

The Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives

Our History

The Beginning

The Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives was born out of a three-day meeting at [Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory](#) in 1992, in the early days of "[The Decade of the Brain](#)." There, 30 of the country's most eminent neuroscientists convened to debate the progress and promise of brain research. The meeting was organized by James D. Watson, Ph.D., Director of the Laboratory and Nobel laureate for his codiscovery of the structure of DNA, and the late David Mahoney, Chairman of the Dana Foundation. Their vision was to establish a group of vanguard neuroscientists who would commit themselves to translating the advances in brain research to the public, the ultimate beneficiary of these advances.

The assembled scientists debated how best to communicate the promise of neuroscience to the public in a way that would convey their knowledge and excitement. They were particularly convened about recent decreases in federal funding for neuroscience research at the very time such research was beginning to yield breakthrough treatments for some of the most devastating neurological disorders.



"People want to know what you can do for them," Mahoney (left) told the neuroscientists. "They want results that can benefit them." Only by convincing the public of the direct benefits of their work, Mahoney cautioned them, could they hope to receive the funding, public and private, that would speed vital work.

By the end of the Cold Spring Harbor meeting, the group had vowed to change the landscape of public support for brain research. They developed a "Declaration of Objectives" setting forth 10 research goals that were both meaningful to the public and considered achievable by the end of the 1990's. These goals guided the Alliance's activities of the next several years.

1. The identification of the genes that are defective in familial Alzheimer's and Huntington's diseases.
2. The identification of the genes responsible for manic-depressive illness.
3. The development of new medications and therapeutic strategies to reduce nerve cell death and enhance recovery of function after strokes and other forms of brain injury.
4. The development of new drugs and other measures to alleviate the effects of multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's disease, motor neuron disease (e.g., ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease), Parkinson's disease, and epilepsy.
5. The identification of new treatments to promote nerve regeneration following spinal cord and peripheral nerve injury.

6. The development of new and more effective treatments for manic-depressive illness, anxiety disorders, and forms of schizophrenia that at present resist treatment.
7. The discovery, testing, and application of agents that will block the action of cocaine and other addictive substances.
8. The development of new treatments for pain associated with cancer, arthritis, migraine headaches, and other debilitating diseases.
9. The identification of the genes that cause hereditary deafness and blindness.
10. The elucidating of the neuronal mechanisms involved in learning and memory.

A Global Force in Brain Research Advocacy

From those founding members, the Dana Alliance has grown to a global organization of more than [600 members](#), including 15 Nobel laureates. Its members, all leaders in their field, represent a broad range of neuroscience disciplines, including neurology, neurobiology, neuropsychology, cognitive neuroscience, neuroimmunology, and virtually every subspecialty within neuroscience. Today, the Alliance is considered one of the most effective and respected forces in communicating science.

In 1997, leading scientific colleagues in Europe sought to make the mission global. After discussions in Europe with Mr. Mahoney and Dana director William Safire, the [European Dana Alliance for the Brain](#) (EDAB) was created. EDAB's active membership has taken the message about the promise of brain research worldwide, firmly establishing that organization as another important international force in advocacy for brain science.