



CANCER PREVENTION & RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE OF TEXAS

# Program Priorities For FY 2024

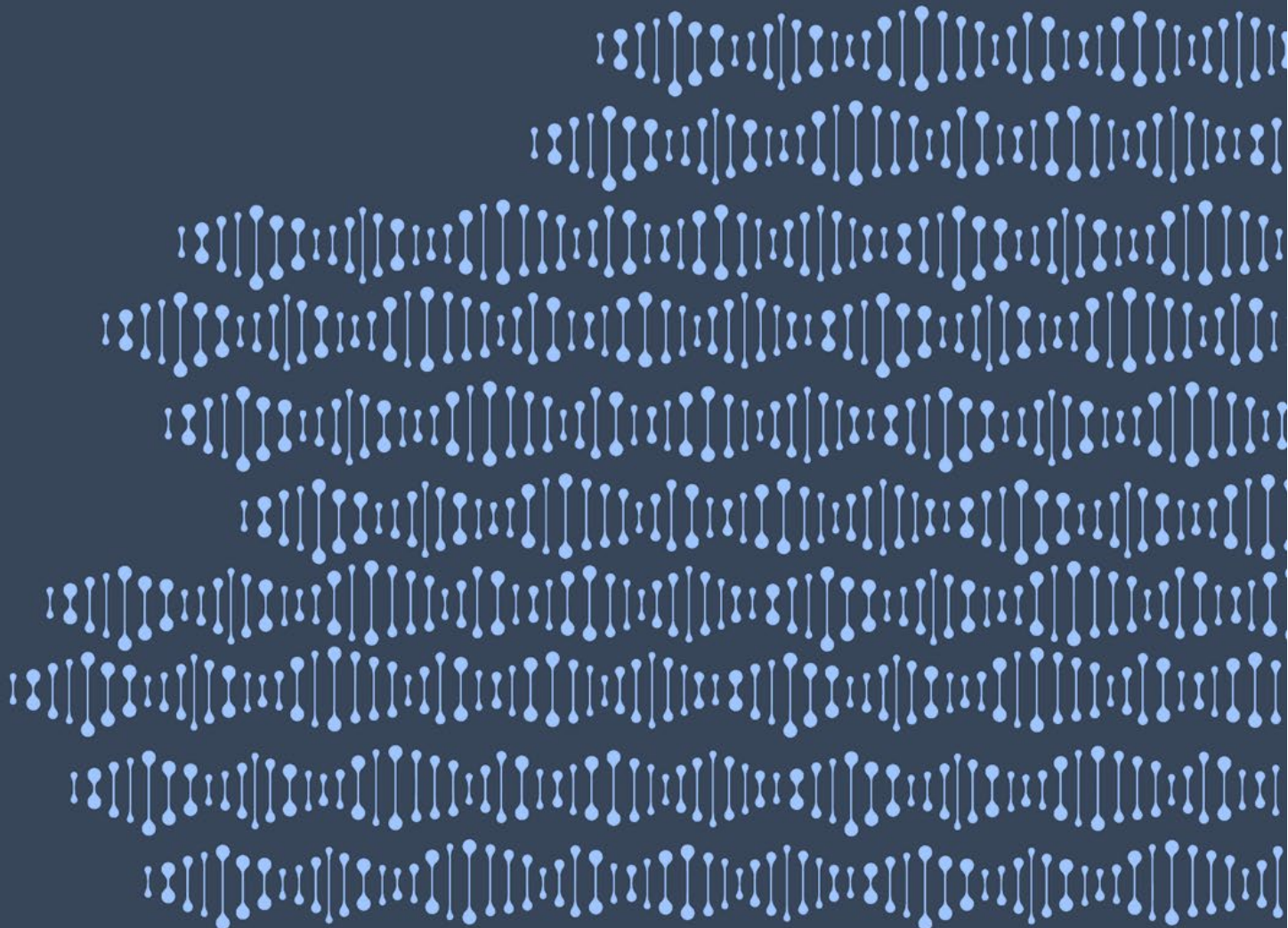




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## ABOUT CPRIT'S PROGRAM PRIORITIES PROJECT

Legislation adopted in 2013 modified CPRIT's governing statute, Texas Health & Safety Code Chapter 102, to include enhancements to the agency's governance and operations. One of the statutory changes adopted in 2013 requires CPRIT's Oversight Committee to establish program priorities on an annual basis. The Oversight Committee uses the priorities to provide transparency in how it directs the orientation of the agency's funding portfolio between and within its three programs as well as guide CPRIT staff and the peer review panels on the development and issuance of program-specific Requests for Applications (RFAs) and the evaluation of applications submitted in response to those RFAs.

