
AIR-P ANSWER SCHOLARS PROGRAM:

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

Cohort 1 - 2024-2025

The AIR-P ANSWER Scholars Program provides **support and career mentorship for (a) autistic doctoral students** conducting thesis research in any field related to autism and health and well-being and **(b) autistic physicians or other health care professionals (not necessarily enrolled in a degree program)** conducting clinical research related to autism and health. These grants will begin **September 2024** and are to be completed by **August 2025**. Grants are funded by the [Autism Intervention Network on Physical Health \(AIR-P\)](#), which receives funding from the United States federal government.

The **maximum funding available per awardee is \$10,000.00 USD**, which can be applied towards the operating costs of the successful applicant(s)'s research project (**funds awarded are not a scholarship and cannot be used to provide salary/stipend support**). Applications will be evaluated based on the quality and originality of the proposed project, and on the potential of the research to contribute to the health and well-being of autistic people. As part of the ANSWER Scholars program, all successful applicants will take part in additional career development opportunities through AIR-P (including one-on-one mentorship by a more senior-level autistic/neurodivergent researcher). More details can be found below.

Deadline to apply is April 30, 2024

ABOUT AIR-P AND ANSWER:

The [Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health \(AIR-P\)](#) establishes and maintains an interdisciplinary, multicenter research network for scientific collaboration and infrastructure to increase the life expectancy and quality of life for autistic individuals, particularly for underserved and vulnerable populations. The AIR-P aims to support innovative life course intervention research that promotes optimal health and well-being of autistic individuals across the lifespan.

[Autistic and Neurodivergent Scholars Working for Equity in Research \(ANSWER\)](#), recently established as part of the AIR-P network, is a group of autistic and neurodivergent researchers at various points in their careers as academics, lecturers, and consultants. Its mission is to support and empower autistic researchers in their efforts to lead autism research, promote health and well-being for autistic individuals, and build community and collaborations between neurotypes within and beyond the AIR-P Network. This mission recognizes the valuable contributions that autistic researchers can make to advancing our understanding of autism and improving the lives of autistic individuals. It seeks to provide the resources and support needed for autistic researchers to succeed in their work.

DETAILED CALL FOR APPLICATIONS/PROPOSALS

Full Application Deadline (submit all materials): April 30, 2024

The AIR-P seeks applications for the ANSWER Scholars program for the September 2024 – August 2025 project year. **Proposals must address a topic or topics related to autism focused on enhancing the health and well-being of autistic people.**

This award is intended for applicants who identify as autistic/on the autism spectrum and are (a) either current doctoral students OR (b) health care professionals. Non-autistic individuals doing autism research and autistic researchers not in the aforementioned categories who are interested in applying for AIR-P funding should apply for [AIR-P scholars](#) (a separate funding opportunity for early-career researchers) instead. **Autistic researchers may apply for both the ANSWER Scholars program (this program) and AIR-P scholars (the other source of AIR-P research funding), if they meet the criteria to apply for both awards.**

- Please note that *unlike ANSWER Scholars*, AIR-P Scholars requires a “Stage 1 application” to be submitted (due **March 1, 2024**). If you are considering applying for both awards, make sure to meet this Stage 1 deadline for AIR-P Scholars!

GOALS/OBJECTIVES

The goal of the ANSWER Scholars Program is to launch the next generation of autistic researchers seeking to **promote the health and well-being of autistic people across the lifespan**. The program has the following specific objectives:

- To provide funds to support independent research projects related to autism and health/well-being carried out by autistic doctoral students or autistic health care professionals.
 - **These are funds that are primarily meant for conducting preliminary research and data collection, when applicable, or secondary data analysis** (including clinical chart review), especially in areas in need of preliminary research.
- To provide mentorship, training, and professional development for autistic researchers at early stages in their research careers
- To increase the number of autistic researchers within the area of autism and physical health; and
- To foster collaboration between AIR-P/ANSWER members and researchers who have not before had the chance to participate in Network activities.

There has historically been an under-representation of openly autistic researchers within the field of autism research, particularly within areas related to the health/medical care of autistic people. This historical absence of autistic voices from the research process has contributed to existing disconnects between researchers and autistic people whom they seek to serve. To better bridge this gap, AIR-P seeks to support the career development of a greater number of autistic researchers seeking to enter the field of autism research, specifically those who hope to work in areas related to autism and health. By providing financial support to autistic researchers early in their research careers, AIR-P hopes to increase success for individuals whose combination of academic expertise and lived experience can greatly impact the broader field of autism research.

