

# JOINT *Matters*



## Science Highlights 2025

As we enter 2026, the Arthritis Foundation reflects on 2025, a year of significant achievements. We continued to support research in inflammatory arthritis, juvenile arthritis, patient-reported outcomes (PRO) and osteoarthritis (OA) through our various grant programs and clinical trials. The Workforce and Clinical Care Program, which included a Community Health & Workforce Summit, has further fortified our commitment to bridging the rheumatology workforce gap. Our accomplishments in 2025 highlight progress toward the Foundation's five-year strategic direction to discover scientific insights that lead to improved treatment and prevention.

The Arthritis Foundation made strides toward addressing the shortage of rheumatologists by conferring three [Clinical Rheumatology Fellowships](#) (\$75,000 per year) to pediatric rheumatology programs: Baylor College of Medicine, the University of Iowa and Boston Children's Hospital. Further, the

Foundation has adjusted the funding duration to coincide with the board eligibility duration of each program. With the fellowship awards, these institutions will train future leaders in pediatric rheumatology through advanced clinical training, innovative research and personalized professional development. The program's strong emphasis on recruiting fellows from underrepresented groups ensures that the future physician pool reflects the diverse patient population it serves.

The Arthritis Foundation also successfully hosted our third [Community Health & Workforce Summit](#). This free virtual summit, attended by more than 100 registrants, highlighted the Foundation's efforts to strengthen the rheumatology workforce and improve community health. We also awarded three [Community Health Grants](#) for projects focused on reducing social and economic barriers to arthritis care and improving health outcomes. In another

effort to close the workforce gap, the Arthritis Foundation, in partnership with the American Orthopaedic Foot & Ankle Society® (AOFAS), launched the Foot and Ankle Arthritis Development Program in 2024 to provide medical students and residents from underrepresented groups with valuable training and mentoring opportunities with foot and ankle orthopedic surgeons across the country. [In early 2025, the first cohort of participants was selected.](#)

The Arthritis Foundation strengthened our pediatric rheumatology research and workforce development efforts through our key partnership with the Childhood Arthritis and Rheumatology Research Alliance (CARRA), announcing [13 new grants](#) totaling \$1.9 million. Additionally, the Foundation expanded our collaboration with the Pediatric Rheumatology Care & Outcomes Improvement Network (PR-COIN) to deliver quality improvement training for fellows, [with the 2025–26 Quality Improvement Education Program supporting up to six trainees](#), building on the prior year's pilot that trained two fellows.

In April 2025, the Arthritis Foundation hosted a [Think Tank meeting at Northwestern University](#) to discuss patient-reported outcomes in arthritis care. The goal of the meeting was to inform the Foundation's funding strategy and the development of our PRO program. Following the meeting, the Foundation announced the first cycle of our PROs grant funding program.

The Arthritis Foundation advanced our research portfolio through significant investments and program milestones, including awarding \$1.25 million in [hip OA](#) and [shoulder OA](#) grants, securing a \$375,000 commitment from AOFAS for a new Ankle Arthritis funding program under the [FastOA Initiative](#), and co-hosting a HipOA Think Tank to guide future strategy. Our Landmark Trials showed strong momentum, [with PIKASO](#) randomizing its 100th participant, [TOPS](#) enrolling 900 of its 1,240 target participants, and [KArAT](#) exceeding enrollment goals and entering the follow-up phase.

In 2025, the Arthritis Foundation advanced our inflammatory arthritis agenda by awarding five [Rheumatoid Arthritis Research Program grants](#) amounting to approximately \$1.35 million for studies focused on mechanisms and biomarkers of disease development, progression and treatment response. We also hosted a Psoriatic Arthritis Roundtable to assess the current research and care landscape, identify critical gaps and inform the development of a future, targeted funding program.

Looking ahead, the Arthritis Foundation will host the [2026 Inflammatory Arthritis Research Summit](#) in New York City, which will convene leading experts to discuss advances in therapies, sex- and gender-related influences, epigenetics and pain. It will feature presentations from Rheumatoid Arthritis Research Program awardees and other leaders in the field. The Arthritis Foundation will also expand our inflammatory arthritis research portfolio to include a request for proposals focused on psoriatic arthritis in 2026. Under the OA portfolio, the Foundation has now launched [TrialLaunch](#), a new funding program designed to integrate patient input and recruitment data to strengthen clinical trial planning, with awards anticipated in 2026.

To read more about the Arthritis Foundation's science and research programs and activities, visit [arthritis.org/science](https://www.arthritis.org/science).

## ADVOCACY UPDATE

In 2025, the Arthritis Foundation made remarkable progress in advocating at the federal, state and grassroots levels for people living with arthritis.

