AIR-P SCHOLARS & PILOT AND FEASIBILITY FUNDING PROGRAM:
CALL FOR APPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS
Cohort 5 - 2024-2025

AUTISM INTERVENTION NETWORK ON PHYSICAL HEALTH
In September 2020, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) assumed leadership of the Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health (AIR-P) under the direction of Dr. Alice Kuo. Funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, the AIR-P is an interdisciplinary, multicenter research network for scientific collaboration and infrastructure aimed at increasing life expectancy and quality of life for autistic individuals, with a focus on underserved/vulnerable populations.

The AIR-P supports innovative life course intervention research in six areas (Research Nodes):
   (1) Primary Care Services and Quality,
   (2) Community-based Lifestyle Interventions,
   (3) Gender, Sexuality, and Reproductive Health,
   (4) Health Systems and Services,
   (5) Neurology[1], and
   (6) Genetics[1]

[1]*Applications in these topics are particularly encouraged.*

The mission of the AIR-P is to develop a robust research infrastructure that will foster measurable improvements in optimal physical health and well-being of autistic individuals and their families across the lifespan. The AIR-P envisions a future where autistic individuals experience optimal multi-dimensional health and well-being. More information about the AIR-P is provided at airpnetwork.ucla.edu.

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS/PROPOSALS
Outline Stage Deadline: March 1, 2024
Full Application Deadline: April 30, 2024
The Autism Intervention Network on Physical Health (AIR-P) seeks applications for the AIR-P Scholars & Pilot and Feasibility funding program during the September 2024 - August 2025 project year. **Proposals must address a topic or topics related to autism and physical health with a focus on enhancing the health and well-being of autistic people**.

Preference will be given to projects with an emphasis on underserved groups. Previously awarded AIR-P Scholars projects can be viewed on our **website**.

GOALS/OBJECTIVES
The goal of the program is to launch the next generation of researchers seeking to **promote the health and well-being of autistic individuals across the lifespan**. The program has the following specific objectives:
   ● To provide pilot and feasibility funding for research that supports improved physical
       health outcomes for autistic individuals. These are funds that will support researchers
       conducting preliminary research and data collection, when applicable, or secondary
       data analysis, especially in areas in need of preliminary research.
          o To generate pilot data for future funding applications including the use of existing
          and secondary data sources through linkage to the National Autism Data Center.
          o To generate preliminary data for a successful R01 or equivalent large-scale grant
          application on the topic of autism and physical health.

- To provide mentorship, training, and professional development for new researchers; and
- To foster collaboration among Network members and new researchers.

ELIGIBILITY
- All proposed research projects must be led by a **Principal Investigator (PI)[2]** who either:
  o Holds a doctorate (e.g. PhD, MD) or equivalent terminal degree
  OR
  o Is actively enrolled in a degree-granting doctoral program.
- PI must have access to IRB and grants administration at an academic research institution (e.g., a university, private research institute, or hospital) at the time of the application and throughout the duration of the study.
- The Scholars and Pilot & Feasibility funding is intended for **Early Stage Investigators** (including doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows, and individuals who have recently completed their academic/clinical training) OR **Later Stage Investigators** who are interested in **transitioning** into research in autism and physical health.
  o Early Stage Investigators are defined as those who (a) have completed their terminal research degree or medical residency (or the equivalent and whichever date is later) within the past 10 years OR (b) are currently enrolled in a degree-granting doctoral program.
  o Later Stage Investigators are defined as qualified investigators in later career stages who are interested in transitioning into research in autism and physical health, as indicated in the RFP.
  Although all PIs must meet the above qualifications, **Co-investigators[3]** (e.g. non-academic community partners, practitioners, and/or research colleagues) with relevant backgrounds may serve on proposals led by qualified investigators and are not required to meet the above criteria.
- We invite all applicants to submit their project to the Infrastructure for Collaborative Research (ICR). The ICR is a data infrastructure that enhances collaboration between researchers and provides logistical support to researchers when deploying their project. This includes pulling electronic surveys from our REDCap library or assisting in creating new measures for your project. More information regarding the ICR can be found on our [website.](#)
  - If you would like to submit your project to the ICR, please submit an application and letter of intent through our [request for proposals system.](#) Please note that this application is separate from the scholars RFP, and does not come with any additional funding. Any questions regarding the ICR can be directed to **ICR@mednet.ucla.edu.**
- Individuals from underrepresented gender and racial and ethnic groups, as well as individuals with disabilities including autistic people, are particularly encouraged to apply. o Applications with autistic co-investigators are also particularly encouraged.
- By the time of award, the applicant must be a citizen or a non-citizen national of the United States or have been lawfully admitted for permanent residence (i.e., possess a currently valid Permanent Resident Card USCIS Form I-551, or other legal verification of such status).

