

MAP4K1 inhibition enhances immune cell activation and anti-tumor immunity in preclinical tumor models

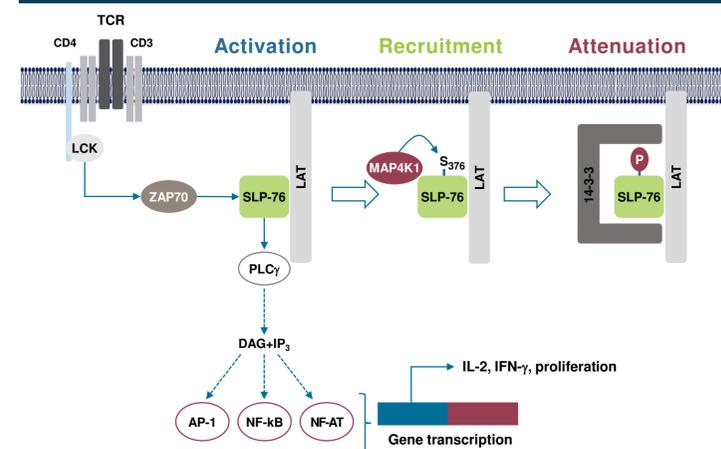
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Background

- Hematopoietic progenitor kinase 1 (HPK1, MAP4K1) is a serine/threonine (SER/THR) kinase that has been demonstrated to have suppressive effects across a range of immune cells, including T cells and dendritic cells¹⁻³
- Loss of MAP4K1 kinase activity alone, and in combination with checkpoint inhibition, is sufficient to enhance T cell receptor (TCR) signaling, resulting in robust anti-tumor immunity, and therefore supporting MAP4K1 as a novel and high priority target for cancer immunotherapy¹⁻³
- The MAP4K family and closely related kinases in the STE20 family have been elusive drug targets despite interest in the biology of this family for cancer and autoimmune diseases⁴
- We have designed a set of potent, selective, and orally bioavailable inhibitors of MAP4K1 (BLU2069, BLU6348, and clinical candidate BLU-852)

Figure 1: MAP4K1 is a negative regulator of T cell function¹⁻³



AP-1, activator protein-1; CD, cluster of differentiation; DAG, diacylglycerol; IFN-γ, interferon gamma; IL, interleukin; IP₃, inositol 1,4,5-trisphosphate; LAT, linker for activation of T cells; LCK, lymphocyte-specific protein tyrosine kinase; MAP4K1, hematopoietic progenitor kinase 1; NF-AT, nuclear factor of activated T cells; NF-κB, nuclear factor kappa B; P, phosphorylation; PLCγ, phospholipase C gamma; S₃₇₆, phospho-S376; SLP-76, SH2 domain-containing leukocyte protein of 76 kDa; ZAP70, zeta-chain-associated protein kinase 70.

- MAP4K1 is a SER/THR kinase selectively expressed in dendritic cells, T cells, and B cells, that acts as a negative regulator of the TCR and B cell receptor signaling, and dendritic cell maturation
- MAP4K1 knock-out or kinase dead knock-in mice exhibit enhanced tumor immunity^{3,5}

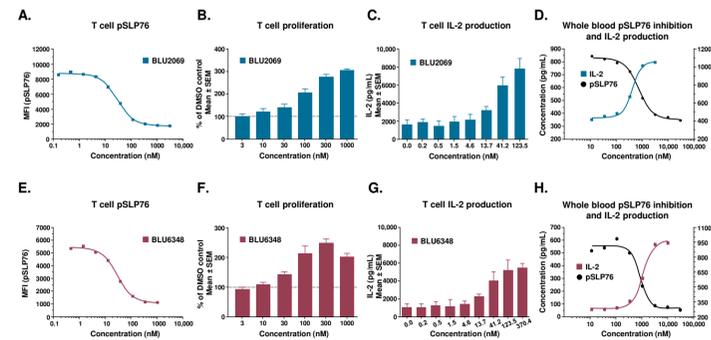
Results

Table 1: BLU2069, BLU6348, and BLU-852 are cell active subnanomolar MAP4K1 inhibitors selective against key off-targets and the kinome

