress in Cancer Research**, awarded to **Dr. Michele Carbone** of the



Dr. Tony Hunter and Dr. Sujuan Ba present the Szent-Györgyi Prize to Dr. Michele Carbone

University of Hawaii Cancer Center for discovering that inherited BAP1 gene mutations drive mesothelioma susceptibility — a breakthrough that has changed how the disease is studied, led to new clinical trials worldwide, and given families facing this rare, deadly cancer a fighting chance never had before. Dr. Carbone reflected on the honor, alongside closest collaborators, **Dr. Harvey I. Pass** and **Dr. Haining Yang**. Their mission: *"to discover new causes of cancer, uncover the mechanisms behind them, and save patient lives."* NFCR Board Chair Silas Deane closed the night by thanking the scientists, donors, and partners whose support turns moments like this into lives saved.

**This is what your support builds: not just a single day of brilliant conversation, but the connections that become tomorrow's cures.**

**HONOR/MEMORIAL • MONTHLY • IRA & DAF • STOCKS**
**Visit www.nfcr.org/Progress26 to learn more about all of these (and more) ways to support NFCR in our fight to cure all cancers.**

Scan the QR code with your phone to give online at NFCR.org/Progress26.

# NFCR By the numbers/What your donation funds

**20+**
therapies in use today-began as NFCR funded reseaerch

**$420M+**
directed to cancer reseasrch since 1973

**100+**
scientists funded at the earliest stages of their work

**160+**
partner institutions hosting NFCR funded research

## DIGITAL TWINS: A NEW WEAPON AGAINST A FASTER-MOVING CANCER

A digital twin is a computer model based on the unique biology of a patient, built from their genetic, molecular, and clinical data. The digital twin is able to update continuously as new information streams in. This allows doctors to virtually test which treatments are most likely to work, catching signs of resistance months before they'd show up on a scan, and adjust care as a patient's cancer evolves.



Dr Ludmil Alexandrov. U.C. San Diego

It's an especially urgent tool for early-onset colorectal cancer, which is rising sharply in younger patients. Screening methods and treatment guidelines weren't built with them in mind. Most of these patients are diagnosed with a form of the disease that has no clear biomarkers and no established playbook, thereby leaving doctors to rely on trial and error.

NFCR is launching a new project with **Dr. Ludmil Alexandrov (UC San Diego)** and **Dr. Kimmie Ng (Dana-Farber Cancer Institute)** to build a molecular twin for early-onset colorectal cancer. Dr. Alexandrov will lead the computational and molecular modeling, while Dr. Ng — director of Dana-Farber's Young-Onset Colorectal Cancer Center — will lead the clinical side, from patient enrollment to treatment outcomes. Together, they aim to help doctors choose the right treatment the first time and catch signs of failure sooner.



Dr Kimmie Ng, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, *Photo: NIcole Loeb*

## YOUR GIFT WILL BE DOUBLED!

Thanks to a generous group of donors, every gift to NFCR will be matched dollar-for-dollar **— up to $150,000 —** through the end of the year.

That means your $50 gift becomes $100. Your $250 gift becomes $500. **Double the support for scientists working every day** to find better treatments, earlier detection, and —

ultimately — cures.

This match won't last, and neither should the wait. **Give today and make your impact go twice as far.**

**Simply scan the QR code with your phone.**

## A NATURAL "BRAKE" ON BREAST CANCER

One of the most common drivers of breast cancer is an overactive signaling pathway called Wnt — but drugs designed to block it directly have proven too toxic to use safely. NFCR-funded scientists Dr. Xiang-Lei Yang and Dr. Paul Schimmel at Scripps Research found a different way in: a naturally occurring enzyme in the body, called SerRS, that acts as a built-in brake on the Wnt pathway.



Drs. Yang and Schimmel, Scripps Research

Their research, published in The FASEB Journal, showed that SerRS suppresses breast cancer progression and metastasis — offering a safer path toward slowing the disease by working with the body's own machinery instead of fighting it. NFCR confirmed the discovery as a direct product of its donor-funded collaborative research grant, connecting years of foundational science to a finding with real potential for patients.