[2]*Principal Investigator (PI): The recipient of the AIR-P Scholars Pilot & Feasibility funding, also defined as the AIR-P Scholar awardee.*
[3]*Co-investigator: If applicable, the co-recipient of the AIR-P Scholars Pilot & Feasibility funding working alongside the PI, also defined as the AIR-P Scholar awardee. Examples include: non-academic community partners, practitioners, and/or research colleagues.*

RESEARCH SUPPORT
The AIR-P Scholars Program & Pilot and Feasibility funding will be awarded for one year ranging from **$10,000 to $50,000 (per award)** for September 2024 - August 2025.

The **program is not intended to provide salary support.** The goal is to support a pilot study202 that will help inform subsequent substantive funding applications.

Funds **CAN** be used for:
- Reasonable project personnel expenses:
  - o Payments to consultants or collaborators for specific project-related tasks o Can include supplemental stipends for postdoctoral fellows and students (including work study) **up to $3,000 per person with an hourly rate not exceeding $50/hr**, as long as these are provided directly for specific research tasks (e.g., coding, transcription, interviews)
- Participant compensation
- Community collaborator compensation at a **minimum of $20/hr but not exceeding $50/hr**
- Select direct cost expenses[4]:
  - **o** Software (EHR/EMR, licenses, installation, commercially-available assessments)
  - o Medical or scientific equipment under $5000 per item
  - o Technology support
  - o Instructional materials
  - o Printing costs

Funds **CANNOT** be used for:
- Indirect costs[5]
- Tuition fee remission
- Equipment exceeding $5,000
- Food or beverage expenses
- Any general salary support or benefits (i.e., FTE)

[4]*Defined by Health Resources Services Administration, the funding source for AIR-P.*
[5]*Exceptions include University of California institutions.*

MENTORSHIP AND TRAINING
This award is intended for independent investigators at all career stages, but it requires the commitment of an experienced **Project Advisor** *and* a **Career Mentor.** Individuals in project advisor and career mentor roles should be established autism researchers holding a doctorate (e.g. PhD, MD) or terminal degree in their given fields.

In some rare instances, one mentor may be able to serve both as the Project Advisor and Career Mentor. In that case, the Project Advisor/Career Mentor should have evidence of successfully mentoring early career researchers and of productive collaborations and be committed both to the career enhancement of the applicant and to the direct supervision of the applicant's research.
- The Project Advisor will be responsible for providing continuous research support for the conceptualization and actualization of project related activities.
- The Career Mentor will be responsible for meeting quarterly with Scholars to provide crucial career advice and assistance with long-term goals.

It is also possible that candidates may identify more than one Project Advisor and/or more than one Career Mentor, i.e., a co-mentor or mentoring team, if this is deemed advantageous for providing expert advice in all aspects of the research career enhancement program.
- In such cases, one individual must be identified as the primary Project Advisor, who will coordinate the applicant's research, and one individual as a Career Mentor, who will provide scaffolding for long-term goals.

Project Advisor's Role
- The applicant must work with the Project Advisor in preparing the application.
- Both the Project Advisor and applicant must document the availability of sufficient research support to conduct the proposed research, in excess of the pilot and feasibility funds provided through this award.
- If data access is required in order to complete the project, such as in secondary data

analysis projects, approved access must be confirmed by the Project Advisor in their letter of support as well as in the proposal materials submitted by the applicant.

Career Mentor's Role
- If desired, a Career Mentor from the AIR-P network can be assigned to increase collaboration and/or if specific expertise is needed. Please specify in the application.
- A mentorship form will be provided for Scholars and Career Mentors to complete quarterly to ensure structure and consistency in career mentorship across the program.
- All Career Mentors will meet twice a year with the AIR-P Steering Committee for faculty development.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLISHING AND PRESENTING
Awardees will have the opportunity to:
- Present their findings at the biannual AIR-P Research Days;
- Contribute to AIR-P *Cureus* Channel, Autism & Health: Across the Lifespan;
- Contribute to the AIR-P webinar series; and
- Engage in other Network activities.

STAGE 1: PROJECT OUTLINE
Project outlines must be **submitted by March 1, 2024 via survey.**
In order to be invited to submit a full project application, applicants must submit a project outline containing a brief description of the project and answers to the questions listed below.

