

# THE 1<sup>ST</sup> CUENCA CONFERENCE



**2.9.25**

THE STEINHARDT MUSEUM  
OF NATURAL HISTORY  
TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

# BUILDING A HEALTHIER FUTURE FOR OLDER ADULTS



In Memory of  
Prof. Yoram Maaravi  
(1957-2024)

# Program

08:15-09:00	Registration & Breakfast
09:00-09:15	<b>Opening Remarks</b> Prof. Rachel Dankner, Head, Cuenca Research Institute Prof. Karen B. Avraham, Dean, Gray Faculty of Medical & Health Sciences
09:15-09:30	<b>In Memory of Prof. Maaravi</b> Neta Maaravi Prof. Yakir Rottenberg
09:30-10:20	<b>Keynote Lecture:</b> Prof. Nathan Herrmann <b>Complexity, Cognition, Compassion: Geriatric Psychiatry Comes of Age</b>
10:20-10:50	Coffee Break & Poster Session (Lobby, Steinhardt Museum of Natural History)
10:50-11:10	Prof. Ramit Ravona-Springer <b>Behavioral Changes as Predictors of Cognitive Decline and Dementia</b>
11:10-11:30	Prof. Tali Cukierman-Yaffe <b>The Challenges of Healthy Aging with Diabetes</b>
11:30-12:10	Prof. Teresa Seeman & Dr. Sharon Stein Merkin <b>Looking Beyond Biology: How Our Social Environment Affects Aging</b>
12:10-12:30	Coffee Break & Poster Session (Lobby, Steinhardt Museum of Natural History)

12:30-12:50	Dr. Rafi Hadad <b>Brain Health in Underserved Populations</b>
12:50-13:20	Mr. Yossi Heymann <b>Promoting Optimal Aging in Israel – Data, Impact, Indicators, and a Case Study</b>
13:20-14:10	Lunch Break
14:10-14:50	Prof. Moyses Szklo <b>The Importance of the Natural History for Public Health Policy</b>
14:50-15:50	<b>Roundtable Discussions</b> <b>Research</b> (moderator, Prof. Tali Cukierman-Yaffe) <b>Education</b> (moderator, Dr. Vered Hermush) <b>Policy</b> (moderator, Dr. Ariel Yakim)
15:50-16:20	Panel: <b>Presentation of Roundtable Conclusions</b>
16:20-16:50	<b>Cuenca Excellence Scholarship Ceremony</b> Short lectures by winners of the Cuenca Excellence Scholarship
16:50-17:00	<b>Closing Remarks</b> Prof. Rachel Dankner

# Welcome

Dear Colleagues, Friends, and Distinguished Participants,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the scientific conference of the Cuenca Research Institute for Treatment Approaches to Age-Related Diseases at Tel Aviv University. The Cuenca Institute promotes a holistic understanding of aging, integrating biological, psychological, and social factors to support healthy and meaningful lives.

This conference represents our vision to bridge the gap between evolving research knowledge and practical application. As we gather researchers, clinicians, and thought leaders from diverse disciplines, from medicine, social sciences, and health policy, we create opportunities to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, share discoveries, and develop solutions our aging society requires.

We dedicate this first conference to our dear colleague, Prof. Yoram Maaravi, who died in a tragic accident in December 2024. Prof. Maaravi helped design the Cuenca Institute's mission statement, providing insightful understanding of gerontology and his passion for promoting healthy aging. We were honored to have him as a board member, and his absence is a great loss.

I encourage you to engage fully with presentations, participate actively in discussions, and seize networking opportunities that will lead to new collaborations. Together, we can advance understanding of aging and develop innovative approaches benefiting older adults and society. Welcome to this inspiring gathering.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Prof. Rachel Dankner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Prof." written in a smaller, more formal script than the last name.

Prof. Rachel Dankner

Head of the Cuenca Research Institute

# Albert and Alba Cuenca

Albert and Alba Cuenca, prominent businesspeople and philanthropists from Argentina, dedicated their lives and resources to strengthening the State of Israel and supporting its institutions. They became exemplary figures of devotion, generosity, and love for the country. As active members of the Argentine Friends Association of



Tel Aviv University, they combined business success with a deep commitment to the values of solidarity, education, and humanism.