Compound	Enzyme activities IC ₅₀ (nM)			Cell activity IC ₅₀ or EC ₅₀ (nM)			Whole blood activity IC ₅₀ or EC ₅₀ (nM)		Selectivity % kinome >100x
	MAP4K1	LCK	MAP4K4	pSLP76 ^a	IL-2 ^b	pSLP76 ^a	IL-2 ^b		
BLU2069	0.17	19	45	29	16	615	517	95	
BLU6348	0.13	78	73	27	11	1033	1194	96	
BLU-852	0.11	502	1196	40	11	851	1240	97	

^aIC₅₀ values; ^bEC₅₀ values. IC₅₀, half-maximal inhibitory concentration; EC₅₀, half-maximal effective concentration.

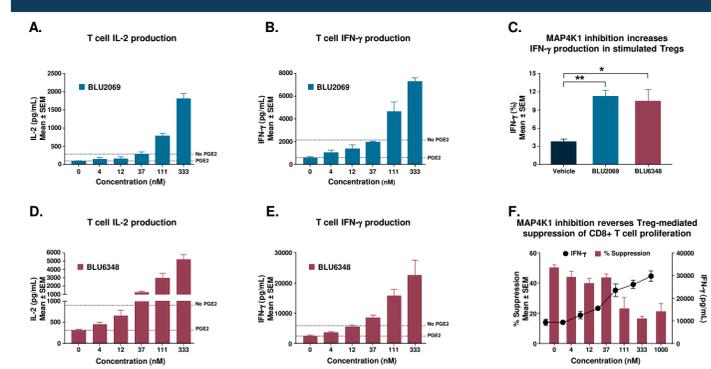
Figure 2: BLU2069 and BLU6348 inhibit TCR-stimulated pSLP76 induction and further enhance human T cell proliferation and IL-2 production



Human CD3+ T cells were stimulated with anti-CD3 and anti-CD28, and the impact of MAP4K1 inhibition with either (top row) BLU2069 or (bottom row) BLU6348 on (A and E) pSLP76 inhibition, (B and F) T cell proliferation, and (C and G) IL-2 production was measured by flow cytometry and MSD-ECL. (D and H) The impact of both compounds on pSLP76 inhibition and IL-2 production was also assessed in human whole blood by flow cytometry and MSD-ECL assay.

DMSO, dimethyl sulfoxide; MFI, median fluorescence intensity; MSD-ECL, Meso Scale Discovery-Electrochemiluminescence.

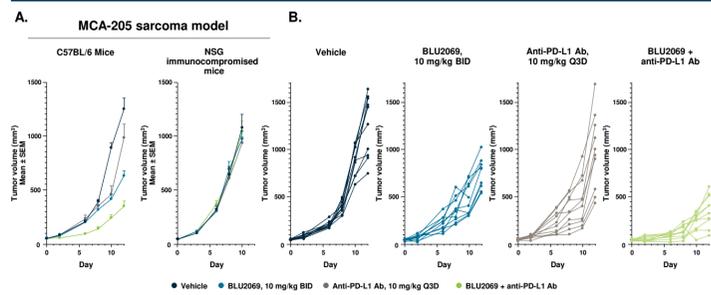
Figure 3: MAP4K1 inhibition overcomes PGE2 and Treg-mediated T cell suppression



Human CD3+ T cells were stimulated with anti-CD3 and anti-CD28 with and without the addition of 500 nM PGE2. (A and D) The ability of BLU2069 and BLU6348 to overcome PGE2-mediated suppression of IL-2 and (B and E) IFN-γ production was measured by MSD-ECL. (C) IFN-γ production from Tregs isolated from human whole blood and stimulated with IL-2, anti-CD3, and anti-CD28 in the presence of DMSO or 300 nM of either compound was measured by flow cytometry. (F) The ability of BLU6348 to reverse Treg-mediated suppression of T cell proliferation (CFSE) was assessed in a co-culture at a 1:15 ratio of Treg to effector cells. IFN-γ in the assay supernatant was also measured by MSD-ECL.

