



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **South Carolina’s top research institutions collaborate to advance comprehensive Alzheimer’s disease research, medical discoveries and education**

**CHARLESTON, CLEMSON, COLUMBIA, S.C. (Sept. 21, 2023)** – As part of a statewide effort to address Alzheimer’s disease and other related dementias more effectively and with the help of \$10 million in legislative funding, Clemson University, the Medical University of South Carolina and the University of South Carolina are combining their expertise and resources to create a first-of-its-kind research center in South Carolina. This collaboration is part of a multi-institutional effort to establish the first federally designated Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center (ADRC) in South Carolina.

“As the population ages and the prevalence of Alzheimer’s and dementia increases, solutions rooted in collaboration and coordination are essential to reach a future free of these devastating diseases,” said Heather Snyder, Ph.D., Alzheimer’s Association vice president of medical and scientific relations. “This effort will translate research advances into improved statewide access to diagnosis, care and treatment for the more than 95,000 South Carolinians living with Alzheimer’s and their families.”

On Wednesday, Sept. 6, Gov. Henry McMaster further paved the way for the collaboration when he ceremonially signed bill [S. 569](#), which requires a comprehensive statewide plan to address issues related to Alzheimer’s and dementia. The bill was championed in the S.C. Senate by Sen. Katrina Shealy and Senate President Thomas Alexander, and championed in the S.C. House by Rep. Mark Smith and Rep. Sylleste Davis.

Part of this strategic approach includes the pursuit of federal ADRC status through the collaborative efforts of the state’s top research institutions. The goal is to establish a highly visible, accessible, trusted and coordinated source of information so that patients and families of all income levels are better connected to resources, research opportunities and more when enduring the challenges brought on by these diagnoses.

“As an academic health system, we are uniquely positioned to engage in cutting-edge research aimed at understanding the underlying causes of disease, developing new treatments and improving diagnostic tools,” said Lori McMahon, Ph.D., MUSC vice president for research and professor of neuroscience. “Our multidisciplinary team, including fundamental and clinical scientists, neurologists, geriatricians,

psychiatrists and more, collaborate to advance the understanding of our brains and how to keep them healthy.”

For example, MUSC is home to the Carroll A. Campbell, Jr. Neuropathology Laboratory, founded in 2009 thanks to a generous gift from the family of South Carolina’s 112th governor who passed away from Alzheimer’s disease. By collecting donor brain tissue from individuals with neurological disorders, including Alzheimer’s disease, as well as age-matched healthy brains, this critical biorepository provides valuable information about the rate and cause of these disorders in South Carolina and serves as a link between scientists and clinicians to generate discoveries that can change patient care.

“At USC, we talk often about the power of interdisciplinary research to solve big problems by addressing multiple dimensions at once. The same goes for collaborations among research institutions,” said Julius Fridriksson, Ph.D., USC vice president for research. “By combining the unique strengths of USC, MUSC and Clemson and focusing them on supporting South Carolina families suffering with Alzheimer’s disease, we will multiply our positive impact on the Palmetto State.”

Alzheimer’s disease research has been at the forefront of the priorities of the USC School of Public Health, the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Medicine. In 2019, researchers received National Institutes of Health funding to establish the Carolina Center on Alzheimer’s Disease and Minority Research. USC also is on the forefront of neuroimaging research and provides technology to the federal Alzheimer’s Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI). Additionally, Leonardo Bonilha, M.D., Ph.D., at USC’s School of Medicine in Columbia, is leading the newly created Rural Brain Health Center, a statewide initiative aimed at improving access to care, diagnosis and management of memory and cognitive problems.

Partnership is critical to providing access to research participation and care statewide, especially to some of the most underserved areas. Access to research opportunities close to home means that the latest information, cutting-edge treatments and the newest strategies for prevention are at families’ fingertips.

“Our Institute for Engaged Aging successfully brings together experts in psychology, computing, bioengineering, social sciences, nursing and other disciplines to solve complex problems related to public health,” said Tanju Karanfil, Clemson University senior vice president for research, scholarship and creative endeavors. “That strong multidisciplinary approach, coupled with Clemson’s legacy of outreach across South Carolina and collaborations with USC and MUSC, will lead to meaningful discoveries to support patients afflicted by degenerative brain diseases, and their families. Translational health research and community outreach are strengths at Clemson.”

The Clemson University Institute for Engaged Aging (IEA) in the College of Behavioral, Social and Health Sciences is committed to research, teaching and community outreach that promote healthy aging across the lifespan regardless of social, economic or health status. The institute recently expanded its Preventing Alzheimer’s with Cognitive Training (PACT) study – the largest study of its kind to date – which investigates methods for the prevention and early detection of dementia. Additionally, the IEA

has several National Institute on Aging-funded studies focused on the early identification of cognitive decline in adults 65 and older, a critical area of need among aging populations.

