

# AIM | YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH



We AIM to create a world of mentally healthy children.

**On the Cover...  
2020-2021 AIM Ad Contest  
Overall Winner**

Jennifer Kim  
Icon Art & Design Academy, Grade 11

“Archery is a sport I have competed in since 5th grade. I have had a love-hate relationship with this sport. I used to be very fixated on how well I performed, and when I didn’t meet my own expectations, I would be so disappointed in myself – to the point where I would have symptoms of depression. I wanted to represent my mental struggles and the struggles of my peers by symbolizing mental health problems grabbing onto my ankles and stopping my progress in life.”

***“There are people in your life who love you and want to help you! Don’t be afraid to reach out and ask for help when you need it.”***



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**“Together We Are Finding Solutions”**

As I write this, the world is still reeling from the effects of the pandemic, but a global effort of awareness and research has led to a solution: the vaccine. Just as we need the research to find vaccines for Covid-19, we need the research to find better treatments for young people struggling with their mental health. While talking about mental health is important, it is not enough. **We need to find solutions, and to find solutions, we have to fund the science that is so desperately needed.**

This is why I am so proud of the work that AIM is doing. We are now seeing a batch of early funded research studies coming to fruition. In this report, you can read about this research and the promising discoveries that are improving upon current practices to make treatment as effective as possible. Research takes time, but each study is a stepping stone to attaining our vision: a world of mentally healthy children.

To reach more children and families in need, AIM is supporting studies to take treatments virtual through tele-health and digital medicine. Many young people have no access to treatment or are hesitant to go to a medical facility or doctor’s office. By going virtual, more children have access to mental health professionals beyond their community and are also more willing to participate in treatment.

In addition to our research, you can read about how AIM is engaging youth in the conversation around mental health, empowering them to be part of the solutions. We are partnering with other funders and stakeholders in the mental health community, demonstrating AIM’s commitment to being a driving force for innovative research at this critical time.

I am so grateful for the commitment of our researchers and AIM’s Scientific Advisory Board, and the generosity and dedication of our many supporters. Together, they have made AIM’s steps towards finding solutions possible.

Thank you for your much needed support.



*Susan*  
Susan Stilwell  
Chairman, AIM



# Why Invest In Youth Mental Health Research

## Mission

AIM is finding and funding promising youth mental health research that can identify solutions to make a difference in young people's lives, while building a movement devoted to the mental health of children, teens, and young adults.

[AIMymh.org](https://AIMymh.org)

### The Problem:

The Covid-19 pandemic has shined a light on what already was a growing mental health crisis among our youth. Before Covid, more than a quarter of young people were struggling with their mental health, whether it was depression and anxiety, eating disorders, self harm or thoughts of suicide. Stresses brought on by the pandemic have only compounded the crisis. Sadly, the research needed to address this crisis remains chronically underfunded.

### Consider these Statistics:

- More than 50% of children, teens and young adults will experience at least one episode of poor mental health by the age of 25.
- More than 75% of all mental health disorders begin before the age of 25.
- More than 40% of young adults (ages 18-24) reported symptoms of depression, anxiety or trauma related to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

### The AIM Solution:

AIM Youth Mental Health is transforming lives by addressing mental illness where it most often begins – among our youth. AIM supports cutting edge clinical research to develop better treatments and early intervention strategies for children, teens, and young adults struggling with their mental health. We also support innovative approaches to bridge the gap between research (what we know) and practice (what we do) to ensure the most effective solutions are available to youth who need them.

# Research

AIM funds clinical research to find more effective treatments for youth struggling with their mental health. We believe that research is the catalyst for progress in mental healthcare. AIM is not disorder or institution specific, meaning we address all mental disorders in youth, and find the best, cutting-edge research teams and individuals, regardless of where they are based, so we can begin to find real solutions with near term impacts.

*“AIM is uniquely addressing the critical need for clinical research to help children, teens, and young adults with mental disorders in order to generate more effective interventions to help reduce and ultimately prevent their suffering from the disorders and their risk of death by suicide.”*

**-Hilary P. Blumberg**  
AIM Scientific Advisory Board  
Yale School of Medicine

# Scientific Advisory Board

AIM’s world-class Scientific Advisory Board guides our strategic investments in youth mental health research, looking for work with the greatest promise of making a difference now.