The Oversight Committee reviews its priorities annually and adjusts as circumstances change to incorporate the latest information concerning cancer-related advances in prevention, academic research, and product development research.

### CPRIT Purpose

Texas Health & Safety Code, Chapter 102

*Sec. 102.002. PURPOSES. The Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas is established to:*

- (1) create and expedite innovation in the area of cancer research and in enhancing the potential for a medical or scientific breakthrough in the prevention of cancer and cures for cancer;*
- (2) attract, create, or expand research capabilities of public or private institutions of higher education and other public or private entities that will promote a substantial increase in cancer research and in the creation of high-quality new jobs in this state; and*
- (3) develop and implement the Texas Cancer Plan.*

### Program Priorities Legislative Mandate

Texas Health & Safety Code, Chapter 102

*Sec. 102.107. POWERS AND DUTIES. The oversight committee shall:*

- (1) hire a chief executive officer;*
- (2) annually set priorities as prescribed by the legislature for each grant program that receives money under this chapter; and*
- (3) consider the priorities set under Subdivision (2) in awarding grants under this chapter.*

## PROCESS TO DEVELOP PROGRAM PRIORITIES

The Oversight Committee initially approved the program priorities in November 2014 after a six-month process that included public input. The fiscal year 2015 program priorities were subsequently incorporated into the RFAs released by each program. The Oversight Committee continues to annually approve priorities for each program every year, most recently adopting the program priorities for fiscal year 2023 at the November 16, 2021, meeting.

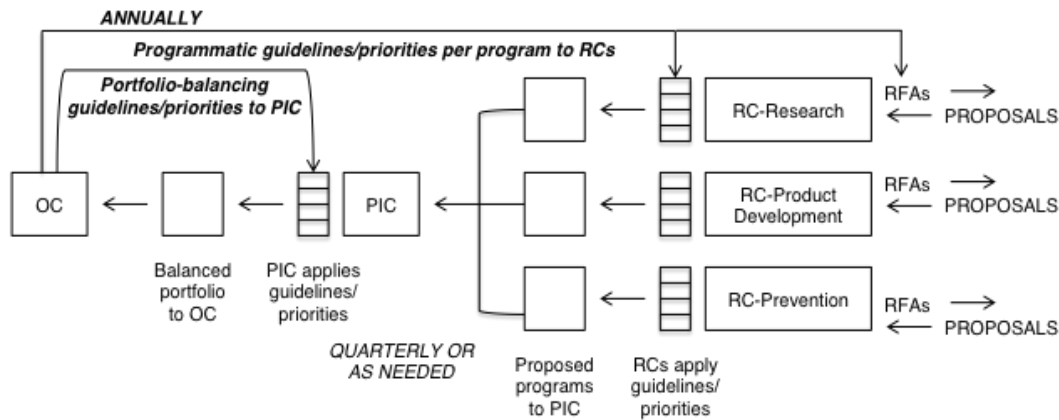


## SCOPE OF PROGRAM PRIORITIES PROJECT

The Program Priorities Project establishes priorities at two levels of CPRIT’s grant making process:

- **Priorities Within Each of CPRIT’s Programs** – priorities to inform staff and respective Peer Review Councils (RCs) on the development and issuance of program-specific Requests for Applications (RFAs) and evaluation of applications submitted in response to those RFAs.
- **Priorities Across CPRIT’s Three Programs** – priorities to inform the Program Integration Committee (PIC) on balancing the portfolio across the academic research, prevention, and product development research programs.

### Priorities and CPRIT’s Grant Making Process



## CPRIT’S LONG TERM VISION

As the Oversight Committee established its program priorities, it began by defining the long-term vision for the agency and each of the three programs in alignment with CPRIT’s mandated purpose.

Innovative projects funded by CPRIT will result in:

- A decrease in the burden of cancer in Texas through preventive measures, new diagnostics and treatments, and effective translation of discoveries into products;
- Informing and reducing disparities in cancer incidence and mortality;
- Significant advancements in the scientific understanding of cancer; and
- An enhanced and expanded life sciences infrastructure in the state because of recruiting researchers, training health care/science professionals, attracting companies and supporting investigator startups.



