

# Package ‘aggregateBioVar’

November 3, 2025

**Type** Package

**Title** Differential Gene Expression Analysis for Multi-subject  
scRNA-seq

**Version** 1.21.0

**URL** <https://github.com/jasonratcliff/aggregateBioVar>

**BugReports** <https://github.com/jasonratcliff/aggregateBioVar/issues>

**Description** For single cell RNA-seq data collected from more than one subject (e.g. biological sample or technical replicates), this package contains tools to summarize single cell gene expression profiles at the level of subject. A SingleCellExperiment object is taken as input and converted to a list of SummarizedExperiment objects, where each list element corresponds to an assigned cell type. The SummarizedExperiment objects contain aggregate gene-by-subject count matrices and inter-subject column metadata for individual subjects that can be processed using downstream bulk RNA-seq tools.

**License** GPL-3

**Encoding** UTF-8

**LazyData** true

**VignetteBuilder** knitr

**Roxygen** list(markdown = TRUE)

**RoxygenNote** 7.1.1

**biocViews** Software, SingleCell, RNASeq, Transcriptomics,  
Transcription, GeneExpression, DifferentialExpression

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SingleCellExperiment, Matrix, tibble, rlang

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|                 |                                                     |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| aggregateBioVar | <i>Aggregate subject-level biological variation</i> |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|

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Description

Given an input gene-by-cell count matrix from a [SingleCellExperiment](#) object, sum within-subject gene counts into an aggregate gene-by-subject count matrix. Column metadata accessed by [colData](#) are collated by [subjectMetaData](#) to remove variables with inter-cell intrasubject variation, effectively retaining between-subject variation. The summary operations are performed across all cell types and within each cell type. A list of [SummarizedExperiment](#) objects is returned each with aggregate gene-by-subject count matrix and inter-subject metadata.

Usage

aggregateBioVar(scExp, subjectVar, cellVar)

**Arguments**

|            |                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| scExp      | <a href="#">SingleCellExperiment</a> object containing (at minimum) gene counts and column metadata describing sample identifiers and cell types. |
| subjectVar | Metadata column name assigning biological sample identity to aggregate within-subject feature counts.                                             |
| cellVar    | Metadata column name assigning cell type. Used for aggregating gene-by-subject count matrices by cell type.                                       |

**Value**

List of [SummarizedExperiment](#) objects with gene-by-subject count matrices and variable inter-subject column metadata across and within cell types.

**Examples**

```
## Aggregate gene-by-subject count matrix and inter-subject metadata
aggregateBioVar(
  scExp=small_airway,
  subjectVar="orig.ident", cellVar="celltype"
)
```

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|              |                                                  |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| countsByCell | <i>Within cell type gene-by-subject matrices</i> |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------|

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**Description**

Given a vector of unique cell types, calculate a gene-by-subject matrix and inter-subject metadata for a differential expression design matrix.

**Usage**

```
countsByCell(scExp, subjectVar, cellVar)
```

**Arguments**

|            |                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| scExp      | <a href="#">SingleCellExperiment</a> object containing (at minimum) gene counts and column metadata describing sample identifiers and cell types. |
| subjectVar | Metadata column name assigning biological sample identity to aggregate within-subject feature counts.                                             |
| cellVar    | Metadata column name assigning cell type. Used for aggregating gene-by-subject count matrices by cell type.                                       |

**Value**

List of gene-by-subject and design matrices for each cell type.

See Also

[summarizedCounts](#) for aggregate counts and metadata [SummarizedExperiment](#) object.

Examples

```
## Return list of `SummarizedExperiments` with gene-by-subject count matrices
## and subject metadata for each unique `SingleCellExperiment` cell type.
countsByCell(
  scExp=small_airway,
  subjectVar="orig.ident", cellVar="celltype"
)
```

---

|                 |                                     |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| countsBySubject | <i>Gene-by-subject count matrix</i> |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|

---

Description

Convert gene-by-cell count matrix to gene-by-subject count matrix. Row sums are calculated for each feature (i.e. gene) across cells by subject.

Usage

```
countsBySubject(scExp, subjectVar)
```

Arguments

- scExp            [SingleCellExperiment](#) object containing (at minimum) gene counts and column metadata describing sample identifiers and cell types.
- subjectVar      Metadata column name assigning biological sample identity to aggregate within-subject feature counts.

Value

S4 DataFrame of gene-by-subject count sums.

See Also

[scSubjects](#) for subjects values.