## DONOR STORY

### STEVE COLELLA: A Monthly Donor Who Has Seen Hope Grow

Cancer has touched Steve Colella's family three times: his mother's breast cancer, his brother's lung cancer, and his mother-in-law's pancreatic cancer. Yet the Illinois businessman looks at the last two decades of research and sees real progress. Precision medicine and gene therapy are helping people live longer, and live better.



That's why Steve has stood with NFCR since 2007. He values our commitment to all cancers, not just one. And through Champion for a Cure, our monthly giving program, he gives in a way that's easy and steady, and that keeps him connected to the work he believes in.

# TOM'S STORY: TURNING GRIEF INTO ACTION

Tom and his wife, Bernadette, were hiking in Cuba when he first noticed something was wrong. She couldn't keep up. Her feet wouldn't go where she wanted them to. She grew frustrated, and so did the moments that followed — fumbling over familiar words, familiar movements. At first, they chalked it up to age.

But Bernadette was a registered nurse certified in gerontology, and her instincts told her otherwise. Her concern grew. So did her fear that this might be a brain tumor.

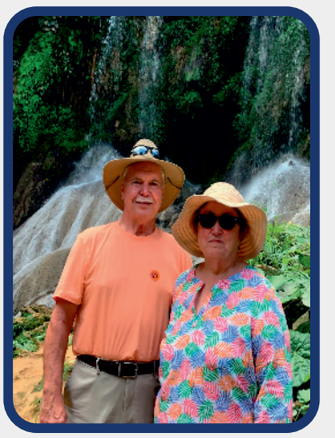
In December 2018, that fear was confirmed: Stage IV glioblastoma (GBM) — one of the most aggressive, difficult-to-treat, and devastating forms of brain cancer.

Tom became Bernadette's full-time caregiver, keeping her comfortable as she began radiation, chemotherapy, and speech and physical therapy — fighting frustration to hold onto her motor skills and her ability to communicate, even as both slipped further away. Doctors gave her roughly nine months. She lived for three.

The average life expectancy after a GBM diagnosis is a dismal 14 to 16 months. For Bernadette, and for too many families like Tom's, even that number was out of reach.

***"I can't control evil in the world," Tom says. "But I can do the best I can to counter it."***

It's a hard story — but not a hopeless one. To process his grief, Tom made the decision to share Bernadette's story with NFCR — along with practical tips for fellow caregivers — hoping it might help someone else walking the same road.Today, he's channeled that grief into advocacy, standing alongside NFCR to push for faster, better cancer research.



***"Every patient's story is different," Tom says, "but what connects us all is hope — and the knowledge that research is moving faster than ever before."***

Because of donors like you, that research keeps moving — toward better treatments, earlier detection, and someday, a cure for glioblastoma and every cancer like it.



**To hear more of Tom's Story - Listen to the full conversation on NFCR's podcast *All Things Cancer* - available anywhere you listen.**

## INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF CANCER RESEARCHERS

This past summer, eight college students traded classrooms for cancer labs — working hands-on alongside NFCR-supported scientists at institutions across the country, including Harvard, UC San Diego, Dana-Farber, and Case Western Reserve. The NFCR College Internship Program pairs rising researchers with leading mentors for eight weeks of real science.



For Taiseer Al-Rajabi, a senior at the University of Kansas, the work was personal. Motivated by cancer survivors in his own life, he spent the summer studying how mitochondrial genetics may drive breast cancer metastasis — his first independent research project, and another step toward medical school.

Several interns contributed directly to ongoing research and will be named co-authors on upcoming publications. **It's an investment that pays off twice: advancing today's cancer research while training tomorrow's scientists.**

## THE COST OF UNCERTAINTY

Over the last several decades, nearly every major cancer breakthrough — from targeted therapies to immunotherapy — began as federally funded basic science. Today, that funding pipeline is increasingly uncertain.