**Hilary P. Blumberg**  
Yale  
Mood Disorders



**David M. Clark**  
Oxford  
Panic Disorder, Social Phobia, & PTSD



**Barbara Cornblatt**  
Hofstra New York  
Recognition & Prevention



**W. Edward Craighead**  
Emory  
Depression & Bipolar Disorder



**Kate Fitzgerald**  
University of Michigan  
Pediatric Anxiety, OCD, & Depression



**Adam Gazzaley**  
UCSF  
Digital Medicine & ADHD



**Stephen P. Hinshaw**  
UCSF and UC Berkeley  
Developmental Psychopathology



**Walter H. Kaye**  
UCSD  
Eating Disorders



**Patrick McGorry**  
University of Melbourne  
Access to Treatment



**David J. Miklowitz**  
UCLA  
Bipolar Disorder



**Rinad Beidas**  
University of Pennsylvania  
Implementation Research



**John R. Weisz**  
Harvard  
Anxiety & Depression

# AIM's Research Funding Strategy

## Accelerating the Next Generation of Youth Mental Health Research



**AIM Clinical Science Fellow Grants** are awards to increase and improve clinical research in youth mental health, focusing on new therapies, diagnostic tools, early interventions, and/or new technologies. These post-doctoral fellowships enable recipients to make critical research contributions and obtain faculty roles at world-leading research institutions.

## Addressing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do



The gap between learning effective strategies/interventions and implementing them is far too large. **AIM Venture Grants for Innovative Research** provide seed-funding to pilot test innovative new approaches to youth mental health care to demonstrate feasibility and build the initial evidence needed to attract multi-million dollar grants for large scale trials and clinical implementation. These grants are intended to provide support to researchers at any stage in their career, and not yet supported by the federal government. AIM funds pivotal, innovative research, and encourages collaboration between departments and institutions.

## Inclusiveness and Advocacy in Youth Mental Health Research



The **AIM Ideas Lab** is designed to:

- Engage youth in the mental health conversation,
- Raise awareness of the need for the science to find solutions,
- Include youth with lived experiences in the research strategic decisions,
- Educate youth on evidence-based solutions.

*AIM is not disorder or institution-specific, which means that we fund the search for effective treatments for all mental disorders in youth, and find the best, cutting-edge research teams and individuals, regardless of where they are based.*

Over 25% of youth struggle with their mental health.

Anxiety is the most common emotional problem in children.

AIM is here to help.

Depression ~ Anxiety ~ ADHD

**AIM**  
YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

[aimformentalhealth.org](http://aimformentalhealth.org)

Yvone Cortes

*"Speaking up doesn't mean that you are weak. It means that you are willing to become strong and ask for help. That's what makes people human."*

**-Yvone Cortes - Grade 12**

2019 AIM Ad Contest High School Winner

# Piloting Technical Solutions for Adolescent Mental Health

## Taking Eating Disorder Treatments Virtual

AIM has funded two coordinated telehealth family intervention studies for eating disorders in youth at UCSD and Stanford. The UCSD project focuses on multi-family support for patients in treatment while the Stanford project focuses on the online self-help family interventions for patients/families awaiting treatment. Both projects have common outcome measures to assess feasibility, acceptability, and clinical change.



**Dr. Walter Kaye**  
UCSD

**AIM Investment:** \$70,000

*“The intent of this proposal is to extend our evidence-based treatments using telemedicine to people in their homes. Moreover, we are incorporating new approaches that may result in more successful outcomes.” –Dr. Kaye*



**Dr. James Lock**  
Stanford University

**AIM Investment:** \$50,000

*“With the pandemic we have seen a spike in eating disorders in youth, and the gap between availability of therapeutic resources and need, which was already large and has become a chasm. While it is evident that we need to increase the overall clinical workforce to treat youth with eating disorders, we also need to provide help to those who are waiting for care. This study funded by AIM will allow us to begin to address this growing need through developing and evaluating online self-help strategies for parents who need help while they are waiting for care.” –Dr. Lock.*

# AIM Research Updates

## Finding Hope for Preschoolers with Anxiety and OCD



**Dr. Katy Fitzgerald**  
University of Michigan

**AIM Investment:** \$250,000

What if kids could be inoculated against anxiety? AIM researcher and Scientific Advisory Board member, Dr. Katy Fitzgerald, at the University of Michigan, is researching this very question and making headway. By discovering the neural markers for anxiety in very young children, she has found ways to train their brains for greater resiliency. Because of AIM’s early seed funding of Kate’s research, the program has now received nearly \$3M from the NIMH to expand.

