THANKS TO THE VISION AND GENEROSITY OF THE SHILEYS, THE SHILEY-MARCOS ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE RESEARCH CENTER HAS LED THE WAY IN SCIENTIFIC LEARNING, EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY THAT CAN TRANSFORM LIVES. Philanthropic support is critical to achieving our mission, and gifts of all sizes play an important role in sustaining our momentum.

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Betsy Collins | UC San Diego Health Sciences Advancement
Attn: Shiley-Marcos ADRC | Fund E2140
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At UC San Diego, we believe that what we don’t know today will forever change our tomorrows. Empowered by generosity and fueled by curiosity, we are unable to chase these unknowns — to ask the questions no one has asked before and to push the boundaries of possibility. Together with your support for the Shiley-Marcos Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center, we will uncover diverse people and unconventional perspectives to propel groundbreaking progress. Because we know that when we come together, nothing is beyond us.

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This is a landmark year for the Shiley-Marcos Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center (SMADRC). We are celebrating the 40th year of continuous grant funding from the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the National Institutes of Health. This year, 2023, marks the 20th year since Darlene and the late Donald Shiley named the center in honor of Darlene Shiley’s mother, Dona Marcos. The Shileys’ partnership has facilitated incredible advancements in the understanding of the disease, its causes and strategies for improving the quality of life for the patient as well as the caregiver. The continued commitment of donors like you has made the SMADRC a world-renowned leader in Alzheimer’s disease (AD) research.

Philanthropy is the catalyst that allows us to lay the groundwork necessary to obtain major research awards. Donors provide funding for early-stage research that has repeatedly led to millions in federal grants and potentially life-changing advancements in treatment. Your support gives us the flexibility to quickly pivot to focus on the most promising research areas and to attract the very best Alzheimer’s disease experts to lead our efforts. As part of UC San Diego, we leverage the exceptional neuroscience environment and diversity of our region to support and advance multidisciplinary research. With rapidly expanding access to biomarker-assisted clinical characterization and the emerging availability of anti-amyloid therapeutics, our center is advancing and contributing to an evolving scientific, and care/advancement environment. I am grateful for this opportunity to share with you some of our achievements from the past year.

I hope that this report helps to illustrate the ripple effect of your giving. I look forward to reporting on the SMARC’s next chapter, which you are helping us to write. Thank you very much for partnering with us to improve the lives of our patients and their families — and ultimately, to make Alzheimer’s disease a thing of the past.

Sincerely,
James Brewer, MD, PhD
Director, Shiley-Marcos Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center
Chair, Department of Neurosciences
ALZHEIMER'S RESEARCH

Transcription factor network that drives the development of ADRD, potentially leading to new approaches to treatment.

Dr. Schlachetzki is seeking to understand the development of neurodegenerative disorders. He has developed advanced methods to isolate neurons and oligodendrocytes in order to characterize how age and disease mechanisms drive neuronal damage and susceptibility to ADRD.

A forthcoming study led by Dr. Mertens aims to identify the distinct disease pathways in an ethnic and genetic subgroup of AD patients. Alzheimer’s disease in Latin American heritage is five times more likely to develop prior to age 65, and research hopes to define the frequency and prevalence of this disease in this population.

REVEALING THE ROLE OF TAU

Therapeutic treatment.

Neuroscientist Xu Chen, PhD, studies the assessment of cognition in aging and dementia, with an emphasis on early detection and differential diagnoses of ADRD. Previously at Columbia University, she conducted research on tauology and epidemiological aspects of AD. At UC San Diego, she obtained a pilot grant from the SMADRC to develop novel cognitive measures for detection of subtle cognitive changes in preclinical AD in collaboration with colleagues at Brown University and Wistar Institute.

Understanding cognition in Aging

Neuroscientist Diane Jacob, PhD, studies how do pathogenic tau form and accumulate in neurons? How does tau debilitate diseases: What makes tau a toxic protein in the diseased brain?

Dr. Chen and her team are seeking answers to three fundamental questions: 1) How does tau accumulate in neurons? 2) How does tau contribute to ADRD? 3) How does tau spread from neurons to neurons? The answers could point to new therapeutic targets.

UNDERSTANDING COGNITION IN AGING

Neuroscientist Diane Jacob, PhD, studies the assessment of cognition in aging and dementia, with an emphasis on early detection and differential diagnoses of ADRD. Previously at Columbia University, she conducted research on tauology and epidemiological aspects of AD. At UC San Diego, she obtained a pilot grant from the SMADRC to develop novel cognitive measures for detection of subtle cognitive changes in preclinical AD in collaboration with colleagues at Brown University and Wistar Institute.

Recent findings led to funding from the NIA to develop and validate neurocognitive measures that are sensitive to preclinical AD. Since standard neuropsychological tests typically are not sensitive to the earliest phases of AD pathology, there is a critical need for novel measures that can detect subtle cognitive changes and track progression over time. The development of such measures will result in improved clinical care and outcomes research, including clinical trials.