Transforming human health

Momentous gift from the Blavatnik Family Foundation catalyzes curiosity-driven research and the translation of next-generation precision therapies

$200 million commitment to HMS

“It has long been my goal to support innovative, breakthrough scientific research and to expedite the translation of scientific discovery into treatments and cures to solve the most confounding biomedical challenges. Harvard Medical School, with its unparalleled history of scientific achievement, creativity, and science entrepreneurship, is the ideal partner to further this dream.”

Len Blavatnik, MBA ’89
Founder and Chairman,
Access Industries
Led by HMS Dean George Q. Daley, the Blavatnik Institute at Harvard Medical School is home to world-class faculty who aim to solve the greatest problems of human health through fundamental and translational biomedical science research. The institute reflects the unique identity of the scientific enterprise housed on the HMS Quadrangle, encompassing the School’s 11 academic departments, including the departments of biological chemistry and molecular pharmacology, biomedical informatics, cell biology, genetics, global health and social medicine, health care policy, immunology, microbiology, neurobiology, stem cell and regenerative biology, and systems biology. The institute was named in November 2018 in recognition of a momentous commitment from the Blavatnik Family Foundation to benefit Harvard Medical School.

“The generous gift from Len Blavatnik will open many doors and possibilities. I am especially excited about the new bridges that will form between departments and the new possibilities for using computer science and artificial intelligence to probe the complexities and deep structure of biological systems.”

—Galit Lahav, PhD
Chair, HMS Department of Systems Biology
The gift, the largest in the School’s 236-year history, will help propel the School’s mission of transforming health through curiosity-driven research that stimulates the development of new therapies and tools to diagnose, prevent, and treat disease.

“We are deeply grateful to the Blavatnik Family Foundation—and Len Blavatnik in particular—for the resounding vote of confidence in Harvard Medical School,” said Harvard University President Lawrence S. Bacow, JD ’76, MPP ’76, PhD ’78. “Len is one of this generation’s greatest philanthropists. He understands that great strides in human health comprise many steps taken by many people over long periods of time.”

Biomedicine is at a unique inflection point, marked by a dizzying pace of discovery and rapid proliferation of new technologies. The gift will enable Harvard Medical School to harness unprecedented opportunities for discovery and remove barriers that historically have stymied efforts to expedite the translation of basic insights into promising treatments.

“This tremendous act of generosity will speed progress and generate profound and lasting contributions to science and human health,” Bacow added. “In each aspect of the gift, one recognizes not only a deep commitment to supporting outstanding research, but also a fundamental understanding of and respect for the nature of the scientific enterprise—and the hope it holds for all of humanity.”

Led by business leader and philanthropist Len Blavatnik, MBA ’89, the Blavatnik Family Foundation is well-known for its generous charitable activities that have advanced life-sciences innovation around the world; most notably the Blavatnik Awards for Young Scientists.

“It has long been my goal to support innovative, breakthrough scientific research and to expedite the translation of scientific discovery into treatments and cures,” Blavatnik said. “Harvard Medical School, with its unparalleled history of scientific achievement, creativity, and science entrepreneurship, is the ideal partner to further this dream. I am confident that the School will make the most of this gift to build on its tradition of scientific greatness in the years ahead.”

The overarching goal of the gift is to accelerate the pace of therapeutic discovery by shortening the trajectory between basic discovery and transformation of insights into therapies.

“The work that takes place in the labs and clinics across Harvard Medical School embodies the promise of curiosity-driven fundamental research to solve some of humanity’s most confounding and pressing biomedical challenges. In that sense, this is a gift to medicine and, indeed, to patients everywhere,” said George Q. Daley, AB ’82, MD ’91, PhD, dean of Harvard Medical School.

“This transformational gift will bring us closer to solving the most intractable health challenges of our time,” Daley added. “We are deeply grateful to the Blavatnik Family Foundation for its support.”

In particular, the gift will:

**Support a therapeutics initiative**

This therapeutics initiative will catalyze the development of new treatments as well as train scientists to be more effective contributors to therapeutic translation. A central tenet of the initiative is that effective treatments emanate from deep insights into the fundamental mechanisms of disease that follow from curiosity-driven research, but the current system for translating discovery into therapies must be optimized. To achieve that, the therapeutics initiative will eliminate barriers to therapeutic optimization—common across academia—such as insufficient funding for therapeutic discovery, inadequate support for enabling technologies, and a cultural divide between academic and industry scientists. (Please refer to the callout box on the far right for the new and enhanced technologies this gift will enable.)