To accomplish CPRIT's long-term vision, the Oversight Committee has identified these priorities:

- Investing in the cancer research capacity of Texas institutions through recruitment of cancer scholars, investment in core facilities, and investment in individual investigator awards in all regions of the state;
- Building the Texas cancer life science ecosystem across Texas by bridging discovery and translational research into early-stage company products with high impact on cancer patient care and creating economic development for the State of Texas; and
- Increasing the capacity for Texas to have a significant impact on cancer prevention and early detection, ultimately decreasing cancer incidence and mortality.



## PRIORITIES WITHIN EACH OF CPRIT'S PROGRAMS

Priorities within each of CPRIT's programs – academic research, prevention, and product development research– will inform staff and respective peer review councils on the development and issuance of program-specific RFAs and evaluation of applications to those RFAs.

Established key principles essential to executing CPRIT's purpose guide each of CPRIT's three programs. The main principle underlying all three programs is that each will continue to ensure only applications with scientific merit moves forward in CPRIT's peer review grant process. In addition, each program has established unique program principles. The program priorities supplement these principles to guide the selection of meritorious applications to address CPRIT's strategic priorities as set annually by the Oversight Committee.

*It is important to note that these priorities do not exclude funding in areas outside of the identified priorities.*

### Academic Research Program

#### Background

The goal of CPRIT's academic research program is to discover new insights about cancer that can lead to prevention, early detection, and more effective treatments; translate new and existing discoveries into practical advances in cancer diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship; and increase the prominence and stature of Texas in the fight against cancer. CPRIT's strategy is to support the most creative ideas and the most meritorious projects brought forward by the cancer research community in Texas. The overarching principles for awarding CPRIT funds will continue to be scientific excellence, and impact on reducing the burden of cancer across Texas.

In addition, CPRIT's academic research program will seek to fund projects in critical, but underfunded areas of cancer research. Areas of opportunity for strategic deployment of funds include prevention and early detection research; computational oncology and analytic methods; childhood cancers; and intractable cancers with emphasis on population disparities and cancers of significance in Texas such as hepatocellular cancer.

Finally, it is critically important to add to the life sciences infrastructure in the State of Texas. This will enable CPRIT's impact on cancer research to extend for years beyond the lifetime of the program. Most important to increasing infrastructure is the recruitment of preeminent researchers and the investment in core facilities. New researchers will bring additional resources to the State, including research funding and new expertise, as well as help build the critical mass of science needed to attract investments in the development of products for cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. Investments in core facilities will assure that these and other cancer researchers in Texas have access to the most up-to-date technologies needed for cutting-edge cancer research. Also critical are the training programs that aim to produce the next generation of cancer researchers and increase the diversity of the cancer research workforce.



## Established Principles

- Scientific excellence and impact on cancer
- Increasing the life sciences infrastructure in all regions of the state
- Reducing cancer disparities

### Academic Research Program Priorities

- Recruitment of outstanding cancer researchers to Texas
- Investment in core facilities
- A broad range of innovative, investigator-initiated research projects
- Implementation research to accelerate adoption and deployment of evidence-based prevention, early detection, risk assessment and interventions
- Computational oncology and analytic methods
- Childhood and adolescent cancers
- Hepatocellular cancer
- Expand access to innovative clinical trials

## **Prevention Program**

### Background:

The following principles have guided the prevention program since its inception in 2009. These principles have informed the development of the requests for applications (RFAs) and the evaluation of applications submitted in response to the RFAs. Through the prevention program, CPRIT seeks to fund projects that:

- Offer effective prevention interventions based on the existing body of knowledge about and evidence for cancer prevention (“evidence based”); and
- Deliver primary, secondary, or tertiary (includes survivor care) prevention interventions that provide state of the art preventive clinical services and tailored, culturally appropriate, and accurate information to the public and health professionals.

In addition, the program has focused on providing access in all regions of the state to populations with obstacles to cancer prevention, detection, diagnostic testing, treatment, and survivorship services and serving the populations in most need including underinsured and uninsured individuals and those disproportionately affected by cancer.

To achieve some degree of balance in the prevention program portfolio, the Prevention Review Council (PRC) conducts a programmatic review of applications under consideration. During programmatic review, the PRC evaluates applications judged to be meritorious by prevention review panels. Programmatic considerations include:

- Potential for impact;



- Geographic distribution;
- Cancer type; and
- Type of program or service

While these principles provide guidance for the program, identifying priorities based on areas where significant cancer incidence and mortality disparities exist focuses the program further on areas of greatest need and greatest potential for impact.

The prevention program reviews data on cancer incidence, mortality, and disparities (geographic, ethnic, etc.) annually to identify priorities and identify areas of emphasis. This information informs the development of RFAs and informs programmatic decisions during the PRC level of review.