"We are faced with... a very important reckoning," says **Dr. Lisa Coussens, Professor and Chair of Cell, Developmental & Cancer Biology at Oregon Health & Science University's Knight Cancer Institute,** noting that most researchers have grown highly dependent on NIH support with no guarantee that it continues.

**Dr. Monica Bertagnolli** — former Director of the National Cancer Institute and the NIH, now **President of the National Academy of Medicine** — has seen the toll firsthand: shrinking labs, at-risk careers, and a research community bracing for what's next. Still, she remains hopeful public investment can keep pace with the science.



**That's where NFCR's donor-funded model matters most — steady support when federal funding can't be guaranteed.**

## A FRIENDSHIP THAT BECAME A LEGACY

Johanna Ross was, in every sense, a free spirit. Born in Massachusetts in 1937, she was fluent in French, Russian, Polish, and Lithuanian, worked as a Moscow correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune, and spent decades teaching world history, often traveling solo to places like Japan and the Middle East with little more than a tote bag.

Johanna supported NFCR for years, attending our galas and countless events. But it was in the final years of her life that she and NFCR Development Officer, Dr. Hali Hartmann grew truly close. Their phone calls ranged everywhere, from philosophy, to art, to the meaning of science itself and always ran longer than expected. ***"It was always completely enjoyable," Hali recalls. "The conversations would go everywhere all at once."***

In 2023, during NFCR's 50th anniversary events in Boston, Hali made sure Johanna could join a dinner with NFCR's scientists, even arranging for her to speak French with a friend by phone along the way — a small joy for a woman who missed it dearly. It was a night Johanna talked about for months afterward.



**Johanna Ross at the Boston NFCR 50th Anniversary dinner**

Not long after, Johanna quietly updated her will. When she passed away in January 2025, NFCR learned she had left a large legacy gift— a testament to a friendship, and to a lifelong belief in what science can do for the world.

**A legacy gift isn't just a donation. It's a relationship that continues everlasting.**

## ENGINEERING A BETTER ATTACK ON PANCREATIC CANCER



CAR T-cell therapy has transformed treatment for some blood cancers, but pancreatic tumors have proven far harder to crack — they suppress immune cells and vary widely in the proteins they display. With NFCR's support, **Dr. Avery Posey of the University of Pennsylvania** is engineering CAR T-cells that target CEACAM6, a protein found on many pancreatic cancer cells.

His redesigned cells block the tumor's ability to suppress immune attack and remain highly sensitive to their target, even at low levels. In animal studies, these improvements increased survival — building the foundation for a new treatment option for one of cancer's toughest diagnoses.

Dr. Posey's work is featured on NFCR's podcast *All Things Cancer* - available anywhere you listen.

## EARLY DETECTION: THE FIGHT AGAINST A YOUNGER, DEADLIER CANCER

Colorectal cancer is no longer just a disease of older adults. Rates have been climbing roughly 3% each year in people ages 20 to 49, and it's now the leading cause of cancer death in adults under 50. Because guidelines and awareness have not caught up to the changing statistics, **about three in four patients diagnosed before the age of 50 are diagnosed at an advanced stage.** This is why new treatments and early detection matter so much: catching colorectal cancer before symptoms appear dramatically improves the odds of survival.

NFCR-supported scientist **Dr. Ludmil Alexandrov of UC San Diego** is leading a multi-institution team building a "molecular twin" specifically for early onset colorectal cancer — a continuously updating model of a patient's biology that could one day help doctors flag risk earlier and choose the right treatment sooner, before this fast-moving disease gets the upper hand.

## THANK YOU FOR MAKING THIS POSSIBLE

**None of the work in these pages happens without you** — the scientists, the students, the patients whose stories drive us forward.

In a year of real uncertainty for federally funded research, your support isn't just helpful. It's the difference between a discovery moving forward and a lab going dark.

Thank you for standing with NFCR — this year, and for the 53 years before it. Together, **we will make cures for all cancers possible.**