**Spark fertile intellectual communities**

Harvard Medical School will enrich its pool of scientific talent by recruiting the most promising bioengineers, physicists, quantitative analysts, and...
computational biologists who have the specialized expertise needed to harness new data-rich technologies to advance biological research, build and manage new core technology facilities, and train fellow scientists. The School will empower its biomedical informatics and data science initiatives to harness advances in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and augmented reality to help scientists generate richer insights into a range of biological phenomena, ranging from the behavior of rogue cells in cancer development to improving diagnosis for mystifying disorders. To that end, HMS will create a new data science core facility that will enable the conceptualization, design, and development of new computational and AI tools and technologies for use by researchers across the Harvard life sciences community.

**Build bridges across disciplines**

Through a robust collaborative-grants program, Harvard Medical School will bring scientists together to solve challenging biomedical problems. The gift will fund promising partnerships among researchers based on the Harvard Medical School campus and at its 15 affiliated teaching hospitals and research institutions. These grants will bring together scientists with a wide range of expertise, skill sets, and disciplines who will work to solve the most confounding biomedical challenges, and also accelerate interdepartmental and cross-institutional research partnerships across the broader biomedical ecosystem.

**Launch the Blavatnik Harvard Life Lab Longwood**

Building on the success of the pioneering Pagiucu Harvard Life Lab in Allston, the Blavatnik Harvard Life Lab Longwood will provide collaborative workspaces for early-stage, high-potential biotech and life sciences start-ups founded by Harvard students, alumni, postdoctoral scholars, and faculty. Situated on the Harvard Medical School campus, in the heart of the Longwood Medical Area, the planned Blavatnik Harvard Life Lab Longwood will foster collaborations with biotech industry experts, academics, and investors. As part of the Harvard Innovation Labs, the new life lab will offer diverse resources, including business building, industry-specific programming, and expert advisors and mentors.

“This gift is going to fuel our drive to the biomedical future we all dream about.”

— Susan Hockfield, PhD  
President Emerita and  
Professor of Neuroscience, MIT
In recognition of this gift, HMS will name the Blavatnik Institute at Harvard Medical School—an umbrella research institute to encompass the School’s 11 academic departments. The institute will recognize the unique identity of the scientific enterprise housed on the HMS Quadrangle, while supporting research infrastructure that will be a magnet for the broader life sciences community, including the 15 Harvard-affiliated teaching hospitals and research institutions, as well as other Harvard schools and peer institutions.

The Blavatnik Family Foundation’s history of support at Harvard originated with a gift that established the Biomedical Accelerator Fund in 2007, followed by a $50 million gift in 2013 that created the Blavatnik Biomedical Accelerator at Harvard University and the Blavatnik Fellowship in Life Science Entrepreneurship at Harvard Business School.

Many Harvard Medical School scientists from a range of disciplines—immunology, genetics, neurobiology, and stem cell biology, among others—have received support from the Blavatnik Biomedical Accelerator to advance translational efforts in areas spanning cancer immunology, regenerative medicine, neuroscience, infectious disease, and reproductive medicine. One of the early recipients of the Blavatnik Award for Young Scientists was Rachel Wilson, AB ’96, PhD, the Martin Family Professor of Basic Research in the Field of Neurobiology at Harvard Medical School.

Rachel Wolfson, Harvard/ MIT MD-PhD Class of 2019, speaks at the symposium about how fortunate she has been at HMS to find “daring mentors who are willing to take a chance on my imagination.”

President Emerita Drew Gilpin Faust, MA, PhD, gives a toast in honor of the Blavatnik Family Foundation at a celebratory, post-symposium luncheon.

Watch a video about HMS’s impact on the world at bit.ly/serving-the-world

“Len’s vision for the future of biomedical innovation is inspiring. His generosity will touch so many lives, especially the patients and families who are the ultimate beneficiaries of Harvard’s work.”

—Drew Gilpin Faust, MA, PhD
President Emerita, Harvard University
Landmark gift

The $200 million commitment to Harvard Medical School from the Blavatnik Family Foundation, announced at a symposium on Nov. 8, will support four key areas:

- A therapeutics initiative to enhance the impact of fundamental curiosity-driven research and catalyze the development of new therapies
- Fertile intellectual communities to integrate data science and artificial intelligence capabilities and applications
- A collaborative-grants program to inspire cross-disciplinary research collaborations across the Harvard life sciences ecosystem
- The Blavatnik Harvard Life Lab Longwood to provide incubator space for early-stage, high-potential biotech start-ups

Read more about the gift at bit.ly/transformational-hms-gift

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