

UTSA awards \$4 million to Alzheimer's researchers around the world

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UT Health San Antonio Assistant Professor Bess Frost talks about her research into Alzheimer's using fruit flies in her lab in April 2019.

Jerry Lara, Staff / Staff photographer

A professor at [UT Health San Antonio](#) is among four researchers worldwide awarded \$500,000 each — part of the University of Texas at San Antonio's Oskar Fischer Prize — for their work in furthering society's understanding what causes Alzheimer's disease.

UTSA on Wednesday announced the results of its Oskar Fischer Prize, an international competition that awards \$4 million in prizes to 10 individuals. The competition awarded gold, silver and bronze prizes of \$500,000, \$400,000 and \$300,000, respectively.

San Antonio scientist [Bess Frost](#) received one of the \$500,000 prizes for her theory on the cause of Alzheimer's disease.

Frost is the [Bartell Zachry Distinguished Professor for Research in Neurodegenerative Disorders](#) at the [Barshop Institute for Longevity and Aging Studies](#), the [Glenn Biggs Institute for Alzheimer's and Neurodegenerative Disorders](#), and the [Department of Cell Systems and Anatomy](#) at UT Health San Antonio.

She proposes that neurodegeneration in Alzheimer's disease and related tauopathies result from the negative consequences of pathogenic forms of tau on the three-dimensional packaging of DNA. In her submission, Frost wrote that this kind of DNA restructuring affects the cellular identity of brain cells and drives cell death.

Frost's lab at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, which studies the basic science underlying Alzheimer's disease, is currently enrolling patients with a diagnosis of early Alzheimer's disease for a phase 2 clinical trial. The trial studies an antiretroviral drug called 3TC, which has been approved to treat HIV.

Gold prizes were also awarded to Carlo Abbate of the IRCCS Fondazione Don Carlo Gnocchi, Istituto Palazzolo, in Italy; Estela Area-Gomez at Columbia University in New York and Centro de Investigaciones Biológicas "Margarita Salas" in Spain; and Ralph Nixon of the Nathan S. Kline Institute for Psychiatric Research just outside New York.

Silver prizes were awarded to Bernd Moosmann at Johannes Gutenberg University in Germany and Donald Weaver from the University of Toronto. Bronze prize recipients are Annelise Barron of Stanford University, Gunnar Gouras of Lund University in Sweden, Varghese John of UCLA and Russell Swerdlow at the University of Kansas Medical Center.

The Oskar Fischer Prize was launched in late 2019 following a \$5 million philanthropic gift to UTSA from Texas businessman James Truchard, who co-founded software company National Instruments.

UTSA President Taylor Eighmy said in a statement that the competition "allows us to significantly impact new discoveries in brain health that will directly help solve the mysteries of Alzheimer's disease."

"Despite a century and tens of billions of dollars spent on Alzheimer's Disease research, no definitive explanation for a cause has been found," Truchard said. "The prize's goal is to bring forth ideas, which can create a foundation for future research. While no single entry covered all the major aspects of Alzheimer's, I believe a combination of these ideas creates a launchpad for future research."

According to Alzheimer's Disease International, an estimated 55 million people worldwide are living with dementia. That population is expected to increase to 78 million by 2030.

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