

Research Awards Jesús Serra

Food, nutrition, and health

1. About the Research Awards Jesús Serra

Research Awards Jesús Serra

The annual Research Awards Jesús Serra, held for the first time in 2018, are an initiative of Fundació Occident, part of GCO. This year, 2024, it celebrates its sixth edition.

These awards recognise the careers of young researchers working in Spain and support projects that represent significant advances in nutrition, food and health research. Two prizes are awarded each year, in the categories of basic and clinical research, with an endowment of 50,000 euros each.

With these awards, the Fundació Occident not only recognises the best research talent in our country, giving them the visibility they so richly deserve, but also contributes to building a healthier society – following the advice of large and renowned organisations, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) – and ensuring the well-being of future generations.

Fundación Occident

It was born as the Fundació Catalana Occidente within GCO in 1998 and has since led sponsorship and patronage efforts that the company had been developing for over a century. In 2006, following the death of GCO's founder Jesús Serra, it changed its name to honor his legacy. Now, under the new name of Fundació Occident, it maintains the same spirit that has characterized it to date and continues to promote its five lines of action: research, education, cultural activities, sports activities, and charitable initiatives; reinforcing GCO's commitment to society year after year.



Among its projects, numerous initiatives stand out for their focus on nurturing education and training of children and young people, promoting the musical career of emerging artists or poetry, and programs aimed at people with disabilities in sports. In research, beyond these awards, the Foundation provides support to young researchers as well as cutting-edge research in biomedicine and astrophysics.

More information is available at: fundacionoccident.org

GCO is currently a consolidated leader in the Spanish insurance sector, ranking sixth in terms of premium volume, and is the second-largest group globally in credit insurance. Its business holding operates in over 50 countries and employs more than 7,000 people. Through a network of 1,600 offices, its over 19,000 brokers serve more than 4 million clients.

For more information, visit:
grupocatalanaoccidente.com



2. Promoting health through diet and nutrient metabolism

Consistently, research focuses on healthy eating habits and lifestyles to prevent numerous diseases or to improve the clinical management of pathologies such as ischemic heart disease, cancer, and obesity. Furthermore, as we unveil the intricacies of nutrient metabolism, we better understand their role in health and disease.

Through the Research Awards Jesús Serra, our foundation advancing research and deepening our understanding of how food and nutrition can improve the lives of millions of people in Spain globally.

Just as with other Foundation programs, these Awards focus on young researchers, because they are already shaping our future. In the words of Federico Halpern, president of the Fundación Occident,



The wellbeing of future generations depends on supporting all these young scientists, and on promoting and disseminating research into nutrition and health.

Adequate nutrition strengthens the immune system, prevents tumours and cardiovascular pathologies, and can slow down and even reverse chronic diseases such as overweight and obesity. But research goes far beyond what we eat and points to new therapeutic targets based on how our body uses nutrients to grow or function.

Dr. María Blasco, chair of the jury of these Awards and one of the leading international researchers in the study of cancer, explains that,



A healthy and balanced diet could prevent around 30-50% of all cancer diagnoses. That is why it is essential to raise awareness of the importance of lifestyle habits and to continue researching. These awards are undoubtedly of great help in this important work that we all have to tackle together.

3. Research Awards Jesús Serra: call for applications 2024

6th edition

Purpose: Researchers' careers and projects.

Number of awards: 2, basic research and clinical research.

Financial endowment: €100,000 gross, divided between the two categories, basic and clinical, with €50,000 each. This endowment must be invested in expenses associated with the research project.

Candidates: Researchers under 46 years of age* on the closing date of this call, with a minimum of 3 years of research in Spain.

Scientific endorsement: Candidates must be endorsed by at least one letter of support from one of their project leaders or professionals of recognised prestige linked to universities, hospitals or research centres in Spain.

Completion and submission of applications:

Applications must be submitted, in Spanish or English, exclusively through the website fundacionoccident.org/eng/awards-research

Deadline: Applications may be submitted from 3 April to 7 June 2024, both inclusive.