The project outline will be reviewed by AIR-P's Autistic Researchers Committee (ARC) and the National Coordinating Center (NCC) to ensure that the proposed project addresses the below questions and criteria. **Please note that only applicants with an approved project outline will be eligible to submit a full application. You will be notified by March 15, 2024 if the project outline has been approved.**

The project outline requires the following information compiled into a single PDF format:

1. Limited to 2 pages, Single-spaced, times new roman or Arial size 11 font, 1" margins
   a. Project Title;
   b. Purpose statement detailing the research question your project aims to address; d. Abstract detailing your proposed project. Describe the purpose, relevance, and relationship of your project to the physical health of autistic individuals and at least one of our six **research nodes**, and explain how the proposed design and methods of your project can facilitate improvement of the physical health of autistic individuals.
      i. Your project, if funded, will require IRB approval. Please identify your institution's IRB within your project outline submission. An IRB approval/exemption will not be required until the full application phase.
   c. Responses to the following questions (bullet points acceptable):
      i. **Community collaborators:** *Describe your project's plan to meaningfully include community collaborators. Include information such as the number of collaborators and their identification (autistic individuals, parents/guardians, service providers, etc.) and the level of involvement with the research team. How do you envision community participants improving your project and its outcomes as opposed to not including community participants?*
      ii. **Accessibility:** *Describe your efforts to ensure the accessibility of study materials to study participants and/or community collaborators, including but not limited to surveys, educational materials, data, and*

dissemination efforts.

2. CV of the proposed Project Investigator and, if applicable, Co-investigator
   a. If you are applying as a **Late-Stage Investigator,** please provide a brief response to the following questions (limited to 500 words):
      i. What prompted your shift towards autism and physical health?
      ii. In what ways do you anticipate this grant will advance your research efforts?
      iii. How will the pilot data from this research contribute to your expertise in this field?

To address these questions, please consider viewing the **resources for researchers** on the AIR-P Network website and the **INSAR Community Collaborator Request webpage.** We also encourage applicants to reach out at **airp@mednet.ucla.edu** for guidance on including and attaining community collaboration.

Project outlines must, <u>AT MINIMUM,</u> meet the following requirements:

Scope of work
- ✓ Focuses on a topic relevant to the physical health of autistic individuals.
- ✓ Research project will ultimately contribute to improving the health and well-being of autistic people as defined by them
- ✓ Reasonable justification that project aligns with one or more AIR-P research nodes

Approach
- ✓ Study design and methods are adequately developed and appropriate to the goals of the project
- ✓ Any potential harm to autistic participants (e.g., side-effects from a medical intervention) is clearly outweighed by the benefits of the study
- ✓ Identify your institution's IRB (do not need approval in project outline phase)
- ✓ Study should seek to incorporate as diverse a sample of autistic participants as possible given the research question (e.g., exclusions based on age, sex, ability level, intersectional identities, and co-occurring conditions should be accompanied by strong justification).

Community collaborators
- ✓ At least one autistic individual involved at the "partnership" level or higher on Arnstein's ladder (can be PI, research staff, academic collaborator, or "non-academic" partner with significant involvement; use of only consultants/focus groups with more limited decision-making power may be permitted with strong justification)
- ✓ When appropriate, includes stakeholder input from other relevant groups (e.g., non-autistic caregivers, autistic individuals with specific medical conditions)
- ✓ Participatory research model is outlined in sufficient detail and appears to encourage genuine partnership with autistic collaborators
- ✓ All non-academic collaborators and consultants are compensated fairly ($20/hour or more)

Accessibility
- ✓ When appropriate, significant efforts are made to ensure research study is accessible to autistic participants with varying cognitive/language abilities (i.e. no blanket ID exclusions without strong justification)
- ✓ Considers the variations of terminology used to describe neurodiverse populations and uses respectful language (see above resources for recommendations)
- ✓ When relevant, specific effort made to ensure accessibility of study materials to non-academic community partners (e.g. plain language, preferred communication modalities)

STAGE 2: FULL APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS
Invited Applicants must **submit a full application by** <mark>April 30, 2024 **via survey**</mark>, upon

approval of the project outline.

