



Buzzing with breakthroughs: How Bee Brave transforms donations into action

This year, Bee Brave raised \$201,320, bringing total contributions since 2016 to more than \$1,100,000! This vital funding directly supports groundbreaking breast cancer research in Dr. Matt Steensma's lab at Van Andel Institute.

Thanks to your generosity, this research continues to drive discovery, unlock new insights and lay the groundwork for future treatments. We are honored to be part of this dedicated community united by a shared goal: to build a future where breast cancer is no longer a threat, thanks to the power of science.



Here's a look at the critical research made possible by Bee Brave supporters.

Reversing resistance: Dr. Elizabeth Tovar and Lillian Sauline

An estimated 75% of breast cancers are estrogen receptor positive (ER+), meaning the cancer cells rely on the hormone estrogen to grow and multiply.

Unfortunately, one-third of women with ER+ breast cancer will go on to become resistant to front-line hormone-based therapies. Research Scientist

Dr. Elizabeth Tovar and Ph.D. Student Lillian Sauline are developing new ways to improve treatment response by studying pathways that could predict and prevent resistance.



Modeling cancer: Abigail Godec and Curt Essenburg

Bee Brave funds enabled the Steensma Lab to develop a powerful new model of hereditary breast cancer that recreates how certain breast cancers arise and progress. M.D./Ph.D. Student Abigail Godec and Research Technician Curt Essenburg use this model to study how genetics and environmental factors impact breast cancer risk in young women who have had children. This work is especially important as rates of breast cancer among young women continue to rise.



Investigating a risk gene: Mehrshid Faraji Zonooz

Although changes in the *NF1* gene can significantly increase breast cancer risk, it often is overlooked during breast cancer screening. Ph.D. Student Mehrshid Faraji Zonooz is working to change that by studying how *NF1* influences risk on its own and in tandem with other factors and genetic changes. In the long term, she hopes to inform better, more personalized screening and care.



"From supporting scientists to fueling research projects, Bee Brave has had an immense impact on our breast cancer research. We are endlessly grateful for your generosity, your encouragement and your determination as we collectively pursue breakthroughs that change lives."

Carrie Graveel, Ph.D.
Senior Research Scientist



"Bee Brave's longstanding support ensures we can ask — and answer — important questions about how breast cancer starts and progresses. We are deeply honored to be part of the Bee Brave family. On behalf of all of us in the lab and at VAI, thank you!"

Matt Steensma, M.D.
Associate Professor

