

Brazilian Founder of Cancer Research Initiative Named Advocacy Leader of the Year in Washington

Fernando Goldsztein founded MBI after doctors told him there were no further treatment options for his son's brain tumor.



By the Editorial Staff
EXAME Editorial Staff

Published on September 24, 2026, at 5:17 p.m.
Last updated on September 24, 2026, at 5:39 p.m.

Brazilian entrepreneur **Fernando Goldsztein** founder of the **Medulloblastoma Initiative (MBI)** received the **Advocacy Leader of the Year** award this Thursday from the Washington Business Journal, the leading business publication in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The award is part of the 2026 Innovators in Healthcare program, which honors 12 healthcare leaders in the Washington metropolitan area who are working to address the sector's major clinical and business challenges. The award ceremony takes place at a luncheon at the Ritz-Carlton in Tysons Corner, Virginia.

The honorees were selected by the newspaper's editorial staff based on community nominations and recommendations from its editorial team. According to the publication, the program is strictly editorial and does not charge an entry fee. The Advocacy Leader category recognizes individuals working to advance regulatory or legislative changes, or to raise awareness, in order to improve healthcare.

"Being named Advocacy Leader of the Year by the Washington Business Journal is a deeply meaningful honor. This recognition reinforces our determination to continue this work alongside our scientists, partners, and donors," Goldsztein says. "None of this would have been possible without Dr. Roger Packer's extraordinary leadership and scientific expertise, or without the partnership we have built with Children's National."

From Relapse to an International Research Network

In 2015, at age nine, Fernando's son Frederico was diagnosed with medulloblastoma, one of the main types of malignant brain tumors in children. Four years later, in 2019, the disease returned, and doctors told the family that few treatment options were available. That experience led Goldsztein to question how quickly new treatment options were reaching children with brain tumors. Despite advances in science and technology over recent decades, the protocols used to treat medulloblastoma still date back to the 1980s. Beyond the challenges posed by the disease itself, treatments can leave survivors with long-term side effects.

During his son's treatment, **Goldsztein** met Dr. Roger J. Packer, one of the world's leading experts in pediatric neuro-oncology and director of the Brain Tumor Institute at Children's National Hospital in Washington. Goldsztein asked him a simple question: Could research move faster? That question led to the creation of the Medulloblastoma Initiative in 2021.

MBI is built around three principles: urgency, focus, and collaboration. **The initiative brings researchers from different institutions together** around a shared strategy, with data sharing, a division of responsibilities, and integration across research teams.

The goal is to concentrate efforts on a single disease and reduce research fragmentation. Rather than working in isolation, laboratories collaborate to advance different stages of developing new therapies.

The results came quickly. In five years, MBI has raised \$11 million and connected 16 laboratories across the United States, Canada, and Europe. Two clinical trials have already been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and two more are expected to be submitted in 2026. One laboratory in the consortium is already testing an immunotherapy in patients that directs the body's immune system against tumor cells. Another is developing a messenger RNA vaccine against medulloblastoma, using the same platform employed in COVID-19 vaccines.

A Rare and Underfunded Cancer

An estimated 15,000 to 20,000 children worldwide are diagnosed with medulloblastoma each year. In 20% to 25% of cases, the tumor resists treatment, and there is no established protocol for relapse. Pediatric cancer as a whole receives approximately 4% of cancer research funding in the United States, according to the National Cancer Institute. Because the patient population is small, the potential commercial return is also limited, discouraging industry investment.

"It's not a question of if, but when we will find a cure," Goldsztein often says. He believes MBI's model can be replicated for other rare diseases. In other words, there is a faster, more collaborative way to fund and advance medical research.