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**La Jolla
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FOR IMMUNOLOGY

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For Immediate Release

Global Autoimmune Institute invests over \$800,000 in La Jolla Institute for Immunology, strengthening autoimmune disease research and patient resources

LA JOLLA, CA — September 25, 2024 — La Jolla Institute for Immunology ([LJI](#)) is proud to announce new milestones in its partnership with the Global Autoimmune Institute ([GAI](#)), marking a major step forward in the advancement of autoimmune disease research and patient-centered resources.

"GAI's dedication to advancing autoimmune disease research and empowering patients aligns seamlessly with LJI's mission to unlock the mysteries of the immune system," says LJI Professor, President & CEO Erica Ollmann Saphire, Ph.D. "We are grateful for this opportunity to deepen our collaboration with such an influential partner in autoimmune research."

In August 2024, GAI provided \$375,000 to establish The Walter and Jean Boek Seminar Series at LJI. This series, an elevation of LJI's long-standing External Seminar Series, serves as a hub for intellectual exchange and scientific collaboration in immunology. With GAI's generous support, the series is now secured through the 2028-2029 academic calendar and will continue to spotlight pioneering research and foster dialogue among leading scientists.

The Walter and Jean Boek Seminar Series was named in honor of GAI Founder and Executive Director Sandra Boek Werness's parents, and pays tribute to their leadership in public health, as well as their lifelong devotion to the advancement of science. The lecture series makes its official debut during the 2024-2025 academic year. With up to 30 lectures a year, the series will feature world-class immunologists and facilitate connections between the scientific community and patients to drive forward both research and public understanding.

The Walter and Jean Boek Seminar Series will feature a special event called Lectures, Empowerment, and Awareness for Autoimmune Disease (LEAD) Day, held in March during Autoimmune Disease Awareness Month. LEAD Day will include The Walter and Jean Boek Leadership in Research Award Lecture targeted to scientists—a GAI-moderated, patient-focused, lay-friendly panel discussion and Q&A with medical research experts—followed by a social reception with Celiac-compatible offerings.

Earlier this year, GAI also demonstrated its commitment to advancing autoimmune research with an investment of \$431,000 in LJI. This funding supports vital research projects, including the establishment of a 1-year professorship for faculty member [Sam Myers, Ph.D.](#), who now serves as LJI's Global Autoimmune Institute Assistant Professor. The GAI funding supported ongoing research by LJI Postdoctoral Researcher Greet Verstichel, M.D., Ph.D., into autoimmune disease mechanisms, as well. Beyond research, GAI's contributions have enhanced patient-focused programs, including LJI's *Life Without Disease* and *Live from the Lab* initiatives

"I'm really thrilled by the work LJI scientists are doing to better understand the beginnings of autoimmune disease processes," says Boek Werness.

All of these initiatives, anchored by GAI's support, aim to amplify autoimmune disease research and empower patients to shape the future of treatment. By connecting top researchers with patient advocates, GAI's commitment continues to make a lasting impact on the field.

In a further testament to this growing partnership, LJI is pleased to announce that on Sept. 13, 2024, Boek Werness was unanimously appointed to LJI's Board of Directors. Her visionary leadership in autoimmune disease advocacy and research will strengthen the collaboration between GAI and LJI, fostering greater advancements in the field.

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