

UC system awards \$2 million to CA COVID-19 researchers

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Byline: Victoria Stafford

Body

More than \$2 million in emergency funding is being distributed to California researchers to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 among vulnerable communities.

On Wednesday, the UC Office of the President, or UCOP, announced the recipients of its emergency research funding. Studies that will mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 among the most vulnerable communities were prioritized, according to a UCOP press release. Among those awarded the funding include researchers who study vaccine development, how the coronavirus attacks the body and the sociological impacts of California's shelter-in-place order.

"When the pandemic was sweeping through the East Coast and heading toward California, we realized this was going to become the most pressing research need in the country," said Mhel Kavanaugh-Lynch, director of the California Breast Cancer Research Program, which is part of the UCOP program giving the grants. "We wanted to get money in researchers' hands very quickly to allow them to redirect their efforts to addressing the pandemic."

According to Kavanaugh-Lynch, the UCOP COVID-19 research grant application process was "easy" and "straightforward." UCOP was looking for the impact the potential research would have on COVID-19 and if the researcher would be able to complete the research amid California's shelter-in-place order.

Executive Director of UCOP's Research Grants Program Office Bart Aoki added that UCOP was also hoping to fund projects that targeted vulnerable communities, including homeless people, health care workers and those living in group housing.

UC San Diego researcher Pradipta Ghosh said she will use the UCOP money her center received to infect lab-grown human lungs with the COVID-19 virus to discover the potential causes of the virus's fatality.

"Growing stem cells out of tissues is not a trivial matter," Ghosh said. "It costs a huge amount of money and we are happy UCOP gave us some money to do this research - \$50,000 is a drop in the bucket and we have also reached out" to the National Institutes of Health.

Chunyan Yang, assistant professor of school psychology at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education, said in an email she will use the UCOP grant to conduct a survey that will gauge the mental health needs of Chinese American students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The goal of her survey is to give families and schools a "framework of best practices" to respond to students' mental health needs during school adjustments, Yang said in the email.

"This rapid-response seed funding enables me to conduct this important and time-sensitive project that is well aligned with my research focus," Yang said in the email.

Michael Springborn, an environmental and resource economist and associate professor at UC Davis, said funding from UCOP helped him quickly expand a research team needed to track county responses to COVID-19.

By understanding patterns of governmental response, Springborn's team hopes to understand the effectiveness of local decision-making in disease management. These findings may guide COVID-19 responses in communities that are "most at risk."

"Not all counties have great records of these declarations over time," Springborn said. "We need to retrieve this information before it starts to fade."

According to a UCOP press release, the projects were approved for six months after which time researchers can apply for additional funds to continue their projects.

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