Their generosity was particularly evident in their longstanding and significant support of Tel Aviv University. Thanks to their contributions, the university was able to promote innovative research initiatives, especially in the fields of medicine and aging, thereby positively impacting the well-being of society in Israel and around the world.

Beyond academia, Albert and Alba Cuenca supported and were involved in numerous social and educational projects across Israel, including inclusion programs for children with special needs, children with diverse abilities, and children on the autism spectrum. Their active involvement in the Friends Association also helped strengthen the bonds of friendship and partnership between Argentina and Israel.

At Tel Aviv University, the Cuenca Research Institute for Treatment Approaches to Age-Related Diseases is now operating in their name. This institute is part of the university's network of research foundations and represents a meaningful contribution to scientific research in this important field. In Jerusalem, the Cuenca name is associated with the Albert and Alba Cuenca Elementary School (Efrata), located in the Baka neighborhood. Since 1986, the couple supported the school through renovations, development of educational infrastructure, the establishment of innovative facilities, and the promotion of inclusive education.



## In Memory of Prof. Yoram Maaravi (1957–2024)

Prof. Yoram Maaravi was a specialist in geriatrics, internal medicine, endocrinology, and rehabilitation. He was also a pioneering researcher and one of the leading figures in the fields of geriatrics and rehabilitation in Israel. Over the course of decades of professional activity, he combined clinical excellence with extensive academic work and significant public contribution.

Prof. Maaravi worked for 37 years at Hadassah Har Hazofim (Mount Scopus) Hospital, where he led the field of geriatric medicine and was involved in numerous studies focusing on the physical, functional, health-related, social, and economic aspects of aging. He published dozens of articles in the international scientific literature and lectured at many academic institutions in the field of geriatrics.

In parallel, he served as the director of home rehabilitation and community rehabilitation centers for Clalit Health Services in the Jerusalem district, and as chief physician in the geriatric and rehabilitation system of the Hadassah Medical Centers and the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

Prof. Maaravi took an active part in public committees related to aging and dedicated time to broad public and educational work. As part of this, he participated in the Israeli public TV program "80 and Four" (Kan 11), where he promoted awareness of the importance of intergenerational connections and their positive impact on the quality of life of older adults.

Yoram was a beloved partner, father of two daughters, and a warm, deeply appreciated individual who was loved by his friends, colleagues, and patients.

Until his untimely death, he was a member of the leadership of the Cuenca Research Institute for Treatment Approaches to Age-Related Diseases at Tel Aviv University, where he played a central role in shaping the institute's vision and strategic directions.

The institute's first conference (September 2, 2025), dedicated to his memory, reflects the gerontological perspective that Prof. Maaravi championed, a view that considers the full spectrum of life domains and the interconnected physical, emotional, familial, social, and economic factors that together shape the health, quality of life, and longevity of aging individuals.

# Cuenca Research Institute

## Board of Directors



**Prof. Rachel Dankner**, M.D., M.P.H., Dipl. Sports Med, is the Director of the Center for Public Health Research and Chief Epidemiologist of the Gertner Institute for Epidemiology and Health Policy Research, Sheba Medical Center, as well as the Director of the Reuth Institute for Research, Development and Innovation at the Reuth Tel-Aviv Rehabilitation and Geriatric Hospital.

She is a Full Professor in Epidemiology at the Department for Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, School of Public Health, Tel Aviv Gray Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences. Prof. Dankner specialized in Public Health and is the former Head of the public health residency examinations committee.

Prof. Dankner graduated in medicine at the Hebrew University and earned her M.P.H. degree at the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. She holds a Diploma in Sports Medicine from the Tel Aviv Continuing Education program and is a certified sports physician and marine physician.

Prof. Dankner's research focuses on risk factors and prevention of cardiovascular diseases, type-2 diabetes, and obesity, with an emphasis on lifestyle modifications. She established several cohorts of heart patients, stroke survivors, and diabetic patients, which serve in her longitudinal epidemiologic studies of adult and elderly populations.



**Dr. Sharon Stein Merkin** is a Senior Researcher at the Gertner Institute of Epidemiology and Health Policy Research at Sheba Medical Center and an Adjunct Professor at the Division of Geriatrics at the UCLA Geffen School of Medicine.

Her research focuses on the role of social determinants of health in shaping population health disparities, with a particular interest in how psychosocial and socioeconomic



factors influence the biological processes underlying disease risk and aging. Recently Dr. Merkin has launched a project along with colleagues at Gertner to assess how civic engagement may buffer the harmful health effects of war-related trauma in Israel.