South Carolina is one of 20 states deemed "neurology deserts," meaning there is a shortage of neurologists that is only expected to grow as cases increase. A dedicated center in South Carolina would offer citizens support with obtaining a diagnosis and medical management, information about Alzheimer's and related dementias, services and resources, opportunities for volunteers to participate in clinical trials and studies and research registries and support groups and other special programs for volunteers and their families.

### **LEGISLATIVE COMMENTARY**

Statement from S.C. Senate President Thomas C. Alexander (R-Oconee and Pickens counties) on the state's investment in resources to caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's and related dementias:

"Our three research universities working together with the Alzheimer's Advisory Council on a comprehensive statewide plan to address this dreaded disease speaks to what makes South Carolina a special place. We are committed to putting the well-being of our citizens first by providing informed clinical care, early detection and caregiver support services to individuals and families coping with Alzheimer' disease and related dementias."

Statement from Sen. Katrina F. Shealy (R-Lexington) on the General Assembly's investment in research and treatment:

"South Carolina is poised to become a leader in research and treatment for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Through our statewide investments in these critical areas, we can attract the most talented to our state so we can treat our ailing population and find better treatments, and eventually a cure, for future generations. By working together, we can put our state at the forefront of this field and make life better for all South Carolinians."

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Contacts:

#### **Clemson**

Shelley Gordon

[Addis2@clemson.edu](mailto:Addis2@clemson.edu)

#### **MUSC**

Heather Woolwine

[woolwinh@musc.edu](mailto:woolwinh@musc.edu)

#### **USC**

Jeff Stensland

[stenslan@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:stenslan@mailbox.sc.edu)

### **About Clemson University**

One of the most productive public research universities in the nation, Clemson University attracts and powerfully unites students and faculty whose greatest desire is to make a difference in the lives of

others. Ranked among the best national public universities by U.S. News & World Report, Clemson is dedicated to teaching, research and service. Our main campus, located in Upstate South Carolina, sits on 1,400 acres in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, along the shores of Lake Hartwell. We have a presence in every South Carolina county through research facilities, economic development hubs and Innovation Campuses. Through the research, outreach and entrepreneurial projects led by our faculty and students, Clemson University is driving economic development and improving quality of life in South Carolina and beyond.

### **About MUSC**

Founded in 1824 in Charleston, MUSC is the state's only comprehensive academic health system, with a unique mission to preserve and optimize human life in South Carolina through education, research and patient care. Each year, MUSC educates more than 3,200 students in six colleges – Dental Medicine, Graduate Studies, Health Professions, Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy – and trains more than 900 residents and fellows in its health system. MUSC brought in more than \$298 million in research funds in fiscal year 2022, leading the state overall in research funding. MUSC also leads the state in federal and National Institutes of Health funding, with more than \$220 million. For information on academic programs, visit [musc.edu](https://www.musc.edu).

As the health care system of the Medical University of South Carolina, MUSC Health is dedicated to delivering the highest-quality and safest patient care while educating and training generations of outstanding health care providers and leaders to serve the people of South Carolina and beyond. Patient care is provided at 16 hospitals (includes owned and affiliated), with approximately 2,700 beds and four additional hospital locations in development; more than 350 telehealth sites and connectivity to patients' homes; and nearly 750 care locations situated in all regions of South Carolina. In 2023, for the ninth consecutive year, U.S. News & World Report named MUSC Health University Medical Center in Charleston the No. 1 hospital in South Carolina. To learn more about clinical patient services, visit [muschealth.org](https://www.muschealth.org).

MUSC has a total enterprise annual operating budget of \$5.9 billion. The nearly 26,000 MUSC family members include world-class faculty, physicians, specialty providers, scientists, students, affiliates and care team members who deliver groundbreaking education, research and patient care.

### **About University of South Carolina**

The University of South Carolina is a globally recognized, high-impact research university committed to a superior student experience and to innovation in learning, research and community engagement. Founded in 1801, the university is a top-tier Carnegie Foundation research institution offering the No. 1 first-year student experience among public universities and more than 300 academic degree programs. More than 50,000 students are enrolled at one of 20 locations throughout the state, including the research campus in Columbia. With 60 nationally ranked academic programs — including top-ranked programs in international business, the nation's best honors college and distinguished programs in engineering, law, medicine, public health and the arts — the university is helping to build healthier, more educated communities in South Carolina and around the world.