AIR-P SCHOLARS & PILOT AND FEASIBILITY FUNDING PROGRAM: CALL FOR APPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

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, and
   (6) genetics.

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: September 7, 2021
Full Application Deadline: October 22, 2021
The Autism Intervention Network on Physical Health (AIR-P) seeks applications for the AIR-P Scholars & Pilot and Feasibility funding program during January-December 2022 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.

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

ELIGIBILITY
- Early-stage investigators (e.g., doctoral students, post-doctoral fellows, & early-career faculty) and any investigator interested in transitioning into research in autism and physical health.
  - Any candidate with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to carry out the proposed research is invited to work with their Project Advisor and organization to develop an application.
- Individuals from underrepresented gender and racial and ethnic groups, as well as individuals with disabilities including autistic people, are particularly encouraged to apply.
- 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).

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 January-December 2022.

The **program does not provide salary support to researchers.** The goal is to support a pilot study that will help inform subsequent substantive funding applications. The awards:
- Can be used to cover research support.
- Covers direct costs only**,** unless a University of California institution.
- Funds will **not** be awarded for:
  - indirect costs (if a non-University of California institution)
  - tuition fee remission
  - equipment costs above $5,000
  - food or beverage expenses
  - salary or benefits for any study personnel who hold an academic appointment
- Funds must be used to supplement and not supplant existing funding.

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.**
- 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.

In some 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.

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 Supplements in *Pediatrics*;
- Contribute to the AIR-P webinar series; and
- Engage in other Network activities.

STAGE 1: PROJECT OUTLINE
Project outlines must be **submitted by September 7, 2021** 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 Researcher Review Board (ARRB) 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 September 22, 2021 if the project outline has been approved.**

The project outline requires the following information compiled into a single PDF format:
Limited to 2 pages, Single-spaced, times new roman or Arial size 11 font, 1" margins

    a. Project Title;
    b. Abstract (no more than 250 words) detailing your proposed project. Describe the 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.

c. Responses to the following questions (bullet points acceptable):

1. **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?*

2. **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, and dissemination efforts.*

To address these questions, please consider the following resources:

- Dr. Elizabeth Pellicano's article on improving participatory methods in autism research
- Sherry Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation
- Academic Autism Spectrum Partnership in Research and Education (AASPIRE) guidelines for the inclusion of autistic co-researchers and study participants
- *Autism in Adulthood's* guidelines to describe neurodivergent populations and/or populations with disabilities in academic writing
- The AIR-P network's Autistic Researcher Review Board (ARRB) presentation on conducting quality participatory autism research, especially the following sections:
  - ○ **6:15 to 27:20** - Neurodiversity, Language and Models of Disability
  - ○ **27:20 to 34:45** - Perspectives of Autistic Adults on Participatory Autism Research**34:45 to 1:00:04** - AASPIRE Guidelines for the inclusion of autistic adults as collaborators in autism research

Outlines will be reviewed in relation to 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
- ✓ 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 October 22, 2021 via survey**, 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, 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; for secondary data proposals, description of the design, population, and methods of the data source *and* the proposed study;
    g. For secondary data proposals, a detailed analysis plan including exposure and outcome variables, covariates, and analytic methods;
    h. Deliverables, products;
    i. Realistic schedule/timeline for completion;
    j. Demonstrable interest or knowledge on subject, including why the applicant is uniquely suited to carrying out this work;

k. 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

l. If a collaborative project, list of all involved collaborators with email addresses and roles within the project.

m. Specifically detail how this project will lead into the submission of a larger grant application or completion of a larger study.

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. Either (1) a statement describing a plan to include autistic people and other community stakeholders (such as their family members and professionals) as collaborators or co-researchers, e.g., through participatory research or a community advisory board or (2) a statement explaining why this is unnecessary for the project and/or infeasible with available resources. 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. what compensation will be 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.

3. **Biosketches** for all researchers and mentors involved in the research project.

4. **Budget proposal** using the [provided template](#), detailing amount requested and itemized budget and justification for how the amount will be spent. Please also identify sources (confirmed and proposed) of additional funding.

5. **Letter of support from the Project Advisor and Career Mentor**. Letters of support from stakeholders and community partners are also encouraged.

AWARD REQUIREMENTS:
1. **Mid-year report** (due 15 days after halfway point in project period).
2. **Final report** (due 45 days after end of project period).

3. 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.
4. **Plain language promotional summary** is required at the end of the project to be distributed throughout the AIR-P network.

REVIEW CRITERIA
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 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 **September 7, 2021 at 4:00 pm PST**. Invited full applications must be **submitted via survey** by **October 22, 2021 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 Review Board (ARRB), Collaborating Research Entities (CREs) and Research Node leaders will evaluate the full applications. Applicants will be notified of a decision by **December 15, 2021** and funds will be awarded by January 15, 2021.

INFORMATION SESSION
An information session on the application process for the program will be held **Monday, August 23rd, 12-1 pm PST/3-4 pm EST.** The session will include an overview of the application requirements along with a time for Q&A. Sign up for the information session here.

TIMELINE

RFP	Project Outline Due	Project Outline Approval Notification	Full Application Due	Funding Notification	Start of Funding
August 2021	September 7, 2021	September 22, 2021	October 22, 2021	December 15, 2021	January 15, 2022