Notably, the Arthritis Foundation hosted our biennial Advocacy Summit in September. Over 100 Advocates from 30 different states attended and received a full day of programming and breakout sessions before heading to Capitol Hill to meet with legislators. The Summit is the Foundation's hallmark advocacy event. It is one of the most effective ways of getting Advocates at all levels more involved with advocacy programming, state committees and the Ambassador Program. Training sessions included the History of Arthritis Foundation Advocacy, Bringing Advocacy Home, Storytelling and more. During the Summit, the advocacy team and over 220 patient and provider groups ascended onto Capitol Hill to advocate for the Safe Step Act and Pharmacy Benefit Manager Reform.

[Learn more about the accomplishments of the Arthritis Foundation's advocacy efforts in 2025.](#)

Are you ready to make a difference? Take the first step by visiting the [Arthritis Foundation's Action Center](#). There, you can find a topic that resonates with you and start advocating for change.

## 2025 ACR Convergence Highlights



The American College of Rheumatology Convergence is the largest annual rheumatology conference aside from its counterpart in Europe, drawing doctors, scientists, patients, drug makers and others in rheumatology from around the globe. The Arthritis Foundation was there, too, sharing how we're supporting research and care for people with arthritis, gathering insights and listening to what's making waves in rheumatology right now. A few outstanding highlights from the conference are summarized below:

### Promising New Treatment

A number of sessions at the conference focused on the potential treatment using "chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T cells" that could possibly eliminate ongoing drug treatments for autoimmune diseases. CAR-T cell therapy is currently being used for certain types of cancer. It is being studied primarily for lupus among rheumatic diseases but holds potential for other autoimmune conditions. It could be a gamechanger for people living with these diseases, but the cost is also a factor — it is as much as a half-million dollars just for the drug.

### GLP-1 Drugs

Many discussions focused again in 2025 on [glucagon-like peptide-1 \(GLP-1\) receptor agonists](#) for weight loss (like Wegovy, Ozempic and Mounjaro). These drugs, approved to manage blood sugar levels in people with type 2 diabetes, seem to help relieve joint pressure simply due to weight loss. But studies presented at Convergence

suggest that they also help reduce cardiovascular risks in people with osteoarthritis or psoriatic arthritis, as well as kidney disease and heart attack risks in people with lupus nephritis — suggesting that something else is at work besides simple weight loss. This has gained a great deal of interest and is still being studied.

### Artificial Intelligence

In "The Great AI Debate: Unlocking Potential or Unleashing Chaos?" Jeffrey Curtis, MD, MS, MPH, professor of medicine in the Division of Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, discussed how artificial intelligence (AI) can help physicians with time-consuming, repetitive tasks that don't require a lot of thought, like writing prior authorizations for insurance or handling administrative office tasks. It can also help with more complex tasks, like processing a patient's health information to help predict how their disease will progress, and therefore what treatment might be most effective.

But AI needs to be used carefully because it is only as good as the data used to inform it, responded Jinoos Yazdany, MD, MPH, chief of the Division of Rheumatology at UCSF San Francisco General Hospital. For example, historically, clinical trials often [included primarily or only white men](#), leading to bias and misinformation about women and people of color. AI has the potential to be a valuable tool in rheumatology, but only if standards and guardrails are established and protected, Dr. Yazdany said.



## Meeting Current Challenges

**Changes in U.S. federal priorities and funding** that are affecting arthritis research and resources were also a topic of wide concern at Convergence. At two Arthritis Foundation-hosted events, Foundation leaders discussed ways we are meeting these new challenges.

At our Arthritis Healthcare Forum, Arthritis Foundation President and CEO Steve Taylor spoke to the audience of health care providers, scientists, industry representatives and supporters about federal budget cuts that have reduced research and programs designed to help people with arthritis. And Anna Hyde, vice president of advocacy and access for the Arthritis Foundation, shared insights into research spending for six of the most common forms of arthritis — osteoarthritis (OA), rheumatoid arthritis (RA), psoriatic arthritis (PsA), juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA), ankylosing spondylitis (AS) and gout — by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). She and her team found that, as of August, the NIH for 2025 was funding an estimated 364 projects in those six types of arthritis. That total research investment is around \$175 million — or about .5% of the estimated \$31.2 billion in NIH grants for that period, she said.

The Arthritis Foundation consults top experts in research and clinical care to guide our research and funding priorities, explained Anna Lampe, PhD, senior director, autoimmune and inflammatory arthritis at the Foundation. In addition to the primary Medical and Scientific Advisory Council, we have advisory boards that focus on specific areas and identify gaps in knowledge that we can help fill.

## Questions of Equity

Women are affected in far greater numbers by rheumatic diseases than men, yet clinical trials have historically not included as many women or people of color. The result is that women’s concerns are often brushed aside, and people with dark skin may be overlooked in many ways, from higher comorbidity risks to unnoticed skin symptoms.