Examples

```
## Return cell count matrix aggregated by subject.
countsBySubject(scExp=small_airway, subjectVar="orig.ident")
```

---

|            |                                            |
|------------|--------------------------------------------|
| scSubjects | <i>SingleCellExperiment</i> subject values |
|------------|--------------------------------------------|

---

**Description**

Extract unique values from [SingleCellExperiment](#) column (i.e. cell) metadata. Used to determine subject and cell type values.

**Usage**

```
scSubjects(scExp, ...)
```

**Arguments**

- |       |                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| scExp | <a href="#">SingleCellExperiment</a> object containing (at minimum) gene counts and column metadata describing sample identifiers and cell types. |
| ...   | Named metadata variables for subjects and cell types.                                                                                             |

**Value**

List of character vectors with unique values from [SingleCellExperiment](#) column metadata variables.

**Examples**

```
## Examples of metadata column variable names.
names(SummarizedExperiment::colData(small_airway))

## Return list of subject and cell type values from experiment metadata.
scSubjects(scExp=small_airway, subjects="orig.ident", cellTypes="celltype")
```

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|              |                                                 |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| small_airway | <i>Small Airway SingleCellExperiment</i> object |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------|

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**Description**

Small airway epithelium single-cell RNA sequencing data subset combined from 7 porcine individuals. Genotypes represent wildtype (Genotype WT; n=3) and CFTR-knockout subjects (Genotype CFTRKO; n=4) expressing a cystic fibrosis phenotype.

To access cell counts and column metadata:

- counts: `SummarizedExperiment::assay(small_airway, "counts")`
- metadata: `SummarizedExperiment::colData(small_airway)`

Cell types include:

- Secretory cell
- Endothelial cell
- Immune cell

Usage

small\_airway

Format

A [SingleCellExperiment](#) object with feature counts of 1311 genes (rows) from 2687 individual cells (columns). Features were subset by gene ontology annotation "ion transport" with included child terms ("anion transport", "cation transport", etc.). Includes a count matrix accessed by [assay](#) and column metadata accessed by [colData](#). Metadata variables are defined as:

- orig.ident** Biological sample identifier (i.e. subject)
- nCount\_RNA** Number of UMIs (i.e. depth/size factor)
- nFeature\_RNA** Features with non-zero counts (i.e. identified features)
- Genotype** Sample Genotype ('CF' == cystic fibrosis)
- WT = non-CF pig
  - CFTRKO = CFTR knockout
- Sample** Airway region of sample
- celltype** Cell type labels

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|                 |                                   |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| subjectMetaData | <i>Collate metadata variation</i> |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|

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Description

Identify single cell experiment metadata variables that are identical within subject (e.g. genotype, treatment, cell line, sample preparation). Effectively excludes metadata variables containing between cell variation. Used as the design matrix for differential expression analysis.

Usage

subjectMetaData(scExp, subjectVar)

Arguments

- scExp                [SingleCellExperiment](#) object containing (at minimum) gene counts and column metadata describing sample identifiers and cell types.
- subjectVar        Metadata column name assigning biological sample identity to aggregate within-subject feature counts.

**Value**

Tibble data frame of metadata variables without intrasubject variation from single cell experiment metadata. Rows correspond to aggregated cells (i.e. subject / biological replicate) and columns to metadata attribute variables (e.g. genotype, treatment, cell line).

**Examples**

```
## Return experiment metadata sans intrasubject variation.
subjectMetaData(scExp=small_airway, subjectVar="orig.ident")
```

---

|                  |                                                         |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| summarizedCounts | <i>Aggregate feature counts and metadata by subject</i> |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|

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**Description**

Given an input sparse count matrix and corresponding column metadata, aggregate gene counts by subject level. Metadata variables with only inter-subject variation are retained; any variables with cell-level variation within a subject are dropped (e.g. feature / RNA count by cell).

**Usage**

```
summarizedCounts(scExp, subjectVar)
```

**Arguments**

|            |                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| scExp      | <a href="#">SingleCellExperiment</a> object containing (at minimum) gene counts and column metadata describing sample identifiers and cell types. |
| subjectVar | Metadata column name assigning biological sample identity to aggregate within-subject feature counts.                                             |

**Value**

[SummarizedExperiment](#) object with feature counts aggregated by subject and summarized inter-subject metadata.

**Examples**

```
## Construct SummarizedExperiment object with gene-by-subject count matrix
## and column metadata summarized to exclude intrasubject variation.
## See `SummarizedExperiment` accessor functions `assay()` and `colData()`
## to access the count matrix and column metadata for downstream analyses.
summarizedCounts(scExp=small_airway, subjectVar="orig.ident")
```

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