*“We hope our work will show that childhood anxiety is not inevitable, but might be prevented with the right intervention,” says Fitzgerald. “So far, it’s looking promising.”*

## Helping Adolescents with Attention Difficulties in Monterey County



**Dr. Courtney Gallen**  
UCSF

**Mentor:** Dr. Adam Gazzaley  
**AIM Investment:** \$45,680  
Pilot Study

AIM funded research is examining how a kid-friendly focused meditation training can potentially improve cognitive functions in children and adolescents, specifically with attention difficulties. This novel training was developed at Neuroscape Center at UCSF and developed for 12-16-year-olds, with kids as young as 8 years-old capable of playing the game. The game gets harder over time and is played by the participating kids 30 times over 6 weeks.

*“AIM is positioning itself to help with the critical and growing crisis in addressing challenges of attention and emotional regulation experienced by our children. The need is great and this could not happen soon enough from my perspective.” Dr. Adam Gazzaley, UCSF*



**Dr. Barbara Cornblatt**  
Northshore, LIJ School  
of Medicine  
**AIM Investment: \$60,000**  
Pilot Study 2019-2020

## Helping Teens at High Risk for Developing Serious Mental Illness

Severe anxiety fills you with fear and dread. It makes you doubt yourself. It seeps into the dark nooks and crannies of your psyche to feed you intrusive thoughts that make you worry you are losing your mind.

Most often, the first instances of anxiety will occur in someone's life around the ages of 18-24 - the college years. While the first semester of college represents a societal narrative of newfound freedom, for others, it marks the terrifying beginnings of not beginning to trust yourself.

For Sarah, a 17-year old residing in New York, her first semester of college marked a time of such severe anxiety that she began missing classes out of fear that she would have an anxiety attack during a lecture. Yet, as she withdrew from class and isolated herself, her fears intensified thus creating the likelihood that those attacks would indeed occur. She began to experience anxiety attacks regularly. In fact, her anxiety became so paralyzing, she dropped out within that first semester.

Dropping out of college only increased Sarah's already debilitating anxiety, adding to her list of worries that if her mental health continued this way, she could develop more serious symptoms like psychosis. According to the NIMH, an estimated 32% of youth have an anxiety disorder, with 8.3% having severe impairment. Sarah is part of that 8.3% - with anxiety so severe she is high-risk for developing psychosis or schizophrenia later in life.

Motivated to manage her anxiety, Sarah joined over 800 young people between the ages of 12-22 in participating in the New York-based **Recognition and Prevention (RAP) program**, where AIM-funded researcher and director of the RAP program, Dr. Barbara Cornblatt, is working to determine the predictors of serious mental illnesses (like psychosis and schizophrenia) and prevent their development earlier on.

Programs like Dr. Cornblatt's are some of the most important research being done. Early Intervention treatments like the RAP program approach mental health as a help-first system, in order to engage individuals - to arm them with the tools, techniques, and the language to understand their mental health - before the development of serious mental illness.

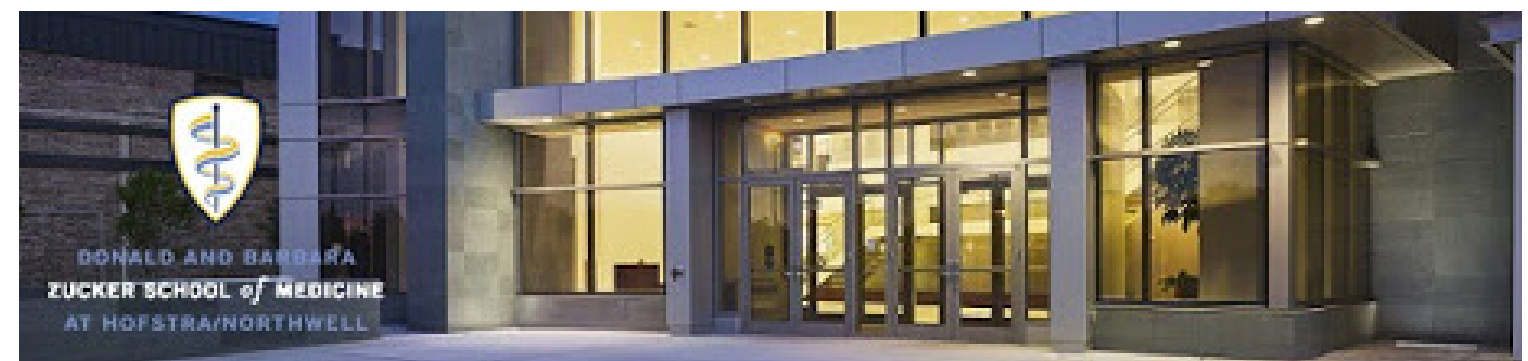
Dr. Cornblatt's RAP program has been a leader in prevention research for twenty years. However, despite the research's long standing significance, funding still remains scarce as a result of the stigma surrounding mental health. Dr. Cornblatt shares, "as we were on the brink of a new prevention study [the very study Sarah was enrolled in], gaps in funding forced our research program to come to a halt. **But AIM stepped in and saved the day!**" As a result of AIM's emergency funding, the RAP program was able to move forward and put those twenty years of findings to good immediate use. **It is expected that from this research, Dr. Cornblatt can establish a fully automated platform to deliver an intervention package to youth struggling with severe mental health challenges. This would allow for at-risk youth across the nation to lower their vulnerability to developing a serious mental illness later in life.**

