afar american federation for aging research

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AFAR's FAST Biomarkers Initiative Advances as part of Federal ARPA-H's PROSPR Program

Columbia University-led FAST project will build on AFAR-incubated work to accelerate development of practical biomarkers of aging and healthspan

New York, NY — The American Federation for Aging Research (AFAR) is pleased to announce that **FAST (Finding Aging biomarkers by Searching existing Trials)**—an initiative incubated and launched by AFAR to accelerate the discovery and validation of biomarkers of aging—will advance as part of the recently launched federal **Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health's (ARPA-H) PROactive Solutions for Prolonging Resilience (PROSPR**) program.

Under the guidance of a Scientific Advisory Committee convened by AFAR, FAST began in 2022 to help catalyze and coordinate the development of biomarkers for aging. Biomarkers are measurable biological signals, often from blood, that can indicate how the body is aging and whether an intervention is having an effect. Unlike many disease areas, aging research has lacked widely accepted, validated biomarker endpoints, which forces studies to rely on slow clinical outcomes that can take years to observe.

FAST initially aimed to boost the pace and quality of biomarker development for aging by bringing together investigators, trial resources, and philanthropic partners around an actionable approach: use existing clinical trials and stored samples to identify biomarkers that show measurable change within months and can serve as faster, more informative endpoints for clinical trials.

This first phase of FAST was led by Daniel W. Belsky, PhD (Columbia University); AFAR board member and multiple grantee Nir Barzilai, MD (Albert Einstein College of Medicine); and Mahdi Moqri, PhD (Brigham and Women's Hospital; Harvard Medical School). Jamie Justice, PhD (XPRIZE Foundation; Wake Forest University), co-launched the initiative alongside Dr. Barzilai before Dr. Belsky assumed the leadership role.

Now, through ARPA-H's PROSPR program, FAST will advance with Belsky as the core Principal Investigator, who will build on the scientific and operational foundation established during the phase of FAST that AFAR led for four years.

"AFAR created FAST to address one of the central bottlenecks in geroscience: the lack of widely accepted, validated biomarkers that can make clinical studies of aging-related interventions faster, more practical, and more comparable," notes Dr. Belsky. "FAST was built around a simple idea: we can learn far more quickly by leveraging the wealth of clinical trial data and samples that already exist."

Validated biomarkers of aging could accelerate geroscience by enabling shorter, more informative studies and by improving comparability across trials and cohorts. Dr. Barzilai adds: "With better biomarkers, researchers can move from long, expensive studies to shorter, more informative trials, and more quickly learn which approaches produce measurable biological change in humans. This is an important step toward making aging research more rigorous, efficient, and actionable."

PROSPR is designed to accelerate solutions that extend healthspan—the number of years people spend in good health—by enabling approaches that can measure age-associated outcomes in years rather than decades. As one of multiple PROSPR efforts moving in parallel, the FAST project will analyze data and biospecimens from existing human intervention trials to identify biomarkers that respond early to health-promoting interventions and can serve as practical endpoints for future studies.

Notes Andrew Brack, PhD, Program Manager, ARPA-H: “PROSPR provides an opportunity to accelerate the identification of measurable biological signals that show when interventions are improving aging-related outcomes in humans.”

FAST reflects AFAR’s longstanding role in identifying key scientific bottlenecks, convening stakeholders, and helping launch initiatives that later scale through major public-sector support. Past examples include the New Investigator Awards in Alzheimer’s Disease, initiated by The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation and AFAR in 2007 and later expanded through NIH mechanisms such as the Small Research Grant Program for the Next Generation of Researchers in Alzheimer’s Disease (R03), as well as the Paul B. Beeson Emerging Leaders Career Development Award in Aging (K76), which AFAR helped launch in 1994. “AFAR is proud to see FAST carry forward within ARPA-H’s PROSPR program, and we congratulate the entire team as they enter this next phase,” notes Stephanie Lederman, EdM. “Biomarkers for aging will be a significant catalyst in geroscience, helping move research toward translation and discoveries from the labs into our lives.”

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About AFAR - The American Federation for Aging Research (AFAR) is a national non-profit organization that supports and advances pioneering biomedical research that is revolutionizing how we live healthier and longer. For nearly half a century, AFAR has served as the field’s talent incubator, providing $225,316,000 to 4,539 investigators at research institutions across the country and around the globe to date—and growing. In 2025, AFAR provided approximately $12,816,000 to 79 investigators through a range of programs. A trusted leader and strategist, AFAR also works with public and private funders to steer high-quality grant programs and interdisciplinary research networks. AFAR-funded researchers are finding that modifying basic cellular processes can delay—or even prevent—many chronic diseases, often at the same time. They are discovering that it is never too late—or too early—to improve health. This groundbreaking science is paving the way for innovative new therapies that promise to improve and extend our quality of life—at any age. Learn more at www.afar.org.