Global Immersion Experience 2016 Highlights

“We are making a difference — do you feel it?”

— Maria Carrillo, Ph.D., Chief Science Officer, Alzheimer’s Association

Thousands of scientists, philanthropists, policymakers and other stakeholders came together in Toronto this summer for the world’s largest gathering of the dementia research community: the Alzheimer’s Association International Conference® 2016 (AAIC®). More than 50 of the Association’s Zenith Society members and other leading supporters were there for the Global Immersion Experience — a customized educational program that celebrates the intersection of philanthropic investment and scientific progress.

Over the course of three days, participants learned firsthand about the latest developments in Alzheimer’s research — and the impact of charitable giving — from leading scientists and families living with Alzheimer’s disease. Intimate social activities complemented scientific sessions, enabling philanthropists to connect and identify opportunities to move promising research projects forward.

Throughout the conference, two things were clear: This is a time of unprecedented promise for Alzheimer’s science and the current momentum would not be possible if not for philanthropic partnerships. Many of the scientists presenting findings at the conference received research grants from the Association at one or more points in their career, and Dr. Carrillo announced that the Alzheimer’s Association would fund a record $25 million in research grants this year — “thanks to the generosity of our donors, many of whom are here today.”

Research momentum inspires optimism

“It really gives me a sense of hope to see the great work researchers are doing and to meet with others who share our commitment.”

— Debbie Jones, Co-Chair, Zenith Society

More than 2,200 scientific presentations were given at AAIC 2016 — representing the tremendous growth in Alzheimer’s research that is bringing the world closer to breakthroughs in dementia science. “Resilience” was a leading theme this year: Researchers shared findings that people can help protect themselves from age-related cognitive decline through work that requires complex thinking or activities — or both — and through cognitive training.

Additional noteworthy developments: Scientists offered evidence that a smell test may one day prove useful as an early, cost-effective screening tool for dementia risk; other researchers reported results of the first-ever Phase 3 trial of an anti-tau drug — a significant milestone in Alzheimer’s research.
Personal commitments drive progress

“Every day we wake up and ask ourselves, how can we help great people do great things?”

– Jerre Stead, Chairman and CEO, IHS Markit

Jerre and Mary Joy Stead were honored alongside outstanding scientists at AAIC when they received the fourth annual Jerome H. Stone Philanthropy Award for Research — named after the passionate and determined individual who founded the Alzheimer’s Association and who was the first private citizen to raise the call for investment in Alzheimer’s research. “The Steads’ contributions to nonprofits across the globe serve as an inspiration to other philanthropists,” said Association President and CEO Harry Johns. “We thank them for all that they’ve done and continue to do for our cause.”

Banner Alzheimer’s Institute Executive Director Dr. Eric Reiman paid a moving tribute to the Steads — one of many emotional moments during the Global Immersion Experience. Paul Hornback brought many to tears with his personal account of living with Alzheimer’s and helping others through his volunteer role as an Alzheimer’s Association Early-Stage Advisor. And another speaker, a 55-year-old man who already has lost several siblings to familial younger-onset Alzheimer’s disease, talked about receiving his own diagnosis and deciding to help future generations by participating in a groundbreaking prevention study, the Dominantly Inherited Alzheimer Network Trial Unit (DIAN-TU). “I’ll do what I can for as long as I can,” he said — a commitment our philanthropic partners share.

Thanks to investment by Alzheimer’s Association donors, the DIAN-TU study was launched 18 months early — just one of many examples of how philanthropic partnerships have helped the Association earn recognition as the nonprofit with the highest impact in Alzheimer’s research worldwide.

Save the Date: AAIC 2017, July 16-20

“I heard someone describe the Alzheimer’s movement as a rocket ready to launch, and it’s a great analogy. You get that sense of anticipation here because so many good things are happening. I know where I’m going to be next summer: London!”

– John Beuerlein, Member, Zenith Society

Our philanthropic partners are already making plans to attend the Alzheimer’s Association International Conference 2017 in London, England. For more information, contact leadershipgiving@alz.org. We hope to see you there!