Established Principles:

- Fund evidence-based interventions and their dissemination
- Support the prevention continuum of primary, secondary, and tertiary (includes survivorship)

| Prevention Program Priorities  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Populations disproportionately affected by cancer incidence, mortality, or cancer risk prevalence</li> <li>• Geographic areas of the state disproportionately affected by cancer incidence, mortality, or cancer risk prevalence</li> <li>• Populations with obstacles to cancer prevention, detection, diagnostic testing, treatment, and survivorship services</li> <li>• Program assessment to identify best practices, use as a quality improvement tool, and guide future program direction</li> </ul> |

**Product Development Research Program**

Background

The Product Development Research Program funds the commercial development of novel products in Texas that address unmet cancer diagnosis and treatment needs. CPRIT supports early stage and startup companies that are converting a one-time phenomenon discovered in a laboratory into a safe, reliable, and reproduceable product usable in a clinical setting. CPRIT invests in projects based on comprehensive scientific research developed at companies with strong management and sound business plans that will attract future private investment. These product development investments also stimulate the Texas life sciences ecosystem.

Developing novel cancer treatments, diagnostics, and devices results from a series of research and development activities. As a product moves through the development process, the risk of





failure decreases as the product successfully navigates each step. Clinical research confirms the safety and efficacy of the new therapy on the target patient population.

Companies working with products that are at an earlier development stage (preclinical, Phase I and Phase II clinical trials) are a higher investment risk and have a harder time attracting private capital. CPRIT invests in these early stage companies where private capital is hardest to obtain, typically referred to as the technology “valley of death,” where promising ideas die for lack of funding. Subject matter experts review company proposals to identify the most promising projects. CPRIT’s investment in early stage companies increases the number of cancer therapies in development in Texas, which stimulates the Texas life sciences ecosystem.

CPRIT uses its limited resources to maximize clinical benefits, including curing disease, slowing cancer progression, detecting malignancies earlier, mitigating side effects, and/or reducing cost of care. More scientifically and commercially attractive product development opportunities exist than CPRIT can fund.

### Established Principles

To invest strategically the Product Development Research Program focuses on the funding novel projects, including those that:

- Offer therapeutic or diagnostic benefits not currently available; i.e., disruptive technologies;
- Address large or challenging unmet medical needs;
- Support early stage projects with sound scientific research, strong management and compelling business plans when private capital is most difficult to obtain.

CPRIT’s Product Development Research Program also catalyzes the Texas life science ecosystem by:

- Supporting new company startups in Texas and attracting promising companies to Texas;
- Identifying companies that will recruit staff with life science industry expertise; especially experienced C-level staff to seed clusters of life science expertise at various Texas locations;
- Commercializing technologies developed at Texas institutions; and
- Promoting company formation.



### Product Development Research Program Priorities

- Funding novel projects that offer therapeutic or diagnostic benefits; i.e., disruptive technologies
- Funding projects addressing large or challenging unmet medical needs
- Investing in early stage projects when private capital is least available
- Stimulating commercialization of technologies developed at Texas research entities
- Supporting new company formation in Texas or attracting promising companies to Texas that will recruit staff with life science expertise, especially C-level executives
- Providing appropriate return on Texas taxpayer investment



## PRIORITIES ACROSS CPRIT'S THREE PROGRAMS

Establishing priorities across CPRIT's academic research, prevention and product development research programs will inform the Program Integration Committee (PIC) on balancing the portfolio across the three programs.

CPRIT's structure, which includes programs in academic research, prevention, and product development research, presents a unique opportunity for funding projects that span the continuum from discovery to delivery to the public and creating synergy across the spectrum. While CPRIT programs would continue to fund a broad range of programs and cancer types, selecting areas of emphasis where CPRIT may have an impact distinguishing it from other funding sources provides a basis for focusing resources and guiding decisions for limited resources. The recommended areas of emphasis outlined below also correspond to unmet needs – places in the cancer research and care continuum where existing institutions have not provided strong programs or results.

*It is important to note that these priorities serve as strategic areas of emphasis and do not exclude funding in areas outside of the identified priorities.*

### Prevention and Early Detection Initiatives

#### Rationale

Nowhere is there greater potential to reduce the burden of cancer than by reducing its incidence. This spares people and families from the psychological and emotional trauma of a cancer diagnosis, the often-devastating physical consequences of cancer therapies, and the financial burden associated with cancer treatment. In addition, the current emphasis in cancer research on finding cures for advanced cancers has serious limitations. Thus far, the ability of cancer cells to develop resistance to chemotherapy, radiation, and even targeted therapy has thwarted attempts to control cancer by these treatment modalities. Detecting cancer early in its development is a more desirable approach to cancer control. Despite the potential impact of prevention and early detection on reducing the cancer burden, these areas of cancer research receive little funding relative to funding devoted to curing advanced cancer.