Dr. Merkin leads multiple ongoing research collaborations in both Israel and the United States, advancing the understanding of how social and biological factors interact over the life course. Her work bridges disciplines, contributing to the development of evidence-based strategies aimed at reducing health disparities and improving outcomes for aging and vulnerable populations.



**Prof. Ramit Ravona-Springer** is a geriatric psychiatrist and Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Tel Aviv University. She leads a multidisciplinary clinical unit at Sheba Medical Center dedicated to diagnosing, treating, and managing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral symptoms in dementia and neurodegenerative disorders, utilizing state-of-the-art diagnostic tools and advanced treatments for Alzheimer's disease.

Her research focuses on identifying risk factors and mechanisms underlying cognitive decline and dementia. She directs two major longitudinal studies: the Israel Registry for Alzheimer's Prevention (IRAP), examining offspring of Alzheimer's patients, and the Israel Diabetes and Cognitive Decline (IDCD) study, which explores dementia risk in older adults with type 2 diabetes.

In recent years, Prof. Ravona-Springer has expanded her work to investigate non-cognitive aspects of aging and dementia, with an emphasis on behavioral and emotional symptoms such as apathy. She is committed to improving measurement tools, understanding the cognitive and neurological bases of these symptoms, and developing early disease markers and targeted therapeutic strategies.



**Prof. Tali Cukierman-Yaffe** is an endocrinologist and clinical epidemiologist. She is the chief physician of the Center for Successful Aging with Diabetes and head of the Endocrinology and Diabetes Service for Women & Pregnancy at the Division of Endocrinology & Diabetes, Sheba Medical Center. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, School of Public Health, at the Gray Faculty of Medical & Health Sciences, Tel Aviv University, a member of the Herczeg Institute on Aging,

a Senior International Fellow at PHRI, McMaster University and the scientific lead of the International Geriatric Diabetes Society.

She has authored numerous publications, presented internationally, and contributed to local and global guidelines on the challenges of managing diabetes in older adults.

Prof. Cukierman-Yaffe has served as PI and led cognitive sub-studies in major cardiovascular trials involving people with diabetes. Her recent work has expanded to develop technological solutions for improving care of older adults with diabetes, using machine learning models to assess cognitive and physical health agility (BIRAX-funded). She currently leads several trials, including the evaluation of an automated insulin delivery system in older adults with type-1 diabetes, and prevention of sarcopenia in new older GLP-1 receptor agonist users.

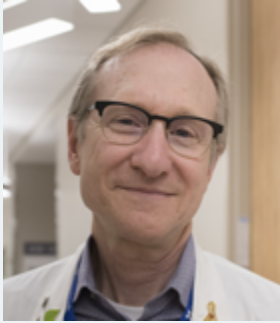


**Dr. Violetta Rozani** is a registered nurse with bachelor's and master's degrees in Nursing Sciences and a PhD in Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine from Tel Aviv University. She is a senior faculty member and lecturer in the Department of Nursing Sciences at the Gray Faculty of Medical & Health Sciences, where she conducts applied research on aging populations and the challenges of chronic illness in healthcare systems.

Her research focuses on quality of life, resilience, and self-care capabilities among older adults, as well as the well-being of family caregivers supporting relatives with complex chronic conditions such as Parkinson's disease, dementia, and psychiatric disorders. She investigates issues of rights navigation, emotional burden, and long-term support, as well as the impact of innovative interventions, including therapeutic gardening, on coping and functioning for both patients and caregivers.

Dr. Rozani is also dedicated to advancing the professional role of nurses in healthcare. Her work addresses professional autonomy, advanced clinical competencies, and evidence-based leadership, emphasizing training, empowerment, and professional development. She examines how nurses' expanded roles contribute to improving care quality and promoting health in both inpatient and community settings.

# Invited Speakers



**Dr. Nathan Herrmann** is Director of Psychopharmacology Services at Merchavim Center for Brain and Mental Health in Be'er Yaacov, Israel, and a visiting professor at Tel Aviv University. He is a Professor of Psychiatry in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto and formerly, the Richard Lewar Chair in Geriatric Psychiatry at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and the University of Toronto. He was Head of the Division of Geriatric Psychiatry at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre from 1991-2019 and was Head of the Division of

Geriatric Psychiatry at the University of Toronto from 1994-2005.

