American College of Neuropsychopharmacology
2025 Early-Stage Inventigator (ESI) Assistance Program Recipients



Nagalakshmi Balasubramanian, Ph.D.
University of Florida

In a few sentences, provide a brief overview of your research, background, and professional work.
I am a molecular neurobiologist with extensive training in epigenetics, systems neuroscience, and translational neurobiology, and I am currently in the final stages of my postdoctoral training. My research focuses on understanding how stress and chronic alcohol exposure accelerate brain aging and increase vulnerability to Alzheimer's disease. My NIH K99/R00 award investigates how acetaldehyde toxicity resulting from chronic alcohol use alters epigenetic and metabolic states in a cell–type–specific and sex-specific manner to drive neurodegenerative processes associated with Alzheimer's pathology. I am committed to building an interdisciplinary research program that bridges stress, alcohol addiction, aging biology, and neurodegeneration, with the broader goal of identifying vulnerable brain regions, stress-sensitive circuits, and molecular pathways that contribute to premature brain aging and Alzheimer's disease risk.

What was your favorite experience at the ACNP Annual Meeting?
One of my favorite aspects of the ACNP Annual Meeting was the opportunity to engage with scientists across different career stages and disciplines in a highly collaborative environment. I especially valued the informal discussions following symposia and poster sessions, where I was able to exchange ideas, receive insightful feedback on my work, and build new professional connections. The meeting provided an inspiring atmosphere that highlighted both scientific innovation and mentorship within the neuropsychopharmacology community.

Explain briefly why others should apply for the Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program?

The Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program is an exceptional opportunity for trainees and junior investigators to become integrated into the ACNP community. Beyond providing financial support to attend the meeting, the program offers invaluable exposure to cutting-edge science, networking opportunities with leaders in the field, and mentorship that can significantly influence career development. For early-career scientists, it is an excellent platform for building collaborations, gaining visibility, and developing a strong sense of belonging within the scientific community.



Tashalee Brown, M.D., Ph.D.
University of California, Los Angeles

In a few sentences, provide a brief overview of your research, background, and professional work.
I am a child and adolescent psychiatrist and a postdoctoral fellow in the UCLA National Clinician Scholars Program. My research examines disparities in access to genetic testing among children with autism and intellectual disabilities, focusing on how Medicaid policy and healthcare systems shape equitable access to precision medicine for underserved populations. More broadly, my work centers on the social determinants of mental health and barriers to mental health care. I completed my MD/PhD at the Tri-Institutional MD-PhD Program and my psychiatry and child and adolescent psychiatry training at Washington University in St. Louis and UCLA.

What was your favorite experience at the ACNP Annual Meeting?
The NPPR Panel on *Child and Adolescent Development and Mental Health* was a highlight for me. The session spanned basic science through digital interventions, and Dr. Rogers' presentation on social determinants of health and early brain development was particularly resonant. Her work on how adverse environments shape neurodevelopment sits at the intersection of the equity questions that motivate my own research. It was great to see child and adolescent psychiatry centered so prominently within ACNP.

Explain briefly why others should apply for the Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program.
This program offers early-career investigators access to a community of scientists during a

critical time in their career development. The financial support, which includes childcare, removes a significant barrier for many at this career stage. The mentorship and scientific relationships that emerge from the meeting can genuinely shape the direction of your work. I especially encourage applicants from underrepresented backgrounds to apply; this kind of investment in your career development and visibility in the field is worth pursuing.



John France, B.S.
University of Minnesota

In a few sentences, provide a brief overview of your research, background, and professional work.
I am a postdoctoral associate at the University of Minnesota's Masonic Institute for the Developing Brain, where I study how excitatory and inhibitory neurotransmission supports cognitive neurodevelopment during adolescence. My research combines multimodal neuroimaging, including functional magnetic resonance spectroscopy, and computational modeling to better understand the neural mechanisms underlying adolescent executive function and psychiatric risk. Ultimately, I aim to establish normative models of adolescent brain development that can be used to understand how childhood trauma shapes risk for psychiatric illness through cognitive brain maturation.