#### Emphasis

Ideally, academic research will create the evidence base for novel approaches to prevention and early detection. Product development research will provide new methods, diagnostics, imaging, or devices, for early cancer detection. The prevention program will implement interventions to put these innovative approaches into practice once a solid evidence base of effectiveness exists.

Strategies include each program issuing either a targeted RFA or listing prevention or early detection as an area of emphasis (among others) within current RFAs. In addition, the programs can explore RFAs that could span programs, e.g. RFAs that would support a research component to a prevention project.



## **Early Translational Research**

### Rationale

One well-documented impediment to bringing the results of basic research to bear on cancer is the shortage of funding to translate new discoveries into practical advances for cancer patients. Funds for research and development are needed between the stages of discovery science, which is funded traditionally by grants from federal sources and foundations, and late term development and commercialization of drugs, devices, diagnostic tests, and biologicals, which is funded often by private sector industries. Data indicate that translational research is underfunded and would benefit from additional investment. Funding such research and development by CPRIT could have the added benefit of stimulating public-private partnerships and bringing new commercial investments to Texas.

### Emphasis

Funding translational research that bridges the gap between basic research and product development, and between research on preventive measures and innovative technologies for early detection and adaptation of tested interventions represents opportunities for inter-program strategic investment by CPRIT. The time needed to move some projects from research to products is often lengthy and may limit the role of the prevention program in this area of emphasis.

## **Enhance Texas' Research Capacity and Life Science Infrastructure**

### Rationale

CPRIT's statute emphasizes enhancing research superiority, increasing applied science and technology research capabilities and increasing high-quality jobs in the state. All three programs contribute to enhancing the research, life science and cancer control workforce and infrastructure across Texas.

### Emphasis

Establishing a critical mass of cancer researchers in Texas is possible by supporting the recruitment of cancer scientists and clinicians, at all career levels, to academic institutions in Texas and through training programs that educate pre- and post-doctoral fellows to become cancer researchers. The recruitment program has been successful in enhancing Texas' cancer research efforts and increasing the external visibility of the state in the medical and scientific communities.

CPRIT's investments in product development help to build Texas' life-science industry. While bringing a product to market takes time, the process generates jobs and economic activity. Every CPRIT award includes intellectual property requirements that specify a revenue return to Texas through the successful development of CPRIT-funded drugs, devices, diagnostics, or services.



The prevention program supports the education and training of health care professionals and community workers, thereby increasing the state’s capacity for cancer prevention and control activities. By requiring collaborative partnerships, the program also creates incentives for organizations and individuals to collaborate to tackle community problems through networks that can mobilize resources and avoid duplication of efforts. Implementing system changes (such as reducing wait times between screening and diagnostics, implementing patient reminder systems) by CPRIT funded programs also improves the infrastructure for the delivery of preventive interventions.

**Summary: Priorities across CPRIT’s Three Programs**

This table illustrates how each of CPRIT’s three programs may implement the recommended areas of emphasis outlined above.

|  | Prevention and Early Detection Initiatives  | Early Translational Research  | Enhance Texas’ Research Capacity and Life Science Infrastructure  |
|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Academic Research Program Implementation</b>            | Create the evidence base for novel approaches to risk assessment, prevention, early detection and interventions that could translate into implementation prevention research. | Fund the continuum of cancer research - population, basic, translational, and clinical research - that could develop new discoveries into practical advances    | Increase the cancer research infrastructure across Texas by investing in researcher recruitment, training grants and core facilities.           |
| <b>Prevention Program Implementation</b>                   | Implement programs that place innovative, evidence-based approaches into practice and continue to fund effective approaches   | Harness emerging technologies that expedite the development of early cancer detection, risk assessment, and interception to implement novel prevention services | Implementing systems change, developing partnerships and collaborations, training of community and healthcare providers, and creating new jobs. |
| <b>Product Development Research Program Implementation</b> | Fund new technologies and methods for early cancer detection and prevention.  | Fund early-stage companies that are bridging the gap between basic research and product development.  | Grow the life sciences industry and infrastructure in Texas while creating new employment opportunities.  |