^aP-value of 0.0062; ^bP-value of 0.0005. CFSE, carboxyfluorescein succinimidyl ester; Treg, regulatory T cell; PGE2, prostaglandin E2.

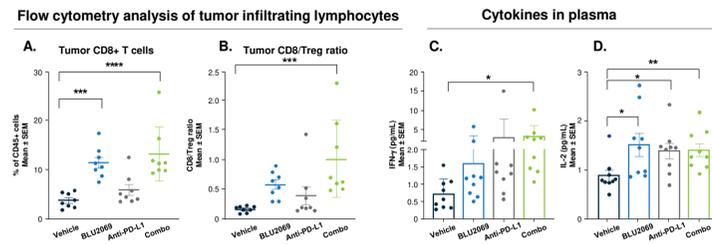
Figure 4: BLU2069 exhibits immune-dependent anti-tumor activity (MCA-205 sarcoma model)



MCA205 cells were implanted subcutaneously in the right flank of C57BL/6 or NSG mice, at 10⁶ cells per mouse. Mice were subsequently randomized into treatment groups. 10 mice per group, at mean tumor volumes of 54 mm³ for C57BL/6 and 40 mm³ for NSG. (A) BLU2069 was administered by oral gavage, and anti-PD-L1 Ab (clone 10F.9G2) was administered by IP injection at the doses and schedules indicated. (B) Individual animal tumor volumes from the C57BL/6 experiment are shown.

BID, twice a day; IP, intraperitoneal; PD-L1 Ab, programmed death-ligand 1 antibody; NSG, NOD scid gamma; Q3D, every 3 days.

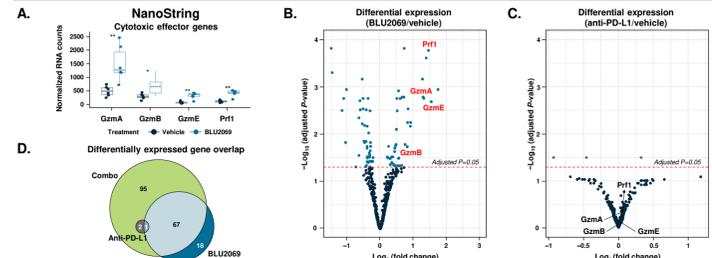
Figure 5: BLU2069 treatment increases the intratumoral CD8/Treg ratio and enhances plasma cytokine levels (MCA-205 sarcoma model)



(A and B) Tumors from MCA-205 bearing mice were collected after 5 days of dosing and the percentage of CD8 positive T cells and CD4/FOXP3 double positive Tregs was assessed by flow cytometry. (C and D) Whole blood for plasma was collected, and IFN-γ and IL-2 levels were measured by MSD-ECL.

*Adjusted P<0.05; **Adjusted P<0.001; ***Adjusted P<0.0001.

Figure 6: BLU2069 induces stronger T cell response within the tumor than anti-PD-L1 (MCA-205 sarcoma model)

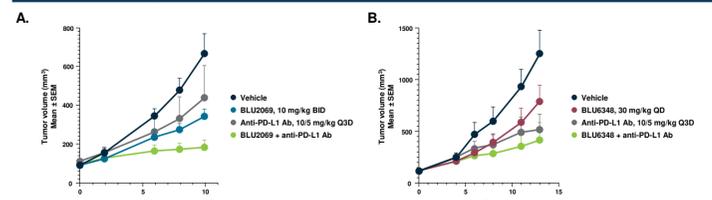


Tumors from MCA-205 bearing mice were collected after 5 days of dosing for RNA isolation and were analyzed using the NanoString PanCancer IO 360™ panel. (A) Cytokine genes are upregulated in BLU2069 treated samples compared to vehicle. (B and C) Effect on transcriptome by BLU2069 compared to anti-PD-L1 treatment. (D) Number of differentially expressed genes overlapped under BLU2069, anti-PD-L1 and BLU2069 plus anti-PD-L1 combination treatment.