Reflecting on the program, Sarah shares, "It was very beneficial for my overall thinking, reaction skills, and other facets of daily life. How I react in other situations and how I make decisions in situations. I'm more considerate now...I consider other options, perspectives, and think more critically...and have a bigger picture mindset, I believe."

As a result of RAP's continuous programming, Sarah was able to learn tools to manage her anxiety. She approached RAP's brain training tasks not only as a distraction, but also as a proactive tool to strengthen her cognitive abilities and rebuild her confidence. With these improvements and the knowledge of how to work on herself moving forward, Sarah lowered her risk for developing psychosis later in life. She opened the door to her education again. She now has a hopeful glimpse into all her future has in store for her.

**"We now have great expectations that we will contribute substantially to an understanding of the causes of [serious mental illness] and to preventive treatment in at-risk teens as a result of AIM support at just the right time,"** says Dr. Cornblatt. "It is likely from this pilot study that Sarah and many other youths will benefit from a longer-term intervention of this kind."

*\*Dr. Barbara Cornblatt is a member of AIM's esteemed Scientific Advisory Board.*



# Accelerating Science through AIM Clinical Science Fellows

## Regulating Daily Rhythms in Adolescents with Bipolar Disorder To Prevent Suicidal Ideation



**Dr. Anjali Sankar**  
Yale  
**\$64,000 Clinical Science Fellow**  
2018–2019

AIM Clinical Science Fellow, Dr. Anjali Sankar of Yale University, works with adolescents and young adults with a diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder to help regulate their daily rhythms. This is very important to avoid a disruption in moods which can contribute to suicidal ideation.

*"We saw a significant decrease in suicidal thoughts and behaviors through weekly assessments of mood and standardized scales to look at any changes in a propensity for suicide. There are not many interventions that target this for adolescents and young adults."*

## Working with Kids with irritability and Monitoring for Anxiety and Depression



**Dr. Spencer Evans**  
Harvard  
**\$65,580 Clinical Science Fellow**  
2018–2020

AIM Clinical Science Fellow, Dr. Spencer C. Evans of Harvard, found links between irritability and aggressive behavior in children and adolescents.

*"When kids are acting out or in a way we consider disruptive, there's a variety of ways in which that behavior might appear. We can tell if they are behaving in a way that may put them at risk for anxiety and depression. It's important to recognize this because a lot of times our rules and policies are around dealing with the disruption [but not the underlying cause]."*

## Stress, Anxiety and Parental Influences Shape Youth's Relationships with Food



**Dr. Joya Hampton-Anderson**  
Emory  
**\$50,417 Clinical Science Fellow**  
2019–2020

Dr. Joya Hampton-Anderson of Emory takes on more than research and mental illness predictors by focusing on social influences such as race and socio-economic backgrounds. It is noted that the youth in this study are individuals who were unlikely to afford or receive treatment without this program, allowing for wider reaching therapies for underserved communities.

*"I appreciate the AIM Clinical Science Fellowship for supporting an underrepresented clinical scientist in serving minority youth in ways that will enhance mental wellness and their ability to thrive in the face of adversity."*

Not only is Dr. Hampton-Anderson's work taking on underserved groups of youth, it is making real change in the lives of the participants. This change speaks to the need for further funding of support for youth facing mental health issues.

