

# Studying Alzheimer's in Latinos

Alzheimer's research has primarily focused on white people of European descent.

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University of Miami researchers joined doctors in [Puerto Rico](#), [Peru](#) and [Africa](#) to look for genetic factors that may contribute to the increased risk for [Alzheimer's](#) among Latinos and seek new drug targets.

About [6 million people](#) in the United States have Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia among older adults. Latinos are about 1.5 times more likely to develop Alzheimer's than white people, according to the [Alzheimer's Association](#). Researchers found that Puerto Ricans, specifically, have an even higher chance of developing Alzheimer's, which could be attributed to a [genetic](#) variant that was discovered.

About 10.7% of the U.S. population above age 65 has Alzheimer's, compared with Puerto Rico's 12.5%. In the continental United States, Puerto Ricans make up the second largest Latino group.

More than three decades ago, Margaret Pericak-Vance, PhD, director of the John P. Hussman Institute for Human Genomics at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, was instrumental in diversifying the country's Alzheimer's genetic research, which then primarily focused on white populations while neglecting Latino and African communities.

Pericak-Vance is now leading the Hussman Institute as it diversifies its genetic database for Alzheimer's research and genetic variations among the Latinos and Africans. The goal is to close gaps in minority research, which could contribute significantly to the development of Alzheimer's drugs.

Katrina Celis, MD, an associate scientist at the Hussman Institute, who is studying Alzheimer's in Latinos, is originally from Venezuela and emphasizes the need for diverse research.

"Coming from an underdeveloped country, I faced and understood the need for inclusion and representation of diverse populations in genetic research," Celis said in an [MSNBC article](#). "I have mainly focused on increasing genetic research participation from diverse populations, specifically from Hispanic Latino communities."

Researchers found that risk levels were different among various racial groups. For example,

people of African descent had a lower genetic risk of developing Alzheimer's.

In the same article, Pericak-Vance said that diversifying participants in Alzheimer's studies has allowed the research community to "see that ancestry was important and that we had to include diverse populations in research."

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