The application requires the following information compiled into a single PDF format:

1. **Description of the project**, addressing the following, limited to 6 pages maximum, single-spaced, times new roman or Arial size 11 font, 1" margins (includes all items described, does not include description of community involvement, Gantt chart, biosketches, budget proposal, letter(s) of support):
   a. Project Title;
   b. An abstract (no more than 250 words);
   c. Research question and/or policy/practice issue and its importance;
   d. Goals and objectives;
   e. How the project addresses issues related to AIR-P research node(s);
   f. Clear presentation of the design and methods
   g. For secondary data proposals, description of the design, population, and methods of the data source *and* the proposed study, including exposure and outcome variables, covariates, and analytic methods;
   h. IRB Status: an IRB approval or exemption for secondary data analysis is required; if IRB status is not confirmed by time of submission, please send to **airp@mednet.ucla.edu** once approval/exemption is confirmed.
   i. Deliverables, products;
   j. Realistic schedule/timeline for completion;
   k. Demonstrable interest or knowledge on subject, including why the applicant is uniquely suited to carrying out this work;
   l. Senior researcher supervision from a named Project Advisor, with a brief description of the mentorship environment and how the mentorship will support the project; and
   m. If a collaborative project, list of all involved collaborators with email addresses and roles within the project.
   n. Specifically, detail how this project will lead into the submission of a larger grant application or completion of a larger study, such as an **NIH R or K award**.

2. **Description of community involvement** (limited to 2 pages maximum, single spaced, times new roman or arial size 11 font, 1" margins), including the following:

   a. A statement describing a plan to include autistic people and other community stakeholders (such as their family members and professionals) as collaborators, Co-investigators, or co-researchers, e.g. through participatory research or a community advisory board. Plans to include community collaborators should consider:
      1. How collaborators have been/will be recruited, with attention to which stakeholder groups (including intersectional identities) and what relevant lived expertise will be prioritized;
      2. What the roles of stakeholders in the project will be;
      3. What measures will be taken to ensure accessibility so that stakeholders can serve in those roles; and
      4. The rate of compensation available for stakeholders.
   b. If the study includes human participants, either (1) a statement describing the plan to ensure inclusion of gender and racial and ethnic minority populations for appropriate representation and, if applicable, (2) a justification for why representation is limited or absent;
   c. If the study includes human participants, a statement noting whether or not the study will include autistic individuals with intellectual disabilities and/or alternative communication needs and, if not, a justification for why they must be excluded;
   d. If the study involves secondary data, a statement noting whether the data includes autistic individuals with intellectual disabilities and/or alternative communication needs and, if so, will the analysis include data from people with IDD. If people with IDD are excluded a justification is necessary;

e. If the study involves secondary data, a statement describing inclusion of gender and racial and ethnic minority populations in the secondary data source and in your analysis plan; and
f. A plan describing how research findings will be disseminated to the community.
g. Please refer to the below resources provided by AIR-P's ANSWER that provides further guidance on community collaboration.

   a) [Examples of Successful Research Partnerships](#)
   b) [Participatory Autism Research](#)
   c) [A starter pack for participatory autism research](#)
   d) [Six steps to engaging in participatory autism research](#)
   e) [Helpful Templates for Recruiting Community Partners](#)
   f) [AASPIRE Participatory Research Toolkit](#)
   g) [AASPIRE Inclusion Guidelines](#)
   h) [Participatory and Inclusive Autism Research Practice Guides](#)

3. **Gantt Chart** clearly designed to illustrate the timeline of your project.
   i.   Please attach a visual timeline, in Gantt chart format, that shows ALL steps for this project and the months in which they will occur. Don't forget to plan ahead!
   ii. You can find a template attached **HERE.**
4. **Biosketches** for all investigators and mentors involved in the research project. Please refer to the **NIH guidelines** for formatting biosketches.
5. **Budget proposal** using the **provided template**, detailing the amount requested and itemized budget and justification for how the amount will be spent. Please also identify sources (confirmed and proposed) of additional funding.
      i. Please include registration and travel expenses to present your findings at an AIR-P Research Day
6. **Letter of support from the Project Advisor and Career Mentor**. Letters of support from stakeholders and community partners are also encouraged.
   i.   Please make sure the letters describe the individual's role in the proposed project as well as their assurances that your project can be completed in the 1-year timeframe. Letters of Support from medical school administration that describes their commitment to project activities are also welcome.
7. **Contract forms**: please submit a **W-9** and an **UCLA Pre-Hire Worksheet**.

AWARD REQUIREMENTS:
   1. **Institutional IRB approval/exemption,** emailed to **airp@mednet.ucla.edu,** when obtained.
   2. **Mid-year report** (due 15 days after halfway point in project period).
   3. **Final report** (due 45 days after end of project period).
   4. Projects that are awarded pilot and feasibility funding must **acknowledge the Autism Intervention Network on Physical Health in all programs, public information materials, and publications** resulting from the research project and should be shared with **airp@mednet.ucla.edu**. The following language should be used:
      This project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under the Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health (AIR-P) grant, UT2MC39440. The information, content and/or conclusions are those of the authors and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.
   5. **Virtual Poster** submitted to the AIR-P *Cureus* Channel "[Autism and Health: Across the Lifespan](#)" is required at the end of the project for distribution throughout the AIR-P network.
   6. **Submission of project materials and data to the AIR-P's ICR** at the end of the project period.