## Using Mentors and Technology Interventions for Youth Struggling with Anxiety



**Dr. Alexandra Werntz**  
University of Virginia  
**\$50,000 Clinical Science Fellow**  
2020–2021

As an AIM Clinical Science Fellow, Dr. Werntz is developing and evaluating a technology-delivered intervention for youth struggling with anxiety. The goal is to create a free, easy-to-access intervention for diverse youth struggling with anxious thinking. Dr. Werntz's position is jointly hosted by the University of Massachusetts Boston, where she is working with the Center for Evidence-based Mentoring and MentorHub, to understand how mentors can provide support for youth in their use of evidence-based mental health applications. MentorHub has been adopted by several schools as well as the nation's largest mentoring programs (Big Brothers Big Sisters, Friends of the Children, My Brother's Keeper) and has over 70 programs waiting to onboard.

For more updates on AIM-funded research and for information about our Postdoctoral Fellows, visit [AIMymh.org/research](https://AIMymh.org/research).





**Dr. Marc Weintraub**  
UCLA  
**\$135,000 Grant**  
2018–2019

## Helping Teens with Severe Depression, Bipolar Disorder, and Psychosis Find New Ways of Interacting with the World

Psychosis is typically misunderstood and is often conventionalized as a worsening of social anxiety. And it may seem that way... at the beginning.

Psychosis is a symptom – not a diagnosis – in the context of mood disorders. Bipolar disorder and depression can both have psychotic features, but symptoms of psychosis can exist without meeting the criteria to be diagnosed with a disorder. Someone who experiences psychosis may have started by feeling nervous about what other people are thinking about them. Over time, those feelings can start to worsen, and the initial social anxieties morph into substantial fear.

For Miranda, psychosis meant feeling suspicious of other people's intentions and fearing for her safety. At first, when Miranda was just 13 years old, she began experiencing extreme depression and crippling anxiety. Over the next four years, while her parents frantically searched for answers, her challenges with her mental health grew worse.



By age 17, Miranda had developed severe psychosis. She wondered whether people might want to harm her and started experiencing intrusive thoughts and fears of an animal attack. Miranda described seeing things that weren't there. She saw shadows and dots and heard whispers.

With the development of severe social anxiety and psychosis, Miranda dropped out of high school to be homeschooled. Her parents were still looking for answers. She needed more than regular talk therapy – she needed to learn specific skills that could help her in her struggle to determine what was reality and what was psychosis. She wasn't taught these tools in school. Her teachers didn't teach her to look out for initial warning signs of psychosis in class; they were busy lecturing on English, Math, and History. Where could she go? Who could she turn to?

To their luck, Miranda's parents discovered a nine-week, AIM-funded, UCLA group-based treatment that utilizes cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for adolescents experiencing or at-risk for severe depression, bipolar disorder and psychosis. Led by AIM-funded postdoctoral fellow, Dr. Marc Weintraub, the study utilized a skills-based approach that teaches adolescents strategies to better cope with stressful thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Along with 29 other adolescents and their families, Miranda began participating in group sessions to learn these strategies she so desperately needed.

"We take small steps," explains Dr. Weintraub, "First, we have the participants notice their thoughts and pay attention to them... If they are anxious about something, whatever it may be, we slowly modify the thoughts, so they don't fall into thinking traps. We can ask: are you 100% sure [about your negative thought] or is there, perhaps, a 1% possibility that it's going to be okay?"

Throughout her nine weeks in groups, Miranda learned skills about recognizing and communicating her emotions, monitoring her thoughts and behaviors, and how to identify thinking traps that are unhelpful. She wasn't alone. In fact, **the initial data from this program showed an improvement in emotional regulation and functioning across a variety of domains for all 30 youth participants.** There were improvements in academic functioning, peer and social functioning, and reductions in psychiatric symptoms. These improvements were amplified for the teens who practiced the skills more. The goal was to learn to manage symptoms as an adolescent, so they never reach the threshold for these disorders as they get older. Thanks to this intervention, Miranda learned those skills and continues to practice them with her family today.