Jury: Made up of professionals of recognised prestige in the fields of medicine and biology, from research centres of excellence.

Awardees: To be announced on the website fundacionoccident.org/eng/awards-research and at the ceremony in November 2024.

2 categories will reward the researchers' careers and projects: Basic and clinical research**.

Annually, Research Awards Jesús Serra recognize the trajectory of two young researchers working in Spain who have made outstanding contributions to research in food, nutrition, and health.

*The age of 46 may be exceeded if the candidate has temporarily interrupted his/her career as a result of the birth or adoption of children and their care during the first months of life. These months of extension must be supported by relevant official documentation.

**If the research project accompanying the application is in the pre-clinical phase, the category should reflect the long-term objectives of this line of research.

4. Award-winning researchers

Basic research



Guadalupe Sabio

Principal Investigator, Spanish National Cancer Research Center (CNIO)
1st edition

At CNIO, Dr. Sabio leads the research team studying how metabolic alterations and obesity trigger other secondary diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.



Salvador Aznar

ICREA Researcher, Institute for Research in Biomedicine of Barcelona
2nd Edition

Dr. Aznar researches the role of adult stem cells in aging and cancer development. Recently, his team has discovered the potentiating effect of certain fatty acids on metastasis, which is the cause of most cancer deaths. The award recognises his work in understanding the effect of the consumption of these acids on cancer.



Rubén Nogueiras

Researcher at the Centre for Research in Molecular Medicine and Chronic Diseases (CIMUS), University of Santiago de Compostela
3rd edition

Dr. Nogueiras is an expert in the molecular mechanisms involved in the development of obesity, one of the world's most widespread and costliest diseases. He studies the interactions between the central nervous system and peripheral organs to regulate energy balance, as well as triggers for the development of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, the prevalence of which is increasing each year.



Arkaitz Carracedo

Ikerbasque Research Professor at the Centre for Cooperative Research in Biosciences (CIC bioGUNE)

4th edition

Dr. Carracedo studies the metabolic basis of prostate cancer and the role of polyamines in the aggressiveness of cancer cells. The winning project aims to understand the molecular effects of polyamines in tumour and non-tumour cells, and to define the therapeutic potential of polyamines to regulate their synthesis in our body or even refine their use as food supplements.



Manuel Irimia

Research Professor ICREA and Principal Investigator at the Centre for Genomic Regulation (CRG)

5th edition

Dr. Irimia leads the research group that studies the role of microexons, which are tiny DNA sequences, in insulin secretion and the development of diabetes. The awarded project aims to explore their use in defining new molecular targets and therapeutic strategies for diabetes, thereby contributing to reducing the disease's comorbidities and healthcare burden.



Pablo Pérez

Scientific Director, Maimonides Institute for Biomedical Research of Cordoba (IMIBIC) and Professor at the University of Cordoba, and internist at the Reina Sofia University Hospital

1st edition

Dr. Pérez is an expert in clinical nutrigenomics, specialising in the gene-environment interaction and its effects on diseases such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. The award recognises his studies on the effects of the Mediterranean diet on the improvement of mild cognitive impairment.



Raúl Zamora

Principal Investigator, Bellvitge Biomedical Research Institute

2nd edition

Dr. Zamora investigates the effect of polyphenols on the development of diseases such as cancer and obesity. Fruits and vegetables are foods rich in polyphenols and could play a key role in weight control in people with obesity as well as in other health parameters related to weight loss treatments.



Borja Ibáñez

Cardiologist at the Fundación Jiménez Díaz Hospital in Madrid and Director of Clinical Research at CNIC

3rd edition

Dr. Ibáñez is an expert in the treatment of acute myocardial infarction, heart failure, and the cardiotoxicity of cancer treatments. He also studies the effect of diet in the prevention and treatment of these diseases. He leads a clinical trial to identify very early stages of heart damage in cancer patients, and an international trial to change post-infarction treatment guidelines. He also leads the CIBER group on cardiovascular diseases.



