Annual Pitt Innovation Challenge (PInCH®) Grants Awarded

Each year, CTSI challenges investigators to come up with creative innovations in research to solve challenging health problems. This year, a total of $485,000 was awarded among nine proposals. To learn more about these exciting new projects and the inventive teams who created them, visit the CTSI website, where short video pitches for all proposals can be viewed.

Awardees include:

- **AWARE**: a smartphone app that enables at-home lung function monitoring for people with lung disorders such as asthma, COPD, and COVID-19.

- **REPLICA: 3D-Sculpted Cartilage Implants**: a custom-made cartilage ear implant that decreases complexity and operative time of facial surgeries, creating a state-of-the-art, high-precision cartilage milling process.

- **LungTarget**: a novel set of lung-targeting peptides, applied to deliver siRNAs to treat the lungs of patients with Cystic Fibrosis.

- **Transplants for Kids**: a software decision support solution that matches specific pediatric organ donor and recipient characteristics in real-time, saving time and reducing the deaths of children waiting for an organ transplant.

- **SULT Stoppers: Novel Depression Therapeutics**: a specific and fundamentally new major depression treatment for the 40% of patients without an effective therapeutic, which inhibits sulfotransferase to regulate serotonin in the brain and can be used in combination with existing drugs (MAOIs/SSRIs).

- **Thinking in Speech**: a cognitive therapy that helps children with autism independently cope with everyday events that cause stress, by developing their ability to use “inner speech” – the voice in our heads we use to think.

- **Sevo**: a novel EEG lead clip designed for people with coarse and curly hair, bringing innovative human centered design to provide a 15x improvement in measurement accuracy for epilepsy, neurological disorders, stroke, and brain injuries in the Black population.

- **P-SEF (Patient-Specific Expandable Foam)**: a polymer spray which expands to exact wound dimensions, saving critical time in the operating room and replacing ineffective manually cut foam blocks to provide an optimal wound healing environment.

- **LemurDx**: a smartwatch activity monitor that combines sensors with machine learning algorithms to accurately measure hyperactivity associated with ADHD diagnosis.
**RESEARCH RESOURCES | Stakeholder Engagement**

**MyPaTH Story Booth Participants Eager to Volunteer as Stakeholder Members of Research Teams**

The MyPaTH Story Booth is a unique research project designed to create a recorded archive of patient, caregiver, and research participant stories of their experiences with health, illness, coping, and navigating the healthcare and research participant system. Since its inception in 2016, the study has curated more than 700 experiential stories. Research teams collecting stories are based a the University of Pittsburgh and Johns Hopkins University, but since interviews are typically recorded over the phone, to date the project has engaged storytellers from 25 states plus the District of Columbia. Names and other personal identifiers are redacted to help maintain confidentiality. Participants have shared a number of compelling narratives on diverse experiences such as trying to help loved ones avoid COVID-19, the challenges of dealing with chronic pain, the need for respite care for caregivers, suggestions for improving healthcare for women who lose pregnancies, communicating about depression symptoms, and many others. In addition to serving as a medium of expression for patients and caregivers, the Story Booth connects people who have experience living with a health condition with clinical researchers. The goal is to help ensure that researchers have a better understanding of patient/participant experiences and can design studies and treatments that are centered on the patient – addressing topics that matter to the people who live with a health problem.

This project was originally funded by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI), which aims to empower patients and encourage more patient-centered healthcare and research. The Story Booth project is operated by, PaTH, a clinical research network led by the University of Pittsburgh, made up of seven academic health systems (in Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania) which is part of PCORnet, the National Patient-Centered Clinical Research Network.

"We hope researchers will listen to these stories and get a better idea of what it’s like to be a patient or what it’s like to struggle to be healthy," says Kathleen McTigue, MD, MPH, MS, associate professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh. "We’re trying to get patients involved in the research process. If researchers want to be answering questions that are going to make a difference to patients’ care, we need to get patients involved so that we find out about what it’s like for patients to be ill, to stay healthy, in what ways it’s difficult to practice preventive health care and what it’s like to access the health care system."

Over 70% of MyPaTH Storybooth study participants have expressed an interest in hearing of opportunities to partner with researchers as members of advisory boards or co-investigators on the team that helps to guide a study’s research processes, bringing their unique experiences to inform research protocols. The breadth of conditions represented in the archives represents an opportunity for researchers from many disciplines to incorporate patient perspectives in study design. Study teams seeking to enhance study design with patient perspective can submit a request to be matched with relevant participants [here](#).

