

Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute Collaborates on \$60M Initiative for the Precision Aging Network

Researchers at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute will join several top-tier institutions as part of a \$60 million University of Arizona-led initiative – the Precision Aging Network. Arizona State University, Emory University, Johns Hopkins University, Baylor College of Medicine, Georgia Institute of Technology, and the Phoenix-based Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen) make up the rest of the team.



The collaborative project will aim to better understand the neural mechanisms that account for optimal brain performance in older-age adults and those that underlie age-related cognitive impairment and disorders such as Alzheimer’s disease.

“This large project is the perfect example of collaborative team science to address a critical research problem of age-related cognitive decline that leverages our participation as an Evelyn McKnight Brain Institute with our sister institute at the University of Arizona,” said Ralph L. Sacco, M.D., M.S., professor and chairman of neurology, executive director

of the Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute, and director of the Miami Clinical and Translational Science Institute. “We will bring our expertise in recruiting underserved populations to enhance the applicability of the aging network results across diverse subjects.”

Bringing Diversity to Brain Research



Ralph L. Sacco,
M.D., M.S.

Research in the Miami area will be headlined by the Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute, where information will be collected from a diverse population of American adults of different ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds by using the MindCrowd research project. The goal is to better understand human memory and risk factors for Alzheimer’s disease and recruit large numbers of participants online.

The Precision Aging Network (PAN) will use an expanded version of the MindCrowd online portal to help recruit 350,000 study participants ages 18 and older to gather information on their cognition, demographics, health, and lifestyle variables. Some of those individuals will then be invited to participate in more in-depth and in-person studies at four sites: University of Arizona in Tucson, Emory University in Atlanta, Johns

Hopkins University in Baltimore, and the Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute in Miami.



Tatjana Rundek,
M.D., Ph.D.

“This five-year program ‘Precision Aging Network (PAN): Closing the Gap Between Cognitive Healthspan and Human Lifespan’ will significantly advance our scientific knowledge of precision medicine concepts to predict individual brain health risks and provide personalized solutions to maximize cognitive health span,” said Tatjana Rundek, M.D., Ph.D., professor of neurology and Evelyn F. McKnight Endowed Chair for Learning and Memory in Aging and a principal investigator of the PAN Miami site. “It is an extremely exciting and novel program that will extend our collaborations with the University of Arizona and other partners.”

Recruiting participants from such diverse regions of the country will ensure large numbers of Hispanic, Black, and other racial and ethnic minorities are represented – an essential goal of the study since those populations have been historically underrepresented in aging literature.



Bonnie E. Levin.
Ph.D.

“This study is critically important in exploring how people age differently under the umbrella of normative aging,” added Bonnie Levin, Ph.D., the Alexandria and Bernard Schoninger professor of neurology and director of the Division of Neuropsychology. “It will help us understand how precision medicine can be applied to the aging process and address specific combinations of risk factors instead of a one size fits all approach that does not consider individual differences. We welcome the opportunity to join our colleagues in this exciting collaborative endeavor.”

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