ELIGIBILITY

- **All proposed research projects must be led by an autistic Principal Investigator** (PI; defined in this case as the primary applicant/awardee and the recipient of the ANSWER Scholars funding/career development resources).
 - In the case of an autistic doctoral student or clinician applying for the award, the PI of this grant/application would be considered the student/clinician and *not their research advisor/mentor*.
 - Similarly, a non-autistic graduate student with an autistic doctoral mentor would not be eligible to apply, as the project PI (the graduate student) is not autistic.
 - No formal documentation of the PI's autism diagnosis is required.
 - **As awardees will be publicly listed on the AIR-P website, the PI must be comfortable having their status as an “autistic researcher” publicly known.**
- The PI must meet at least one of the following criteria for the duration of the award:
 - The PI is actively enrolled in a degree-granting research-focused doctoral program (PhD, DSc, DrPH, or equivalent).
 - The PI is a physician or other health care provider (e.g., nurse-practitioner, speech-language pathologist, clinical psychologist, occupational therapist, clinical social worker, etc.) with full and up-to-date licensure/board-certification (medical residents and fellows are eligible to apply as well).
 - The health care provider additionally *does not* hold a full-time *faculty* appointment at an academic medical center, research institute, or hospital in which 50% or more of full-time effort is devoted to research.
- 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).
- PI must have access to IRB and grant 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.
- Individuals from underrepresented gender and racial and ethnic groups, as well as individuals with additional disabilities beyond autism, are particularly encouraged to apply.

RESEARCH SUPPORT

The ANSWER Scholars Program will be awarded for one year with an amount ranging from **\$5,000 to \$10,000 (per award)** for September 2024 – August 2025.

The **program is not intended to provide salary support (including supplemental stipend support)**. The goal is to support a research study that will help inform subsequent substantive research and career development.

Funds **CAN** be used for:

- Reasonable project personnel expenses:
 - Payments to consultants or collaborators for specific project-related tasks
 - Can include hourly costs for student research assistants (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 (including for autistic research assistants) at a **minimum of \$20/hr but not exceeding \$50/hr**
- Select direct cost expenses¹:
 - Software (EHR/EMR, licenses, installation, commercially-available assessments)
 - Medical or scientific equipment under \$5000 per item
 - Technology support
 - Instructional materials
 - Printing costs

Funds **CANNOT** be used for:

- Indirect costs
- Tuition fee remission
- Equipment exceeding \$5,000
- Food or beverage expenses
- Any general salary support or benefits (i.e., FTE, fringe benefits), for the PI or *any* project staff

MENTORSHIP AND TRAINING

This award is intended for researchers early in their careers and have not reached the level of independence to conduct a research study fully on their own. As such, each project will include a **Project Advisor** (selected by the applicant; typically [but not always] a thesis advisor in the case of doctoral students) and a **Career Mentor** (a senior-level neurodivergent researcher assigned by ANSWER to the applicant based on field of study and interests). Both of these individuals will be established autism researchers holding a doctorate (e.g., PhD or MD) or terminal degree in their respective fields.

- The **Project Advisor** will be responsible for providing continuous research support for the conceptualization and actualization of project-related activities.
 - **For student PIs:** If project advisor is not at the same institution as the student, the PI will need to name an “**on-site faculty sponsor**” (preferably the student’s doctoral advisor), who indicates willingness to provide logistical support for the project and assist the PI with interfacing with institutional officials. This individual must provide a letter of support for the application.
- The **Career Mentor** will be responsible for meeting monthly with Scholars to provide crucial career advice and assistance with long-term goals.

All ANSWER Scholars will also be expected to attend a **seminar series (held once every other month)**: “*Current Topics in Autistic Health Research*,” led by the ANSWER Mentorship and Training team.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLISHING AND PRESENTING

Awardees will have the opportunity to:

- Present their findings at the biannual AIR-P Research Days;
- Publish in the AIR-P “Autism and Health Across the Lifespan” *Cureus* Channel;
- Contribute to the AIR-P webinar series; and
- Engage in other Network activities.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

¹ Defined by Health Resources Services Administration, the funding source for AIR-P.

