

## Medical research hasn't disappeared. It's gone nonprofit | Opinion

*With Arizona's aging population, medical research is needed more than ever. When federal funding was cut, it was our nonprofit hospitals that stepped up to keep research moving forward.*

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When Jane signed up for a research study to develop tests to diagnose Alzheimer's earlier in the disease, she knew it could be a decade before anyone might benefit.

The reality is the next breakthrough in Alzheimer's treatment requires years of patient follow up before a single symptom appears. It's the kind of slow, costly and uncertain foundational research that makes health innovation possible and fuels America's medical breakthroughs.

Over the past year, federal research funding has declined while private sector investment has concentrated in areas with clear commercial pathways. The result is a widening gap in support for prevention research – the unglamorous, long-term work that creates the foundation for future cures.

### Where is long-term health research being undertaken?

Research to prevent conditions like Alzheimer's, cancer and cardiovascular disease may take decades to show results and doesn't fit neatly into either funding model. But who funds the decade of patient follow-up before symptoms appear? Who develops the diagnostic tools that make early detection possible? Who pursues high-risk studies that might fail but could revolutionize care?

Increasingly, that responsibility falls to nonprofit health systems – organizations with the patience, infrastructure and mission-driven focus to pursue answers that may take 15 or 20 years to emerge. For Arizona, this matters enormously. Our state's rapidly aging population, diverse demographics and growing burden of chronic disease make long-term prevention research essential.

This is where nonprofit health systems like Banner Health provide irreplaceable value. Banner's nonprofit structure allows us to pursue high-risk, long-term prevention studies that lay the groundwork for future breakthroughs. Commercial partners excel at translating discoveries into products, essential work that gets treatments to patients. But when Banner spends a decade following Alzheimer's patients before symptoms appear or developing new diagnostic tools for early detection, that foundational work creates the platform for the next generation of treatments.

Banner manages 1,300 active studies supported by an \$80.5 million research enterprise. In 2025, our research advanced multiple therapies toward FDA approval across Alzheimer's disease, cardiology, and oncology.

### **How have Banner researchers helped find cures?**

The results speak for themselves. Banner researchers in collaboration with our University of Arizona academic partners developed a [falloposcope](#) capable of performing the first reliable early detection test for ovarian cancer, a cancer that is uniformly fatal when diagnosed late. Similarly, Banner doctors were among the first to successfully repair a defect in the mitral valve through a tiny catheter inserted through the skin, a procedure that previously required intensive open-heart surgery.

Most recently, Banner researchers [reported in Nature Medicine](#) that Alzheimer's blood tests can be collected via finger prick at home and mailed to labs, a breakthrough that could help expand access to early detection worldwide. This is prevention research at its most transformative: simple, scalable and years away from profitability.

None of this happened overnight. None of it was guaranteed. That's how science works.

Banner's nonprofit model enables longer-term, higher-risk work that lacks immediate commercial viability but generates breakthrough discoveries. Treatments that might fail, take 15 years to prove or require pivoting based on data aren't judged by profit margins but by their potential to advance medical science and improve patient outcomes.

Banner's research enterprise is part of \$1.1 billion in annual community benefits, supported by diversified funding including NIH grants, philanthropy and industry partnerships. Collaborations with the University of Arizona, Arizona State University and MD Anderson Cancer Center expand expertise and reach, giving Arizona families access to treatments years earlier.

### **How does long-range research keep Arizona healthy?**

This is about Arizona's health. Banner serves communities across the state through dozens of hospitals and hundreds of clinics. When our researchers discover a better way to detect ovarian cancer or treat heart valve disease, that innovation flows directly into the community hospitals where Arizona families receive care. A breakthrough in our Phoenix research lab can reach a patient in rural Payson within months, not years. That's research for communities, not medical journals.

Jane's involvement in Banner research a decade ago now means that a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease will soon be made with a tiny pinprick of blood collected at home instead of a spinal tap in the clinic. That early diagnosis, before severe symptoms appear, will allow clinicians to slow or prevent the debilitating dementia that once seemed inevitable.

That's not luck. That's the long game. That's what happens when mission, not quarterly earnings, drives medical research. That's why nonprofit research matters for Arizona.

*Dr. Corey Casper is chief research officer at Banner Health, leading one of the nation's most comprehensive research enterprises with 1,300 active studies and approximately 400 team members.*