"I feel Dr. Weintraub's work reduced my daughter's symptoms. It made me happy because the lightbulb went on to realize the type of therapy that we needed. The materials in our folder from UCLA felt like treasure and gave us answers. Even if some of it is basic information, when you are in the midst of trying to help somebody, it's the golden ticket," shares Miranda's mom. **"After four and a half years, we hadn't gotten any of this from the doctors and therapists we had seen. The nine week UCLA program went by in a blink of an eye. None of us wanted it to end. But now I can see there's more out there for us – there is hope for us and for Miranda."**

*Following the initial piloting of this treatment, Dr. Weintraub and his team are developing a mobile application (app) that will serve as an adjunct to the treatment. The mobile app will include session-by-session content, interactive skill practice, and mood/emotion monitoring. Dr. Weintraub will be testing whether this app-assisted treatment can increase adolescents' engagement in treatment and improve their clinical and functional outcomes.*



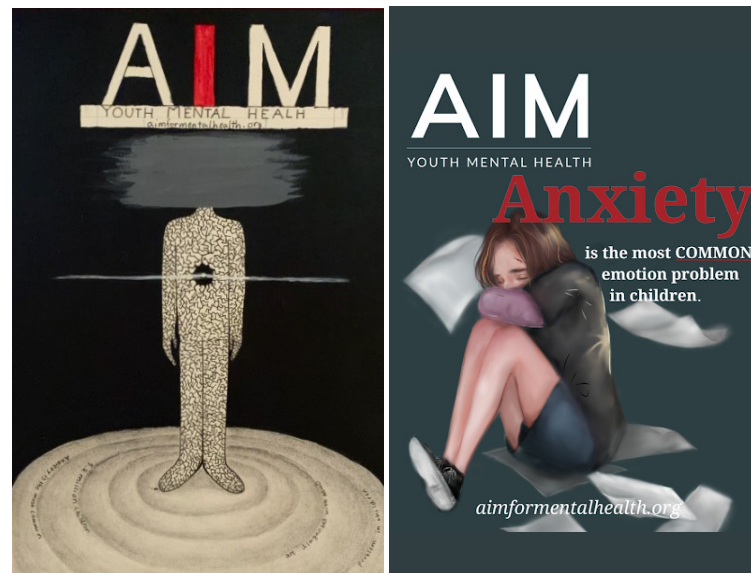
# AIM for Awareness Events

## AIM For Awareness Walk & Rally

AIM's Walk for Awareness in Pacific Grove, CA exhibited fun and interactive ways for the community to get involved in better understanding youth mental health and the need for further research. The walk engaged hundreds of children and their families with dynamic speakers, entertainment, and a fair of mental health service organizations.



## AIM for Awareness Ad Contest



More than 400 middle school and high school students from Monterey County participated in AIM's 3rd Annual Ad Contest, calling for creation of artistic ads to help raise awareness for youth mental health. All entries were showcased during two exhibitions, with winners being honored at these community inclusive events.

Left: Overall Winner, Ceora Minor-Arredondo - Grade 11  
 Right: Overall Middle School Winner, Lily Zhai - Grade 8

# Gala



## Pebble Beach Gala August 2019

AIM's Annual Gala raised more than \$800,000 for youth mental health research and awareness. A highlight of the evening was hearing from an 18 year old participant of a UCLA AIM-funded study who spoke about her life-changing experience because of the Child and Adolescent Mood Disorder (CHAMP) Program.



## 2020 Virtual Gala August 2020

In 2020, AIM was excited to convene our enduring supporters and new friends at our first-ever virtual gala.

Co-hosted by Emmy Award Winning TV personality, Liam Mayclem, and San Francisco 49er's Legend, Dennis Brown, the virtual experience provided attendees with a dynamic and inspiring program highlighting AIM's impact and our next phase of investments in research.



# Scientific Symposium

## Scientific Symposium

In May, 2019 the AIM Scientific Advisory Board as well as other key mental health professionals convened on the Monterey Peninsula, CA for a two day retreat to strategize research funding in a think-tank setting. The retreat was followed by the inaugural AIM Youth Mental Health Scientific Symposium. The symposium, featuring presentations from five of the top doctors in youth mental health, highlighted the latest advancements in research and treatment in areas of anxiety, bipolar disorder, depression, eating disorders, and OCD.



## Symposium Presentations

### Eating Disorders: Insights into Choosing Effective Treatments

Walter H. Kaye | UCSD

### Social Anxiety: Promising Therapies

David M. Clark | Oxford

### Adolescent Depression: Prevention and Treatment

W. Edward Craighead | Emory

### Childhood Anxiety and OCD: Does Early Intervention Work?

Kate Fitzgerald | Michigan

### Bipolar Disorder in Teens: Coping Tips for Families

David Miklowitz | UCLA



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