



# Dr. Margaret Pericak-Vance Honored with Latino Center on Aging Award

Margaret Pericak-Vance, Ph.D., director of the John P. Hussman Institute for Human Genomics (HIHG) at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, has been awarded the Academic Excellence Golden Age Award by the Latino Center on Aging (LCA) at their 34th annual gala. The LCA advocates for improved services for Latino seniors and educates them on available health care options.



Margaret Pericak-Vance, Ph.D., accepting the Latino Center on Aging's Academic Excellence Golden Age Award

The award was one of several honors bestowed at the gala, with the academic excellence award given to those who have made significant contributions to the Latino/Hispanic community through effective leadership, community involvement, and public policy initiatives. Dr. Pericak-Vance has exhibited these attributes in her genetics research and diverse initiatives throughout her career and time at the Miller School.

"I'm very honored by this award, as it displays my passion for making sure the benefit resulting from genetics research in Alzheimer's disease is inclusive," said Dr. Pericak-Vance, who is also the Dr. John T. Macdonald Foundation Professor of



Human Genetics. "The field has been making great strides for inclusivity in the past five to six years as we have greatly emphasized the importance of diversity and moved toward precision medicine in clinical practice."



Dr. Pericak-Vance and Mario E. Tapia,  
president and CEO of the Latino  
Center on Aging

## **On-the-Ground Approach**

Genetic research not only examines the individual's ancestral background but, more importantly, provides insight into the health of individuals and their communities. Since arriving at the Miller School, Dr. Pericak-Vance has continued her approach to ensuring that participation does not focus solely on white non-Hispanic individuals, but is representative of the melting pots that are South Florida and the U.S.

Her novel findings on the APOE gene have transformed the field, showing that people with the gene variant have a higher risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, but that the risk varies depending upon ancestral background.

At the HIHG, Dr. Pericak Vance leads participatory research studies in Alzheimer's disease in Latino/Hispanic and Black communities using an on-the-ground approach. Rather than requiring participants to go to clinics for education and participation in genetic research, members of the diverse HIHG clinical teams go out to meet potential participants and their families in the communities where they live. Through talks, meeting at churches, food drives, and other activities and resources, the teams have increased minority participation in



genetic research – enabling medical breakthroughs that will benefit all groups.

"Having diverse populations participate in genetic research makes them part of the solution as new druggable targets and preventative treatments are discovered and we move toward precision medicine practices," Dr. Pericak-Vance said. "We need to know if these potential therapies will benefit all populations, not just a specific group, and participating in genetics studies provides those answers."



Dr. Pericak-Vance with the Hussman Institute team

## Moving Ahead

Currently, Dr. Pericak-Vance continues her research, recently receiving a \$46 million grant from the National Institute on Aging of the National Institutes of Health. The grant's target is to build a resource that significantly expands Alzheimer's disease genetic studies in the currently underrepresented Latino/Hispanic and African ancestry groups, whose risk of developing Alzheimer's disease is twice that of their white non-Hispanic counterparts.

"This award has been a rewarding assurance in having the Latino community recognize our efforts," Dr. Pericak-Vance said. "We continue to move the field ahead the more we can diversify genetics and start to tackle these health disparities."

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