C-Path's Translational Therapeutics Accelerator, Sontag Foundation Award Grant for Drug Development Project Targeting Pediatric Brain Tumors

TUCSON, Ariz., June 4, 2025 — Critical Path Institute® (C-Path) today announced that its Translational Therapeutics Accelerator (TRxA) program, in partnership with the Sontag Innovation Fund, a wholly owned venture philanthropy subsidiary of the Sontag Foundation, has awarded a $250,000 grant to accelerate the development of a promising new immunotherapy for universally fatal brain tumors, including, but not limited to diffuse midline glioma (DMG). This award is made through TRxA's Bridging Research and Innovation in Drug Development Grants (BRIDGe) program, which is designed to support academic researchers in traversing the drug development valley of death and advancing new cutting-edge therapeutics from the lab to patients.

Jim Olson, Ph.D.

Andrew Mhyre, Ph.D.

Jim Olson, Ph.D., and Andrew Mhyre, Ph.D., both researchers at the Ben Towne Center for Childhood Cancer and Blood Disorders Research in the Seattle Children's Research Institute, have received this award to advance a T cell engager (TCE) that targets a protein commonly exploited by cancer cells to evade immune attack, known as PD-L1. Dr. Olson's team designed and developed the PD-L1-CD3 TCE to harbor specific sequences capable of binding PD-L1 on tumor cells and a protein complex, CD3 (cluster of differentiation 3), on T cells, activating and redirecting the immune system to selectively eliminate cancer cells.

DMG is a devastating pediatric brainstem tumor with no curative therapies and a mean survival of under 12 months. Over the past 60 years, no small molecule or biologic therapy has demonstrated clinical benefit in DMG, making this and other pediatric brain tumors among the most urgent unmet needs in oncology. "After three decades of caring for children with DMG, none of whom survived, I hope that this candidate therapeutic will impact survival in DMG and other devastating cancers," said Dr. Olson. "We're incredibly grateful to the Sontag Foundation and C-Path's TRxA for supporting our work and helping move it closer to the clinic."

This BRIDGe award will support the ultimate goal of realizing future clinical application of the PD-L1-CD3 TCE molecule for people with DMG, as well as glioblastoma, other deadly brain tumors and cancers that metastasize to the brain. The award will provide critical resources to carry out toxicology studies to determine tolerability and learn whether additional molecular engineering is needed to establish a lead candidate that has potential to be safe and effective.

The Sontag Innovation Fund is partnering with TRxA to financially support this project. "There's an urgent need for new therapeutic strategies in brain cancers, and this kind of high-impact science deserves robust backing that can deliver positive results for patients," said Scott Davis, Ph.D., Managing Director at the

Sontag Innovation Fund. “We’re proud to support Drs. Olson, Mhrye, and their teams at Seattle Children’s Research Institute.”

In addition to funding, TRxA’s unique drug accelerator model provides grantees with translational and regulatory science expertise to help drive success and mitigate risks inherent to early-stage research for development of new therapeutics. “With the support of visionary partners like the Sontag Innovation Fund, TRxA is well positioned to support investigators like Drs. Olson and Mhyre,” shared C-Path’s TRxA Executive Director Maaike Everts, Ph.D. “This collaborative approach is essential for developing the next generation of cancer therapies for patients in urgent need of effective treatments.”

For more information about C-Path and TRxA, visit c-path.org/trxa.

About Critical Path Institute

Founded in 2005, as a public-private partnership in response to the FDA’s Critical Path Initiative, Critical Path Institute® (C-Path) celebrates its 20th anniversary as a vital, independent, nonprofit. C-Path’s mission is to lead collaborations that advance better treatments for people worldwide. Globally recognized as a pioneer in accelerating drug development, C-Path has established numerous international consortia, programs and initiatives that currently include more than 1,600 scientists and representatives from government and regulatory agencies, academia, patient organizations, disease foundations and pharmaceutical and biotech companies. With dedicated team members located throughout the world, C-Path’s global headquarters is located in Tucson, Arizona and C-Path’s Europe subsidiary is headquartered in Amsterdam, Netherlands. For more information, visit c-path.org.

About Sontag Foundation

The Sontag Innovation Fund is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Sontag Foundation, one of the largest private funders of brain cancer research in the United States. The Foundation was established in 2002 by Frederick and Susan Sontag. To date, the Foundation has granted over $65 million in funding to support brain cancer research. In 2014, the Sontags established The Brain Tumor Network, to provide free navigation services for patients with brain tumors, helping to connect them to brain cancer specialists, second opinions and clinical trials. The fund builds on the impact of the Sontag Foundation through accelerating solutions to diagnose, treat, prevent and cure brain cancer. For more information, visit the website at **www.sontagfoundation.org/innovation-fund/**.

About TRxA

Critical Path Institute’s Translational Therapeutics Accelerator (TRxA) is a global drug accelerator focused on supporting academic scientists in advancing novel therapeutics from university-based labs to drug development pipelines of pharmaceutical companies and, ultimately, the clinic. As a nonprofit neutral convener of patient groups, academia, pharmaceutical companies and regulatory agencies, C-Path brings a breadth of scientific and drug development planning not available in other accelerator programs. TRxA is uniquely situated to leverage the expertise available through C-Path’s >20 disease-based consortia, as well as regulatory expertise and project management, to empower academic investigators to succeed in bringing safe and effective treatments to patients. For more information, visit c-path.org/trxa or email trxa@c-path.org.

Media Contacts:

Roxan Triolo Olivas
C-Path
520.954.1634
rolivas@c-path.org

Kissy Black
C-Path

615.310.1894
kblack@c-path.org