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**Funding Opportunities**

**COVID-19 Solutions Fund**

The COVID-19 Solutions Fund is part of the Mozilla Open Source Support Program (MOSS). Through this fund, awards of up to $50,000 will be provided to open source technology projects which are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in some way. This opportunity seeks applicants with a well established project that can immediately use funding and is not suitable for early stage ideas. More [here](#).

**Year of Engagement Funding Opportunity**

The University of Pittsburgh is providing competitive internal funding for projects that seek to involve underrepresented/disenfranchised communities and promote diversity and inclusion. Projects should meet a need that will result in measurable outcomes, promote innovative and interdisciplinary agendas, and result in knowledge that combines academic and community based perspectives. More [here](#).
**REGULATORY NOTES | Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) Webinar on Ethical Considerations in Single IRB Review is Now Available Online**

In September 2020, OHRP presented a live webinar titled *Practical and Ethical Considerations for Single IRB Review*, which covered several important topics, including ensuring quality, managing local context concerns, and managing roles and distinguishing responsibilities during single IRB review.

Since many multi-site studies now mandate a single IRB of record, it is important for researchers to understand all the ethical and practical nuances of managing studies that require single IRB review.

OHRP is offering a recorded version of the webinar free to the research community.

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**CTSI UPDATES | Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Workshop Series Returns in Virtual Format**

After a hiatus due to COVID-19, CTSI’s Responsible Conduct of Research Workshop series restarted in November in a virtual format. Ethical standards and responsible practices are the context for successful scientific research. At any step in the research process, you may need to address ethical issues in a thoughtful, responsible manner. The CTSI RCR Center serves as a resource for researchers at the University of Pittsburgh. The objective of RCR is to provide education so that you can learn to effectively recognize and avoid research misconduct and understand the resources available to support your research.

Registration is open for the December RCR workshops; topics include pre-print publications, recruiting pediatric participants through CTSI’s Pitt+Me® research registry, how to define and describe study data, and reproducibility in research.

Visit the [CTSI website](#) for more information and to view the full schedule.

**Community PARTners Core: Upcoming Lunch and Learn Focuses on Resilience During the Pandemic**

CTSI’s Community PARTners Core, in partnership with the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, is presenting a Lunch and Learn on December 10th to address stressors associated with the pandemic and ways to mitigate the negative effects of living through these difficult times. The presentation, *Fostering Resilience during COVID-19*, will feature Amy Malen, assistant deputy director of the Office of Community Services in Allegheny County’s Department of Human Services (DHS), and Daniel S. Shaw, PhD, distinguished professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences and leader of the Early Childhood Collaborative.

Ms. Malen will discuss prevention, family-strengthening and community support services that are available for area residents, and efforts to promote these services to a wider audience and address barriers to navigating access. Dr. Shaw will present on the Pittsburgh Study, which is both a resource for families and a community-partnered study designed to find out what works to help children thrive. The study follows children in Allegheny County from birth through high school in order to find out the best ways to give children the support they need for healthy growth and development.

This presentation is free and open to public, and will offered via Zoom on December 10 from noon to 1 p.m. Register [here](#).
Dear CTSI,

*Question:* I am concerned about Pitt’s operational posture change to elevated risk and the rising number of positive COVID-19 cases in Pittsburgh and surrounding areas. How does this impact research operations?

*Answer:* Rob A. Rutenbar, senior vice chancellor for research, released guidance on this issue in late November via a university wide email. Pitt’s Health Care Advisory Group (HCAG) issued recommendations that the university’s Tier 3 research activities in Allegheny County be conducted remotely without in-person study visits until further notice. Tier 3 studies that do not involve face to face contact and can be conducted remotely may continue.

Tier 3 research is defined by the University of Pittsburgh Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) as research that has low direct benefit to participants and other impacts to research. No additional restrictions have been placed on Tier 1 and 2 human subjects studies (studies with high or moderate direct benefit to participants or that have a high public health priority). Please visit the HRPO website for further clarification regarding what criteria qualify a study for each Tier.

Readers, this space is reserved for your questions. If you have a research question you would like to ask, please send it to cliftons@pitt.edu and look for answers in our next edition.

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**Upcoming Virtual Events**

**Introduction to Tableau for Data Visualization**
Presented by the University of Pittsburgh Health Sciences Library System
Friday, December 11 from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Good Research Practices**
Presented by the University of Pittsburgh Human Research Protection Office
Monday, December 14 from 1 to 4 p.m.

**Engaged Scholarship 101 for Faculty and Post-Doctoral Fellows**
Presented by the Office of the Provost
Monday, December 14 from noon to 1:30 p.m.

**Patient Engagement During the Time of Covid: Virtual Community Engagement Studios**
Presented by the Trial Innovation Network
Wednesday, January 20 from noon to 1 p.m.

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Questions for us?
**We’d love to hear from you**