Mª Carmen Collado

Scientific Researcher, Institute of Agrochemistry and Food Technology (IATA-CSIC)

3rd edition

Dr. Collado investigates the associations between human microbiota, food and health in the mother-child binomial. Specifically, her team aims to understand perinatal, environmental and genetic factors that impact the child's health during the first 1,000 days of life, from conception to the age of 2 years.



Fàtima Crispi

Medical senior specialist in the Fetal Cardiology Unit at the Centre for Maternal-Fetal Medicine of the Hospital Clínic de Barcelona and Hospital Sant Joan de Déu

4th edition

Dr. Crispi investigates low birth weight babies, a condition associated with high perinatal morbidity and mortality and cardiovascular consequences later in life. Starting with an intervention in the diet of pregnant women, Crispi and her team saw a reduction in the number of underweight babies and associated cardiovascular damage. She now wants to see if the benefits in cardiovascular development persist a few years after birth.



Maira Bes-Rastrollo

Professor of Preventive Medicine and Public Health at the University of Navarra (UNAV) in Pamplona

5th edition

Dr. Bes-Rastrollo is an expert in nutritional epidemiology, specifically focusing on understanding how various dietary patterns influence chronic diseases and mortality, as these diseases are the leading cause of death worldwide and are partly the result of poor nutrition. The awarded project aims to evaluate the proper adherence to a vegan diet and prevent potential health risks.

5. The jury, a scientific endorsement of the Research Awards Jesús Serra

The jury of the Research Awards Jesús Serra is chaired by Dr. María A. Blasco and composed of six highly prestigious scientists and physicians who are permanent members of the jury, as well as the scientists awarded in the previous edition of these awards.



The jury is composed of highly prestigious scientists and physicians in the field of medicine and health research, with established careers in national and international centers of excellence.



María A. Blasco

Director of the Spanish National Cancer Research Centre (CNIO)
President of the Jury

Dr. Blasco is also the head of the Telomeres and Telomerase Group at the CNIO, where she has led pioneering research into the role they play in the processes of cancer and aging.



Lina Badimon

Director of the Cardiovascular Research Centre (ICCC-CSIC) and Research Professor of the CSIC at the Santa Creu i Sant Pau Hospital

Dr. Badimon is internationally recognised for her contributions to the study of cardiovascular and cardiometabolic disease, specifically atherosclerosis, thrombosis and ischaemic diseases.



Carlos Macaya

Emeritus Professor of Cardiology at the Faculty of Medicine of the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM)

Dr. Macaya is a cardiologist specialising in haemodynamics and a pioneer in percutaneous therapeutic techniques or therapeutic catheterisation. In 1998, he created the Cardiovascular Institute of the Hospital Clínico San Carlos, which he directed until 2007.



Pedro Mata

Founder and President of the Spanish Foundation for Familial Hypercholesterolemia

Dr. Mata is a specialist in internal medicine. His research focuses on the epidemiological, clinical and molecular study of familial hypercholesterolemia, a field in which he directs the SAFEHEART cohort study in Spain. He is also co-founder and board member of the International Familial Hypercholesterolemia Foundation.



Mercedes Rincón

Professor of Immunology, University of Colorado at Denver and Professor Emeritus at the University of Vermont

Dr. Rincón investigates the immune response to autoimmune diseases as well as mechanisms of resistance to cancer treatments. She is co-founder of the start-up Mitotherapeutix and inventor of two patents and four additional patents.



Guadalupe Sabio

Principal Investigator, Spanish National Cancer Research Center (CNIO)

Dr. Sabio leads the research team studying how metabolic alterations and obesity trigger other secondary diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. Additionally, in 2018, she was one of the first winners of the Research Awards Jesús Serra.



Contact person: [Susana Codina](#)

E-mail: investigacion@fundacionoccident.com

Web: fundacionoccident.org/eng/awards-research