Dr. Herrmann's research focuses on Alzheimer's disease and related disorders pharmacotherapy, studying treatments for cognition and neuropsychiatric symptoms. He has over 900 publications and has held over 170 research grants including grants from the Canadian Institute of Health Research, the National Institute of Health, Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's Drug Discovery Foundation, Alzheimer's Society of Canada, Brain Canada, and the Heart and Stroke Foundation. He has won the Award for Outstanding Achievements in Geriatric Psychiatry from The Canadian Academy of Geriatric Psychiatry, and the International Psychogeriatric Association's Distinguished Service Award.



**Dr. Teresa Seeman** is a Professor of Medicine & Epidemiology at UCLA. Trained as a social epidemiologist, she also completed post-doctoral training in neuroendocrinology. Working in both community and laboratory-based contexts, her interdisciplinary research has focused on understanding the health effects of social contexts (e.g., socio-economic status, social relationships) and psychological characteristics (e.g., control

beliefs, perceptions of self-efficacy), including effects on risks for physical and cognitive decline as well as overall longevity. In collaboration with Bruce McEwen, Dr. Seeman led the development of a program of research on the concept of allostatic load which takes a multi-systems view of biological aging. More recently, Dr. Seeman has also focused on the development and evaluation of inter-generational interventions that can simultaneously promote health and psychosocial benefits for older adults and the younger generations they engage with through the intervention programs. Her most recent efforts include establishing the Generation Xchange program in Los Angeles Unified School District elementary schools, that provides additional evidence of the dual benefits of such programs on both the academic progress of the children and health benefits for the older adults.



**Dr. Rafi Hadad** is a specialist in cognitive neurology. He completed his neurology residency at Rambam Health Care Campus and pursued a prestigious clinical fellowship in cognitive neurology at the Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI), University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). His research focuses on brain health in underserved populations, with emphasis on vascular risk factors, social determinants of health, and genetic influences. Dr. Hadad is actively involved in the development and validation of culturally adapted cognitive assessment tools for diverse populations in Israel.

He also collaborates on the creation of innovative and sensitive cognitive screening tools in low-resource settings worldwide. In addition, he leads outreach projects aimed at improving access to cognitive services for the Arab population in Israel, supported by competitive research grants.



**Yossi Heymann** is the Director of Joint-Eshel, Israel's leading agency for developing and promoting programs that support healthy aging and older adults. Since 2014, he has guided Eshel's strategic vision in partnership with the Israeli government, overseeing a team of 70 professionals. Under his leadership, Eshel has advanced national initiatives to improve care for older persons, expand community-based services, and strengthen social and health systems to meet the needs of Israel's aging population.

Among his key achievements are establishing Israel's inter-ministerial roundtable for healthy aging and initiating a national resolution to integrate aging-related indicators into government policy and data systems. He also chairs the Ministry of Health's national committee on palliative and end-of-life care.

Before joining Joint-Eshel, Heymann served as Director General of the Jerusalem Municipality, leading social policy development for vulnerable populations, including Holocaust survivors, at-risk youth, and minority communities. He previously held senior leadership roles in the Israel Defense Forces, concluding his service as Head of Strategic Planning. Heymann holds an M.A. in Political Science from the University of Haifa and a B.A. in Economics and Management from the Technion.



**Dr. Moyses Szklo** is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Epidemiology, with a joint appointment in Medicine (Cardiology) at Johns Hopkins University, and Director of the Johns Hopkins Summer Institute of Epidemiology and Biostatistics. Originally from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, he earned his medical degree from the State University of Rio de Janeiro and both his Master and Doctor of Public Health degrees from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Author of over 350 peer-reviewed articles and a leading textbook on epidemiologic methods, Dr. Szklo served as Editor-in-Chief of the American Journal of Epidemiology for 31 years. He was principal investigator of the Johns Hopkins site for the landmark ARIC and MESA cohort studies, and currently chairs MESA's Publications and Presentations Committee, which has reviewed more than 2,500 manuscripts.

