UC San Diego has been at the forefront of Alzheimer’s disease research from the very beginning. This is where the disease was first identified as an epidemic in the 1970s and is home to the first major federally funded research and clinical trial initiatives for Alzheimer’s.

Our researchers collaborate with colleagues around the world to better understand every facet of the disease, including its basic biology, imaging techniques for diagnosing and studying the disease, new therapeutic approaches, clinical trials and epidemiology.

The federal government recognized UC San Diego’s leadership in Alzheimer’s research by forming the Alzheimer’s Disease Cooperative Study (ADCS) in 1991. This agreement between UC San Diego and the National Institutes of Health’s National Institute on Aging (NIA) was the first major initiative in the nation to support clinical studies that evaluate treatments for both cognitive and behavioral symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease.

The ADCS has the translational medicine process down to a science, thanks in part to UC San Diego’s world-class facilities and connections with the surrounding biotech industry. The ADCS is part of UC San Diego’s larger Alzheimer’s disease ecosystem, including the Shiley-Marcos Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center which follows 500 participants, including those with dementia and those without. This significant and diverse cohort is uniquely positioned to support the clinical trial efforts of the Epstein Family Alzheimer’s Research Collaboration.

“This is an opportunity of a generation. Our vision is to disrupt the current state of Alzheimer’s disease treatment development by innovating new therapeutic approaches and SMART clinical trial designs that accelerate progress in collaboration with others.”

HOWARD FELDMAN
Dean, Alzheimer’s and Neurodegenerative Disease Research
Professor of Neurosciences
UC San Diego School of Medicine
AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO SOLVING THE ALZHEIMER’S PUZZLE

Despite intensive research over the past 40 years, there has not been a breakthrough therapy for Alzheimer’s disease. New discoveries will require entirely new ways of thinking about the problem.

We believe UC San Diego’s nontraditional ethos is central to unlocking the mysteries of Alzheimer’s disease. We aim to rethink the established paths toward new therapeutics and reveal novel ways to intervene in the relentless progression of Alzheimer’s disease.

Two hallmarks of UC San Diego that make it an exceptional place for addressing this baffling disease include:

» Its proclivity for taking an unconventional approach to complex endeavors, working across disciplines to break down barriers and find new and creative ways to solve problems.

» Its successful and well-established track record for translational medicine. Our state-of-the-art facilities and exceptional pool of talent allow us to speed new ideas through the required drug development pipeline.

Through their vision and generosity, the Epstein family is jump-starting a new era in UC San Diego’s quest for effective treatments for Alzheimer’s disease. They are enabling us to intensify our focus on the most promising paths toward a cure. With their infusion of funding — along with matching gifts — we aim to fully leverage UC San Diego’s unconventional spirit of innovation to speed the way toward meaningful, long-awaited advancements in Alzheimer’s treatment.

MILESTONES IN ALZHEIMER’S RESEARCH AT UC SAN DIEGO

1976
Robert Katzman, MD, founding director of the Shiley-Marcos Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center at UC San Diego, is the first person to declare Alzheimer’s disease a “major killer” in an article in the Archives of Neurology journal.

1991
Leon Thal, MD, establishes the Alzheimer’s Disease Cooperative Study at UC San Diego in partnership with the National Institutes of Health. It is the first nationwide effort to test new Alzheimer’s drugs and investigate new methods for conducting dementia research.

2001
The first-in-human clinical trial of gene therapy in an adult brain to treat Alzheimer’s disease is conducted by Mark Tuszynski, MD, PhD, director of the UC San Diego Translational Neuroscience Institute.

2012
The first stem cell-derived in vitro models of Alzheimer’s disease from patients with the illness are created by Larry Goldstein, PhD, UC San Diego professor of cellular and molecular medicine.