

For immediate release:

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dsutton@wistar.org**Wistar Institute Scientist Dr. Alex Price Awarded
Prestigious, Early-Career NIH Grant***Grant fuels innovative discoveries advancing foundational immune system functions*

PHILADELPHIA — (APR. 15, 2026) The Wistar Institute, a world leader in cancer, immunology, and infectious disease research, has been awarded a five-year, \$2,532,750 National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) Maximizing Investigators' Research Award (MIRA) to support the research of **Alex Price, Ph.D.** Through this funding, Price investigates how immune cells distinguish “self” from “non-self”—a fundamental process that enables the body to eliminate viruses and other foreign invaders without attacking healthy cells.

“Our cells rapidly detect infection by distinguishing viral RNA from our own through multiple innate immune pathways,” said Price. “This grant supports my lab’s foundational research into the mechanisms of immune sensing, with a focus on RNA structure, RNA-binding proteins, and chemical modifications to RNA. As a virologist, I’m especially interested in how viruses enter cells, hijack cellular machinery, and make their RNA resemble normal cellular RNA.”

Cells can detect viral infections by sensing double-stranded RNA, a molecular signal commonly produced by viruses. However, our own cells also make small amounts of double-stranded RNA, so the immune system must learn to ignore these “self” signals. It does this by paying attention to where RNA is found: sensors that look for viruses operate in the cell’s cytoplasm, while safeguards inside the nucleus help prevent mistaken attacks on the cell’s own RNA.

Price’s research examines how cells strike this balance by studying three factors in immune activation—RNA shape, the proteins that bind to RNA, and small chemical changes made to RNA. Together, these features help the immune system accurately recognize viral infections while avoiding damage to healthy cells.

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The Wistar Institute is an international leader in biomedical research with special expertise in cancer research and vaccine development. Founded in 1892 as the first independent nonprofit biomedical research institute in the United States, Wistar has held the prestigious Cancer Center designation from the National Cancer Institute since 1972. The Institute works actively to ensure that research advances move from the laboratory to the clinic as quickly as possible. wistar.org.



A Cancer Center Designated by the
National Cancer Institute