*Adjusted P<0.05; **Adjusted P<0.01.

Gzm, granzyme; Prf1, perforin 1.

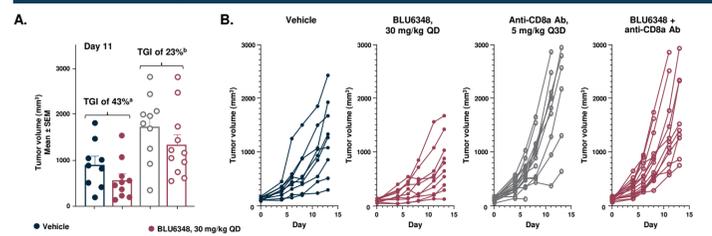
Figure 7: BLU2069 and BLU6348 exhibit monotherapy and enhanced combination anti-tumor activity (MC-38 colon model)



MC-38 cells were implanted subcutaneously in the right flank of C57BL/6 mice, at 10⁶ cells per mouse. Mice were subsequently randomized into treatment groups, 10–15 mice per group, at mean tumor volumes of 100 mm³ for the BLU2069 experiment and 118 mm³ for the BLU6348 experiment. (A) BLU2069 and (B) BLU6348 were administered by oral gavage at the doses and schedules indicated, and anti-PD-L1 Ab (provided by Roche) was administered at 10 mg/kg IV for the first dose and 5 mg/kg IP for the subsequent doses.

IV, intravenous.

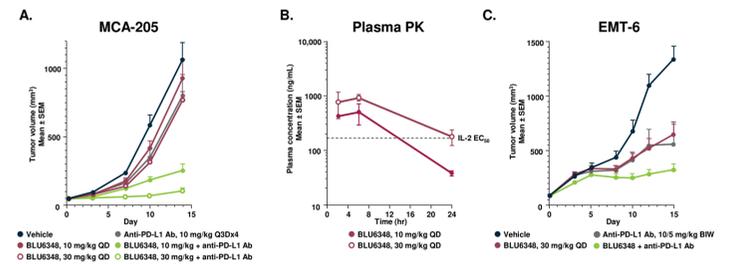
Figure 8: CD8 depletion partially reverses BLU6348-mediated efficacy (MC-38 colon model)



MC-38 cells were implanted subcutaneously in the right flank of C57BL/6 mice, at 10⁶ cells per mouse. Mice were subsequently randomized into treatment groups, 10–15 mice per group, at a mean tumor volume of 124 mm³. (A and B) BLU6348 was administered by oral gavage, and anti-CD8a Ab (clone 53-6.7) was administered by IP injection, at the doses and schedules indicated.

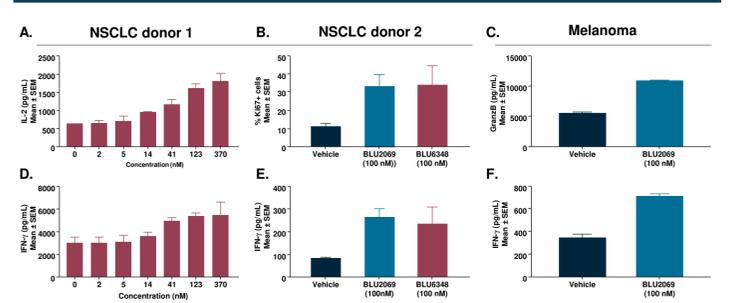
*Without CD8 depletion; †With CD8 depletion. TGI, tumor growth inhibition.