His research also includes a nationwide study of cardiovascular risk factors in 80,000 Brazilian adolescents. Recognized for his mentorship and leadership, he has received multiple awards from Johns Hopkins, lectureship honors from Harvard and the University of North Carolina, and recognition from the U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

# Recipients of the 2025 Cuenca Excellence Scholarship



**Liat Orenstein**

## **The Association Between Adequacy of Medical Care for Community-Dwelling Elderly and Healthy Aging**

Liat Orenstein is a researcher at the Gertner Institute for Epidemiology and Health Policy Research at Sheba Medical Center, and a PhD candidate in epidemiology at Tel Aviv University. Over the past decade, her research has encompassed cardiovascular epidemiology, health disparities, prevention and pharmacoepidemiology. Her doctoral thesis focuses on aging, medication safety, and long-term health outcomes in older adults. Liat has authored multiple peer-reviewed publications, presented her work at national and international conferences, and received awards from the Sheba Longevity Center and the Herczeg Institute. Her PhD research has been supported by the Israel National Institute for Health Policy Research, Tel Aviv University (through Faculty of Medicine Research Funds), the Healthy Longevity Research Center, and the Cuenca Institute.



**Avigail Lithwick Algon**

## **Advancing Home-Based Motor and Cognitive Assessments in Neurodegenerative Diseases: Integrating Online Administration, Large-Scale Databases, and Machine Learning**

Avigail Lithwick Algon is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Occupational Therapy, Gray Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Tel Aviv University, supervised by Dr. William Saban.

Her research focuses on developing and validating remote motor and cognitive assessments for neurodegenerative diseases, particularly Parkinson's disease and cerebellar ataxia. Drawing on her diverse background in physical therapy, mathematics, and physics, Ms. Algon combines clinical expertise with data science and machine learning to provide accessible diagnosis, monitoring, and early identification.



# Poster Presentations

## **Ori Ben Ari\***

Cognitive and brain biomarker outcomes from a double-blind, sham-controlled hyperbaric oxygen therapy trial

## **Shira Freiman\***

The Role of Family Resilience, Rights Utilization and Relationship Closeness in Promoting Caregivers' Self-Efficacy in Parkinson's Disease

## **Tal Sadeh\***

Effect of Sleep on Blood Biomarkers in Alzheimer's Disease: Emerging Findings from the DoD-ADBI Study

## **Hagar Shimon\***

Technology for Healthy Aging with Type 1 Diabetes

## **Adi Waintroub\***

Distinct and Combined Effects of Sensory-Perceptual and Auditory-Cognitive Load on Auditory Processing in Older Cochlear Implant Users

## **Itay Cohen**

Screening for Cognitive Dysfunction in Older Adults with Diabetes

## **Lilach Cohen**

The Influence of Dynamic Mattresses on Sleep Quality in Nursing Home Residents

## **Ifat Keinan**

Redesigning Rehabilitation: Collaborative Practices with Older Adults

## **Miguel Morales Moshiaashvili**

Pretreatment with hyperbaric oxygen mitigates the pathological and functional outcome of experimentally-induced ischemic stroke in aged mice

## **Tal Yahalom-Peri**

Preventing Sarcopenia in Older Adults with T2D and Obesity Treated with GLP-1 RA

\* Recipients of the 2025 Cuenca Research Scholarship

# Albert and Alba Cuenca Research Institute for Treatment Approaches to Age-Related Diseases

The Albert and Alba Cuenca Research Institute for Treatment Approaches to Age-Related Diseases was founded with a broad and innovative vision of gerontology, one that sees aging as a complex, multidimensional, and inspiring process shaped by physical, psychological, social, familial, and economic factors. The Institute examines the contexts in which diseases emerge and interact, aiming to promote optimal aging, so that old age can be a healthy, active, and meaningful period of life.

We recognize that healthy aging depends not only on measurable biomedical indicators but also on less tangible factors such as loneliness, emotional hardship, functional decline, and financial strain. Addressing these challenging factors is central to our mission, both in research and in practice.

The Institute aims to serve as a coordinating hub for aging-related activities across Tel Aviv University, consolidating knowledge, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and sparking dialogue among fields ranging from medicine and health sciences to social sciences. These connections deepen our understanding of aging and inspire innovative therapeutic solutions. To bridge the gap between emerging research and real-world application, the Institute seeks to initiate processes that advance both academic and clinical, practical excellence in gerontology and geriatrics, guided by appropriate methodological standards. We are also committed to nurturing the next generation of professionals, encouraging them to dedicate their expertise to this vital field, and recognizing its profound impact on individuals, families, and society at large.

Visit us at

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