

NEWS

Former California First Lady Maria Shriver gives UC Irvine gender-related research on Alzheimer's disease another boost

Previous seed grant helped UCI scientists secure nearly \$2 million from National Institutes of Health for their Alzheimer's research.



Former California First Lady Maria Shriver announces a grant of \$100,000 from her Women's Alzheimer's Movement to UC Irvine Institute for Memory Impairments and Neurological Disorders in Irvine on Tuesday, January 14, 2020. (Photo by Mindy Schauer, Orange County Register/SCNG)

Former California First Lady Maria Shriver's support of Alzheimer's disease research at UC Irvine will continue with a second \$100,000 award announced Tuesday, Jan. 14, for study of the causes of gender disparity in a disease that affects twice as many women as men.

This is the latest round in "seed grant" money made possible through a partnership that began in 2017 between Shriver's Women's Alzheimer's Movement and the UC Irvine Institute for Memory Impairments and Neurological Disorders, also known as UCI MIND.

The purpose: To figure out why women are disproportionately affected more by Alzheimer's disease than men.

Shriver joined researchers from UCI MIND, donors and other supporters of Alzheimer's disease research on Tuesday at a celebratory gathering on the UCI campus that also included announcement of a recently awarded \$1.9 million grant from the National Institutes of Health that is a direct result of the first pilot study funded by the partnership between Shriver's group and UCI MIND.

And there was more good news when donor Alisha Ballard, vice president of the Living Legacy Foundation in Newport Beach, told the crowd of about 50 people inside UCI Beall Applied Innovation center that Living Legacy would make a gift of \$250,000 to double the number of research grants that will be awarded later this year for sex-difference pilot studies.

"This is a great partnership for us," said Shriver, who earlier in the day had convened a listening session at the UCI Beall center for members of the statewide Alzheimer's Prevention and Preparedness Task Force that Gov. Gavin Newsom created last year, with her at the lead.

"I will always come down here because I believe in your leadership. I believe in the doctors that are here, the researchers that are here ... I believe that investing in sex differences research is a part of how we get forward. Women are two-thirds of the caregivers and two-thirds of those impacted by the disease."



Former California First Lady Maria Shriver announces a grant of \$100,000 from her Women's Alzheimer's Movement to UC Irvine Institute for Memory Impairments and Neurological Disorders in Irvine on Tuesday, January 14, 2020. (Photo by Mindy Schauer, Orange County Register/SCNG)

Her organization's outreach included Shriver's presence in November at the opening of a senior living and memory care center in Redondo Beach, an appearance highlighted by a Q&A with leading researchers that included UCI MIND's director, Dr. Joshua Grill.

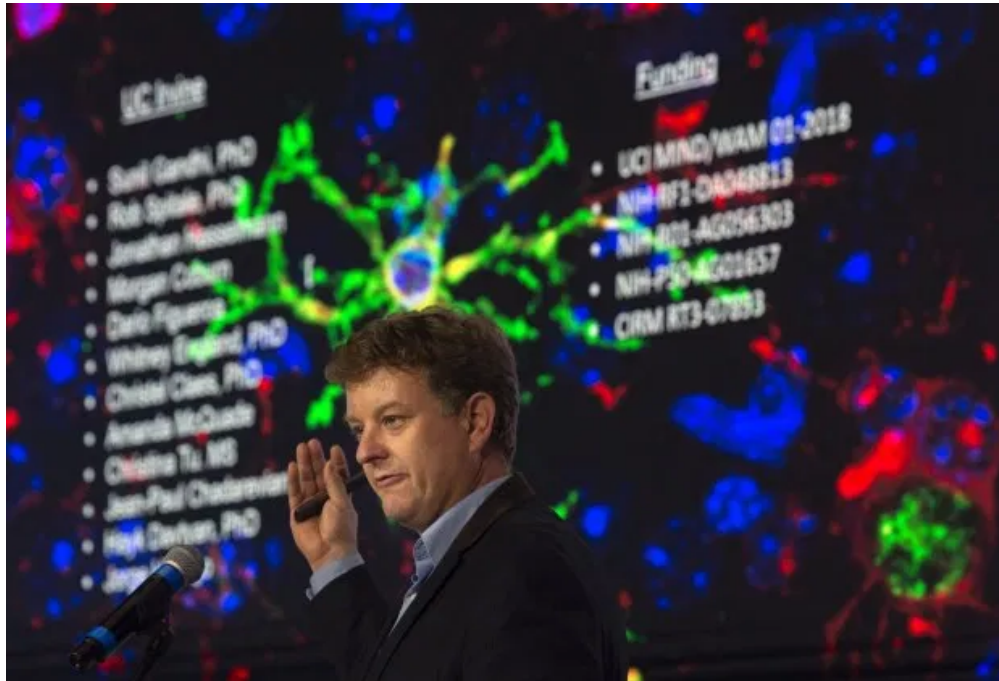
A degenerative disease, Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia, responsible for a decline in memory, thinking and behavior. It is the sixth-leading cause of death among adults in the United States.

Shriver's father, R. Sargent Shriver, whose legacy includes developing the Peace Corps, died in 2011 after an eight-year decline from Alzheimer's disease. Shriver started Women's Alzheimer's Movement, or WAM, 10 years ago, following the publication of "The Shriver Report" that highlighted the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease in women.

For too long, she said, the sex disparity had been dismissed with the simplistic explanation that more women were diagnosed with Alzheimer's because they lived longer than men.

"Really, everywhere I went I was met with it's just because women live longer," Shriver said of the time period before The Shriver Report came out. "The good

The partnership between Women's Alzheimer's Movement and UCI MIND, a state and federally funded Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, was formed specifically to support research into the role of sex and gender in Alzheimer's disease.



UC Irvine's Mathew Blurton-Jones, last year's Mind-Wam grant recipient, talks about his research on gender and Alzheimer's in Irvine, CA on Tuesday, January 14, 2020. (Photo by Mindy Schauer, Orange County Register/SCNG)

UCI neuroscientists Sunil Gandhi and Mathew Blurton-Jones received the inaugural \$100,000 seed grant in 2018. The initial data from their look into the role of microglia, the brain's primary immune cells, in Alzheimer's disease earned UCI MIND the \$1.9 million from the National Institutes of Health to continue their research.

The second WAM-UCI MIND grant recipient is Anshu Agrawal, from UCI's School of Medicine, who will explore the role of inflammatory immune mechanisms sex differences in Alzheimer's disease.



UC Irvine's Assistant Clinical Professor, Anshu Agrawal, will be studying women and Alzheimers with grant money announced in Irvine CA on Tuesday, January 14, 2020. (Photo by Mindy Schauer, Orange County Register/SCNG)

The national [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website page on Alzheimer's Disease and Healthy Aging](#) still states that the increased likelihood that Alzheimer's disease will affect women is "due primarily to women living longer," citing a 2019 report by the national Alzheimer's Association. But [that same report](#) acknowledges that researchers are investigating the possibility that the higher risk for women is tied to biology, genetics or life experiences.

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Theresa Walker is a Southern California native who has been a staff writer at The Orange County Register since 1992. She specializes in human interest stories and social issues, such as homelessness. She also covers nonprofits and philanthropy in Orange County. She loves telling stories about ordinary people who do the extraordinary in their communities.

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