REVIEW CRITERIA

Please consider addressing the following criteria in your applications, and please note if not all of these questions apply to your project. Applications will be reviewed in relation to the following evaluation criteria:

● **Significance**: Does this study address an important problem related to the physical health of autistic individuals? If the goals of the application are achieved, how will scientific knowledge be advanced? What will be the effect of the study on the concepts or methods that drive this field? In particular, does the study have the potential to enhance the health and well-being of autistic people?

● **Approach**: Are the conceptual framework, design (including composition of study population), methods, and analyses adequately developed, well integrated, and appropriate to the goals of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative tactics?

● **Innovation**: Does the project employ novel concepts, approaches or methods? Are the goals original and innovative? Does the project challenge existing paradigms or develop new methodologies or technologies?

● **Investigators**: Are the Principal Investigator, Co-Investigator (if applicable), and faculty mentor appropriately trained and well suited to carry out this work? Is the work proposed appropriate to the experience level of the Principal Investigator and other researchers (if applicable)?

● **Environment**: Does the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Do the proposed experiments take advantage of unique features of the scientific environment or employ useful collaborative arrangements? Is there evidence of institutional support?

● **Ethical Issues**: What provisions have been made for the protection of human subjects and the safety of the research environments? Is the design of the study adequate to account for differences in populations/participants when warranted? To what degree has the applicant outlined the inclusion of under-represented and marginalized groups in the proposed research as participants and/or collaborators? Are all non-academic collaborators or consultants compensated monetarily for their time (minimum $20/hour)?

● **Community Involvement**: Does the project include autistic people as collaborators or co-researchers? Does the investigator collaborate with autistic individuals (and potentially other stakeholders such as parents or service providers) at multiple stages of the project? Does the project include autistic people from diverse backgrounds, with intersectional identities, and with diverse support needs (e.g., intellectual disabilities, alternative communication) as appropriate to the project? Does the project use a participatory research method? Are there clear measures/considerations taken to ensure accessibility?
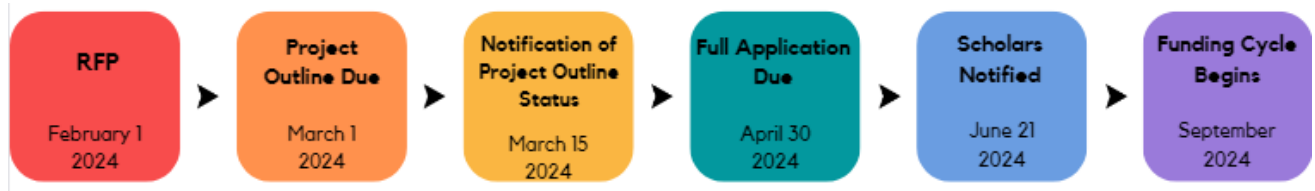
DEADLINE AND SUBMISSION

Project outlines must be **submitted via survey** by **March 1, 2024 at 4:00 pm PST**. Invited full applications must be **submitted via survey** by **April 30, 2024 at 4:00 pm PST**. Please contact **airp@mednet.ucla.edu** should you have any questions. The AIR-P National Coordinating Center (NCC), Autistic Researchers Committee (ARC), Collaborating Research Entities (CREs) and Research Node leaders will evaluate the full applications. Applicants will be notified of a decision by **June 21st, 2024** and funds will be awarded by **September 1, 2024**.

INFORMATION SESSION

An information session on the application process for the program will be held **Wednesday, February 14th, 12-1 pm PST.** The session will include an overview of the application requirements along with a time for Q&A. Sign up for the information session **here**.

A FAQ video on the Scholar's application process from Cohort 4 can be found the AIR-P website.

TIMELINE

RFP	Project Outline Due	Notification of Project Outline Status	Full Application Due	Scholars Notified	Funding Cycle Begins
February 1 2024	March 1 2024	March 15 2024	April 30 2024	June 21 2024	September 2024

AIR-P NETWORK OF NETWORKS STUDY

Collaboration networks are an important part of research. We invite you to participate in a research study about the collaboration networks of AIR-P Research Scholar applicants. We would like to learn more about your collaboration networks, including your collaborations with other researchers, community organizations, and groups. Your participation will help us to learn more about how collaboration networks grow and change over the next 3 years of the AIR-P project, the level of diversity and inclusion in collaboration networks, and how the AIR-P initiative has impacted research and community networks.

Please click the link to participate in the online survey:
https://drexel.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9RKIRBz0mfUbkxw