Women’s health also gets little NIH funding, Hyde said. “Gender is becoming a bigger attention-getter,” she added, saying the Arthritis Foundation is exploring where we can make the biggest impact. The Foundation’s advocacy team is working with other organizational partners to strengthen our impact.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Arthritis Program, which provided education and resources to help people living with arthritis, has also been eliminated. Dedicated Department of Defense funding for OA research also was cut substantially, although it has tentatively been partially restored for 2026.

The effects of the federal cuts to research are still evolving, and we don’t yet know all the impacts, said Lampe. Funding is disappearing from academic research bastions, and DEI policies are erasing funding for gender differences in diseases and care.

“Diversity is under attack, and DEI is very important,” whether it’s women, people in rural areas or blue-collar workers, Foundation CEO Taylor added. “DEI is having the right people involved. Whoever is affected must have a seat at the table because only they really know and understand their challenges and needs.”



## Focus on Rural Health

One way the Arthritis Foundation is working to improve access to care in rural areas is by funding a first-of-its-kind rural fellowship track in Iowa, Taylor explained at an evening reception for supporters, Arthritis Foundation-funded scientists, fellows and others. He introduced Bharat Kumar, MD, associate professor and fellowship program director in the University of Iowa’s division of immunology, rheumatology and allergy, who is heading up the effort.

Dr. Kumar received a grant from the Arthritis Foundation to create the first rural rheumatology health track. Finding ways to provide care to people who live far from a rheumatologist is an important part of the Foundation’s mission to support all people with arthritis. About 40% of rheumatology patients in Iowa live in health professional shortage areas, either due to low income or geographic distance.

Not only does Iowa have a shortage of rheumatologists, but nearly a quarter of those who are practicing are over 60 years old and approaching retirement.

Dr. Kumar is establishing the rural rheumatology health track within the University of Iowa’s Adult Rheumatology Fellowship Training Program. It is intended to not only increase care in rural and under-served communities, but also to empower fellows to help solve problems that worsen disparities in rural care.

## Announcements



### Community Health & Workforce Summit

The 2025 summit held virtually on Nov. 14 showcased the Arthritis Foundation’s commitment to strengthening the rheumatology workforce and improving health outcomes for people with arthritis. Speakers shared updates on patient education, community-building and advocacy initiatives, and the summit featured grantee presentations that highlighted efforts to cultivate the next generation of health care professionals. [Read the full article.](#)



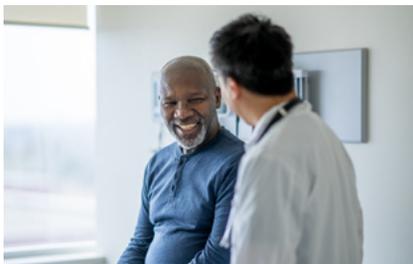
### Rheumatoid Arthritis Research Program Awards

The Arthritis Foundation announced the awardees of the 2025 Rheumatoid Arthritis Research Program grants, totaling approximately \$1.3 million. The grants have been awarded to five investigators: Megan Hanlon, PhD, from Brigham and Women’s Hospital; Marla Glass, PhD, from the Allen Institute; Anna Helena Jonsson, MD, PhD, from the University of Colorado at Denver; Robert Corty, MD, PhD, from Vanderbilt University; and Kevin Wei, MD, PhD, also from Brigham and Women’s Hospital. Their Arthritis Foundation-funded research will clarify the pathology of this chronic, painful disease. [Read the full news article.](#)



### Community Health Awards

The Arthritis Foundation awarded almost \$255,000 in 2025 through our [Community Health program](#). The exceptional list of investigators recognized for this year’s awards includes Daphne Lew, PhD, from Washington University in St. Louis; Laura Baehr, PT, DPT, PhD, from Drexel University in Philadelphia; and Rachael Stovall, MD, MAS, from the University of Washington. [Read the full news article.](#)



### Patient-Reported Outcomes Awards

By supporting research in patient-reported outcomes (PROs), the Arthritis Foundation aims to improve treatments and quality of life for people with arthritis while actively engaging them as partners to ensure studies reflect their real experiences and needs. Although the Foundation has been supporting patient-reported outcomes research for many years, a centralized, formal grants program was launched in early 2025. Upon review of competitive proposals, the PRO awards, totaling almost half a million dollars, were conferred to Maja Kuharic, PhD, from Northwestern University and Gabriela Schmajuk, MD, from the University of California, San Francisco.