Applicants must **submit a full application by April 30, 2024** [via an online survey](#). The application requires the following information compiled into a single PDF format:

1. **Description of the project**, addressing the following (6-page maximum, single-spaced, Times New Roman or Arial size 11 font, 1" margins, figures/tables included; [NIH formatting guidelines](#) apply, with the exception of margin size).
 - 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: Specify how the proposed project addresses issues related to one or more of the six [AIR-P research nodes](#):
 - i. Primary Care Services and Quality
 - ii. Community-based Lifestyle Interventions
 - iii. Gender, Sexuality, and Reproductive Health
 - iv. Health Systems and Services
 - v. Neurology
 - vi. Genetics
 - e. Clear presentation of the design and methods
 - f. For secondary data proposals (including retrospective chart reviews), description of the design, population, and methods of the data source *and* the proposed study, including exposure and outcome variables, covariates, and analytic methods;
 - g. 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. If there is an issue with your institution's IRB not reviewing an application until funding is approved, please email airp@mednet.ucla.edu to discuss further.
 - h. List of expected 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.
2. **Training Plan** (limited to 2 pages maximum, single-spaced, Times New Roman or Arial size 11 font, 1" margins), including the following:
 - a. Outline specific skills or knowledge the applicant plans to gain from this research, how they plan to gain these skill/knowledge, and how these new skills/knowledge will contribute to their career development
 - b. Training activities outside of the research project itself (e.g., clinical care, coursework, rotations, attending conferences, seminars) that the applicant will engage in during the award period
3. **Ethical considerations statement** (limited to 2 pages maximum, single spaced, Times New Roman or Arial size 11 font, 1" margins), including the following:
 1. 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;

2. 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;
3. 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;
4. 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
5. A plan describing how research findings will be disseminated to the community, and what (if any) methods will be used to make this dissemination process accessible to non-academic audiences.
6. **(Optional) Description of community involvement:** If applicable, provide a statement describing a plan to include additional autistic people and other autism community members (such as family members/caregivers or relevant professionals) as collaborators, co-investigators, or co-researchers, e.g. through participatory research or a community advisory board. If included, please provide the following information:
 - a. How collaborators have been/will be recruited, and what relevant lived expertise will be prioritized;
 - b. What the roles of stakeholders in the project will be;
 - c. What measures will be taken to ensure accessibility so that stakeholders can serve in those roles; and
 - d. The rate of compensation available for stakeholders.
 - e. **Note that although additional community collaborators are not required for the application, well-designed participatory studies (i.e., including lived experience from individuals other than the PI) will be scored more favorably in the application process** (all other things being equal).
3. **Biosketches** for all investigators and mentors involved in the research project. Please refer to the [NIH guidelines](#) for formatting biosketches.
4. **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.
5. **Letter of support from the Project Advisor.** Letters of support from stakeholders and community partners are also encouraged.
 - For student PIs: if project advisor is not a faculty member at the student's institution, a letter of support from a faculty member at their current institution (preferably their doctoral advisor) will be needed to demonstrate an "on-site faculty sponsor" who indicates willingness to provide logistical support for the project and assist the PI with interfacing with institutional officials.
6. **Contract forms:** please submit a [W-9](#) and an [UCLA Pre-Hire Worksheet](#).
 - f. Note that if the PI is already employed at a University of California institution, this can be skipped.

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).
 - a. At the point of the mid-year report, the PI is able to request a no-cost extension to extend the award for an additional one year.
 - b. Directions will be sent out via email 30 days ahead of the deadline.

3. **Final report** (due 45 days after end of project period).
4. Projects that are awarded ANSWER Scholars 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:
 - a. *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. **Plain language promotional summary (1–2 pages or infographic)** is required at the end of the project to be distributed throughout the AIR-P network.
6. **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.
7. **Submission of project materials and data to the AIR-P’s Infrastructure for Collaborative Research (ICR)** at the end of the project period.

REVIEW CRITERIA

Applications will be reviewed by ANSWER leadership and the AIR-P National Coordinating Center with the following evaluation criteria:

- **Significance:** Does this study address an important problem related to the 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? Are the methods innovative?
- **Training Plan:** Has the applicant indicated a desire for a career in autism research and indicated that the proposed project can provide meaningful career development towards this and other relevant goals? Are the skills/knowledge that the applicant hopes to obtain from the project feasible and appropriate? Is the Project Mentor well-suited to carry out any aspects of the training they are involved in?
- **Investigators:** Are the Principal Investigator and project 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 (particularly in the case of an off-site project advisor)?
- **Ethical Issues:** What provisions have been made for protecting human subjects and the safety of the research environments? Is the study design 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)?

- **Bonus points will be awarded for participatory research projects**, which include autistic individuals (other than the PI) and/or other people with lived experience relevant to the project (e.g., family members of autistic people, clinicians serving autistic people) as “community partners” or members of the research team whose designated roles include sharing of their lived experience (other researchers on the team with some sort of lived experience does not necessarily make the research participatory unless there is a plan to leverage that lived experience detailed in the “Community Involvement Statement”).

DEADLINE AND SUBMISSION

Applications must be [submitted through the online 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) and Autistic and Neurodivergent Scholars Working for Equity in Research (ANSWER) committee 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**.