Figure 9: BLU6348 demonstrates enhanced *in vivo* efficacy with 24-hour IL-2 EC₅₀ coverage (MCA-205 sarcoma and EMT-6 breast models)



(A) MCA-205 and (C) EMT-6 cells were implanted subcutaneously in the right flank of C57BL/6 (MCA205) or BALB/c (EMT-6) mice, at 10⁶ (MCA205) or 5x10⁵ (EMT-6) cells per mouse. Mice were subsequently randomized into treatment groups, 10 mice per group, at mean tumor volumes of 45 mm³ for MCA205, and 92 mm³ for EMT-6. BLU6348 was administered by oral gavage, and anti-PD-L1 Ab (clone 10F.9G2 for MCA205, an anti-PD-L1 Ab from Roche for EMT-6) was administered by IP injection, at the doses and schedules indicated (the Roche PD-L1 Ab administered at 10 mg/kg IV for the first dose, and 5 mg/kg IP for the subsequent doses). (B) Blood was collected for plasma PK analysis at the end of the BLU6348 MCA-205 efficacy study to confirm target coverage.

Figure 10: MAP4K1 inhibition enhances T cell responses in patient-derived tumor infiltrating lymphocytes



Primary human tumors from individual patients were purchased from Discovery Life Sciences. The dissociated tumors, including the infiltrating lymphocytes, were cultured in the presence of anti-CD3 and anti-CD28 (NSCLC) or anti-CD3 alone (melanoma) and the impact of compound treatment at the indicated doses on (A, D, E, F) cytokine production, (B) T cell proliferation or (C) Granzyme B was measured by flow cytometry and MSD-ECL.

NSCLC, non-small cell lung cancer.

Conclusions

- BLU2069 and BLU6348 are subnanomolar MAP4K1 inhibitors with an excellent selectivity profile
- Pharmacological inhibition of MAP4K1 with BLU2069 and BLU6348 supports previously reported findings in MAP4K1 knock-out and kinase-dead knock-in mice
- BLU2069 and BLU6348 enhance intratumoral immune cell activation, overcome PGE2 and Treg-mediated T cell suppression, and reduce tumor burden both as a monotherapy and in combination with checkpoint inhibition
- MAP4K1 inhibition enhanced CD3/CD28-induced cytokine and granzyme B production in patient-derived tumor infiltrating lymphocytes isolated from melanoma or NSCLC primary tumors
- This chemical matter has been further developed to deliver a clinical development candidate, BLU-852

References

1. Bartolo D et al. *J Exp Med*. 2007;204:681–691; 2. Saba A et al. *Cancer Immunol Immunother*. 2010;59:419–429; 3. Hernandez S et al. *Cell Reports*. 2018;25:80–94; 4. Chuang HC et al. *Adv Immunol*. 2016;129:277–314; 5. Alzabin S et al. *Cancer Immunol Immunother*. 2010;59:419–429.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge the entire joint program team, particularly Marta Murcia and Markus Keller for their management of the Blueprint Medicines – Roche cancer immunotherapy collaboration. Additionally, we would like to thank Dr Tomasz Zol from the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center for providing the MCA-205 sarcoma cell line. Medical writing support was provided by Manoshi Nath MSc, and editorial support was provided by Elke Sims, MLangTrans, all of Paragon, Knutsford, UK, supported by Blueprint Medicines Corporation, Cambridge, MA, according to Good Publication Practice guidelines.

Disclosures

This research was funded by Blueprint Medicines Corporation and Roche Innovation Center. The authors had full editorial control of the poster and provided their final approval of all content. KF, MR, QC, K-AB, WW, JC, JK, EP, MS, RW, FS, NP, TL, CY, CU, JB are employees and shareholders of Blueprint Medicines Corporation. KF, SB, EO, MB, CM, TT, EG, GS, SG, MD, TG, KH were employees of Blueprint Medicines Corporation at the time of the study. AT, DP, AR, TR, LG, AIP, MAb, SH, JE, GH, CW and JPB are employees of Roche Innovation Center.