### Partners for Patients

As a health care provider, you’re invited to join Partners for Patients, a program that connects you with patient education resources and a supportive community through the Arthritis Foundation to help improve patient care and outcomes. By becoming a partner, you’ll gain access to tools that connect your patients with vital Arthritis Foundation services and support, fostering stronger collaboration and better results. Once you join, we’ll highlight our partnership with you in both patient and medical communities and keep you informed with the latest updates and advancements in arthritis research and care. [Learn more about the Partners for Patients program.](#)

## Arthritis Foundation Request for Proposals



### Summer Science Internship

The Arthritis Foundation is seeking applications from high school juniors, seniors and college undergraduates with an interest in the fields of rheumatology and immunology, with a focus on arthritis and related autoimmune diseases. This eight-week internship offers experience in basic laboratory (bench) research, clinical epidemiological/translational (patient oriented) or bioinformatics (computational) research at UCSF and affiliated institutions. The due date for applications is March 9, 2026. **All applications are due by 11:59 p.m. PT.** [Find application instructions.](#)

## Meetings and Symposia



### Arthritis Foundation Inflammatory Arthritis Research Summit, Hospital for Special Surgery, New York, 8 a.m. ET, Feb. 20, to 2 p.m. ET, Feb. 21, 2026

Join the Arthritis Foundation for the 2026 Inflammatory Arthritis Research Summit. The summit will bring together leading clinical, basic and translational researchers to share cutting-edge research and explore next generation approaches to care for individuals with inflammatory forms of arthritis. The summit will include opportunities for attendees to:

- Discuss the newest research in inflammatory arthritis
- Hear updates from recent Arthritis Foundation-funded researchers
- Network with leading researchers in the field
- Attend and present their research at a poster session reception

[Register for the event.](#)



### State of Arthritis Research & Clinical Care Webinar, Virtual, 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. ET, March 13, 2026

Join us in March for the State of Arthritis Research and Clinical Care Webinar for health care professionals, hosted by the Arthritis Foundation. In this free webinar, you will hear about how the Arthritis Foundation is contributing to advancing science in arthritis and ways that you can access the Foundation's patient resources and support services.

[Register for the event.](#)



### 2026 Pathways Conference, March 27-28, 2026

The annual Pathways Conference brings together people living with arthritis and Arthritis Foundation volunteers and staff. This event will include inspiring talks from speakers sharing their secrets of success, the latest tools, resources and programs available to the arthritis community, and recognition awards for some of the Foundation's leading volunteers. This year's conference will be held at the Sheraton Grand Seattle. Attending is free.

[Register for Pathways.](#)

## COMMUNITY IN ACTION

Make an impact! Join the Arthritis Foundation's signature events happening at a location near you.

**Walk to Cure Arthritis** celebrates 25 years of progress this spring. Join us to pick up the pace in raising awareness, influencing positive policies, funding groundbreaking research and producing life-changing resources for millions of people living with arthritis.

**Carolina Hills Classic Bike Tour**, presented by Amgen, is a fully appointed and e-bike-friendly road cycling adventure in the foothills of the unmatched beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Fundraising from this event fuels Arthritis Foundation advocacy, scientific research and life-changing programs. Join us in May to explore the quiet winding roads, vibrant art scene and welcoming hospitality of this premier South-eastern cycling destination.

**Orthopedic Paceline Challenge** is calling for nominations across the country for orthopedic surgeons. Clip in for an iconic cycling experience as an orthopedist ambassador at the Carolina Hills Classic Bike Tour in May 2026. Members of the Medical Honoree Paceline will enjoy epic riding and national recognition as they raise funds for a better future for everyone living with arthritis.

**California Coast Classic Bike Tour**, presented by Amgen, is a scenic bike ride that takes place over eight days and covers 525 miles along the Pacific coast on U.S. Highway 1. The tour starts in the heart of San Francisco and ends on the iconic strand of Los Angeles.

**Ride Your Way With Arthritis Cycling Experience** allows you to attend our signature cycling events virtually if you are unable to attend in person.

To learn more about our events and to participate, [visit arthritis.org/events](https://www.arthritis.org/events).

## LET'S CONNECT!

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You can also email us at [afscience@arthritis.org](mailto:afscience@arthritis.org) for queries and to unsubscribe from *Joint Matters*.



## Educational Resources for Your Patients

### Live Yes! Connect Groups

Connect Groups provide supportive social connections and are open to parents/guardians of children with rheumatic diseases and adults with arthritis or rheumatic diseases. These virtual and in-person groups bring people together for fun social and informative educational events and activities focused on mutual support and positive coping strategies for living well. [Learn about our Connect Groups and upcoming events.](#)

### Finding Hope Through Movement, Feb. 23, 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. ET

Having arthritis doesn't mean having to slow down or stop doing what you love — it simply means finding a new path forward. In this uplifting, expert-led program, patients will learn practical tools to manage pain, regain independence and build an exercise plan tailored to your body and goals. They will also get tips to modify common exercises and weave movement into daily life for better relief. [Register for the event.](#)

### Family, Fertility & Thriving With Arthritis, March 26, 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. ET

Parenting while managing arthritis is challenging but possible. This free webinar will focus on family planning, parenting strategies and self-care for parents living with arthritis. [Register for the event.](#)

