

€10 Million in Grants – Focus on Children’s Physical Activity, Psychiatry, and Cancer Research

The Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation has awarded €9.9 million in grants to 13 projects in the fields of medicine, science, arts, and culture. The announcement coincides with International Foundations Day on October 1, which highlights the role of foundations as contributors to wellbeing in society.

This round of applications was exceptionally strong, with only 10% of applicants receiving funding. The decisions emphasized supporting researchers at different career stages. In medicine, cancer research was particularly prominent, accounting for more than half of the awarded funding. Many projects combine basic, translational, and clinical research with the aim of strengthening research-driven innovation. In arts and culture, the number of applications reached a record high, with many new applicants included.

Unique Psychiatric Research Enabled by Finnish and Swedish Registers

Professor **Jari Tiihonen’s** team received €1 million for a psychiatry project examining the effectiveness of drug treatments and psychotherapy in severe depression and borderline personality disorder. The study is internationally unique in its use of Finland’s and Sweden’s national health registers, which have no equivalent elsewhere. The group aims to identify new, effective medications for mental health disorders and to develop machine-learning models that can predict individual treatment responses. The findings are expected to open new treatment pathways and improve care for people living with severe mental illnesses.

Laying the Groundwork for More Effective Cancer Treatments

Cancer has a profound impact both on individuals and on healthcare systems. Despite major advances in treatment, many challenges remain: tumors can become aggressive and resistant to therapies, and cancer progresses differently in different patients. These uncertainties slow the development of new and more effective treatments.

Associate Professor **Mariike Kuijjer’s** group was awarded €800,000 to develop computational models that map gene regulatory networks in cancer. These models uncover hidden cancer subtypes and cell populations, helping researchers understand why some tumors become aggressive and resistant to treatment. The methods will be applied to Finnish patient data and registry information, while also investigating gene regulation mechanisms behind treatment resistance.

Associate Professor **Heidi Haikala’s** team received €1,119,000 to study why lung cancer treatments lose effectiveness and how the immune system influences disease progression. The multidisciplinary project is creating a novel drug development platform that uses patient samples and advanced technologies, including machine learning. The outcomes could transform cancer drug development, enable more personalized

treatments, improve patient quality of life and survival, reduce development costs, and bring new medicines to patients faster.

Science-Based Solutions to Increase Children's Physical Activity in Schools

Low levels of physical activity among children are an escalating social concern—one that foundations are also working to address. Professor **Timo Jaakkola** and Assistant Professor **Mikko Huhtiniemi's** research group was awarded €1,099,000 for a project that seeks scientifically validated ways to increase physical activity among children and youth in schools. The goal is to build a research-based toolkit for everyday school use and to apply the results in physical education and teacher training. The project has the potential to transform school culture, reshape teacher education, and influence how children move in schools across Finland.

The full list of newly awarded grants is attached to this release and available at www.jaes.fi.

Further information:

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