What was your favorite experience at the ACNP Annual Meeting?
My favorite part of the ACNP Annual Meeting was the opportunity to connect with investigators whose work I have followed throughout my training. The Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program made it easy to meet these scientists, receive career advice, and have meaningful discussions about my research. Those conversations provided valuable feedback while expanding my professional network and reinforced my excitement about pursuing an independent research career.

Explain briefly why others should apply for the Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program.
I would strongly encourage other early-stage investigators to apply because the program provides outstanding opportunities for mentorship and networking. Beyond the financial support, the program creates intentional opportunities to connect with leaders in the field, receive constructive feedback, and build relationships that can shape future collaborations and career

development. It is an invaluable experience for anyone pursuing a career in neuropsychopharmacology.



Andrew Gerlach, Ph.D.
University of Pittsburgh

In a few sentences, provide a brief overview of your research, background, and professional work.
I'm an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Bioengineering at the University of Pittsburgh. After completing a PhD in engineering with a focus on computational physics, I switched gears and began applying my technical skills to study the neurobiology of late-life mood and anxiety disorders by using multimodal MRI. My work seeks to elucidate how brain dynamic brain network organization relates to the etiology, treatment response, and recurrence of these disorders. Recently, I've also started exploring the cognitive mechanisms of repetitive negative thinking associated with these disorders using computational models of behavior.

What was your favorite experience at the ACNP Annual Meeting?
My favorite experience at the ACNP Annual Meeting is the same every year: the informal chats with colleagues across the country that help grow my research and build relationships in this amazing community of scientists. Though karaoke is a close second.

Explain briefly why others should apply for the Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program.
Why WOULDN'T anyone (who's eligible) apply for the Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program? Especially in these times, any extra bit of help is so greatly appreciated, and the effort was very minimal.



Sarah Herzog, Ph.D.
Columbia University

In a few sentences, provide a brief overview of your research, background, and professional work.
I am a clinical psychologist and Assistant Professor at Columbia University in the Pathophysiology & Treatment Division. My research focuses on the neurobiology of depression and suicide risk, with an emphasis on emotion regulation, stress, and cognitive processes associated with suicidal behavior. My current NIMH K08 award investigates glutamatergic dysfunction in depression and suicide risk using magnetic resonance spectroscopy (MRS) and ecological momentary assessment. More broadly, I use multimodal approaches including MRS, functional MRI, fNIRS, and ecological momentary assessment to better understand mechanisms underlying suicide risk and treatment response.

What was your favorite experience at the ACNP Annual Meeting?
One of my favorite aspects of the ACNP Annual Meeting is the opportunity to interact with senior researchers in informal social settings (karaoke, happy hours, dinners, etc.), which makes it much easier to have meaningful conversations and build connections across career stages. I also really appreciated the breadth of cutting-edge research represented at poster sessions. It is exciting to see how different groups are using less commonly applied modalities that are relevant to my work, such as functional MRS, and it gives me a broader sense of where the field is moving methodologically.

Explain briefly why others should apply for the Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program.
Meetings like ACNP can genuinely shape the direction of an early career, particularly for researchers working in more specialized or developing methodological areas. For me, attending ACNP has led to valuable mentorship opportunities, invitations for speaking engagements, research collaborations, and candid advice about navigating a career as a woman in science. The assistance program makes it much more feasible for junior investigators to access these experiences rather than missing out because of cost. Given how competitive travel awards can be, it serves as an especially valuable resource for researchers at this stage of their careers.



Ritvij Satodiya, M.D.
LyfeSci Research & Innovation

In a few sentences, provide a brief overview of your research, background, and professional work.
I am a child, adolescent, adult, and forensic psychiatrist with a strong interest in clinical psychopharmacology, psychiatric innovation, and the responsible use of artificial intelligence in mental health care. My current work focuses on developing AI-assisted clinical decision support tools that can help clinicians organize complex psychiatric information, strengthen clinical reasoning, and support more personalized, evidence-informed care. In addition to my clinical and forensic work, I am involved in research and educational initiatives aimed at helping mental health professionals understand how emerging technologies can be safely, ethically, and meaningfully integrated into psychiatric practice.

In addition, my research background includes work in clinical neuroscience, PTSD, schizophrenia, mood disorders, pediatric psychopharmacology, and cannabinoid exposure across development. I currently serve as Medical Director at LyfeSci Research & Innovation and as a study investigator on multiple industry-sponsored psychiatric clinical trials across major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, Alzheimer's disease agitation, and digital therapeutics. I also work as a grant reviewer with PICORI.

What was your favorite experience at the ACNP Annual Meeting?
My favorite part of the ACNP Annual Meeting was the opportunity to be surrounded by investigators, clinicians, and thought leaders who are deeply engaged in advancing the science of psychiatry. The meeting created a unique environment where early-career professionals could learn not only from the formal scientific sessions, but also from informal conversations, mentorship, and networking. I especially valued the chance to see how innovative research ideas evolve into meaningful clinical and translational impact.

Explain briefly why others should apply for the Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program.

I would strongly encourage others to apply for the Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program because it offers much more than financial support to attend the meeting. It provides early-career investigators with access to an exceptional scientific community, meaningful mentorship opportunities, and exposure to cutting-edge work across neuroscience, psychopharmacology, and clinical psychiatry. For someone building a research or academic career, the program can be both validating and motivating, and it helps create connections that may shape future collaborations and professional growth.



Fair Vassoler, Ph.D.
Tufts University

In a few sentences, provide a brief overview of your research, background, and professional work.
I'm an Associate Professor of Comparative Pathobiology at Tufts University's Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, where my lab studies how parental substance use can shape the neurobiology and behavior of future generations. We use rodent models to investigate the epigenetic mechanisms, particularly sperm small non-coding RNAs, through which paternal opioid or stimulant exposure transmits vulnerability to addiction-related behaviors in offspring. My background spans behavioral neuroscience, pharmacology, and epigenetics, and I'm motivated by the possibility that this work could help identify which families may carry heightened vulnerability and ultimately support better counseling and targeted resources for those communities.

What was your favorite experience at the ACNP Annual Meeting?
Honestly, the whole conference was amazing. I loved the symposia, the lunch events, and the keynotes. But my favorite experience was probably the poster sessions because they created space for more in-depth conversations. I left with several new potential collaborations that I'm genuinely excited about.

Explain briefly why others should apply for the Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program?

ACNP is a broad and intellectually rich meeting where basic scientists meet clinical researchers in a truly translational setting. Getting the chance to meet and discuss cutting-edge neuropsychopharmacology research with extraordinary scientists is a truly motivating experience. This program made it possible for me to attend while preserving the resources I need to keep my lab running at this early stage of my career. Beyond the practical support, being part of ACNP means building relationships that last throughout your career. If it weren't for this program, I wouldn't have been able to attend.



Brandi Quintanilla, D.O., M.S.
University of Texas Health Science Center - Houston

In a few sentences, provide a brief overview of your research, background, and professional work.
My research focuses on understanding the role of mitochondrial dysfunction in depression, particularly in people with co-occurring type 2 diabetes. I am using circulating and neuron-derived mitochondrial biomarkers to better understand the biology of depression and identify markers that may help guide more personalized treatments. Clinically, I am an attending psychiatrist at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston and contracted at San Antonio State Hospital, where I care for patients with severe and refractory mental illness. Combining research with clinical practice allows me to stay focused on questions that can ultimately improve patient care.

What was your favorite experience at the ACNP Annual Meeting?
My favorite part of the ACNP Annual Meeting was meeting researchers whose work I've looked up to for years and realizing how genuinely welcoming everyone was. As an early-stage investigator, it was encouraging to have meaningful conversations with senior scientists who were willing to offer advice, feedback, and mentorship. I left feeling inspired, more confident in my research direction, and excited about the future.

Explain briefly why others should apply for the Early-Stage Investigator Assistance Program.

I would absolutely encourage other early-stage investigators to apply. The program made attending ACNP much more accessible, but more importantly, it created opportunities to connect with mentors and other trainees that I probably wouldn't have had otherwise. It made a large meeting feel much less overwhelming, and the relationships and advice I gained have continued to benefit me well beyond the conference.