

Paris, Wednesday 14 may 2025

PROFESSOR ELIZABETH BLACKBURN AWARDED THE LEGION D'HONNEUR

Institut Imagine is honored to announce that Professor Elizabeth Blackburn, winner of the 2009 Nobel Prize in Medicine, has been awarded the insignia of Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur. This distinction was awarded to her in recognition of her entire scientific career and her exceptional commitment as President of the Scientific Advisory Board of Institut Imagine.

From a self-described “lab rat” to a pioneer in the genetics field

Elizabeth Blackburn, Morris Herztein Professor of Biology and Physiology in the Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics at the University of California, San Francisco, is a leading figure in telomere and telomerase research.

She discovered the molecular nature of telomeres - the ends of chromosomes that act as protective caps, essential for preserving genetic information - and of the enzyme telomerase, which has the property of lengthening these chromosome ends. Prof. Blackburn and her team are currently working on various cell types, including human cells, with the aim of elucidating telomerase function and telomere biology in detail.

Throughout her career, Elizabeth Blackburn has been honored by her peers with numerous prestigious awards. She was awarded the Albert Lasker Prize for Basic Medical Research (2006) and the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2009, for her major discoveries on the role of these structures in cellular aging, genetic stability and the development of certain diseases. Also the 2008 North American winner of the L'Oréal-UNESCO Award for Women in Science, she was named by Time Magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2007.

A visionary spirit at the service of a leading-edge institute

When she accepted the presidency of the Scientific Advisory Board at the creation of Institut *Imagine* (Inserm, AP-HP, Université Paris Cité), she put her expertise and international outlook at the service of the Institute's mission : to accelerate research, diagnosis and treatment of rare genetic diseases.

Under her chairmanship, the Scientific Advisory Board has played a strategic role in evaluating research projects, identifying new scientific priorities and strengthening the interdisciplinary dynamic between researchers, physicians and engineers. Her personal commitment, scientific rigor and ability to foster dialogue between disciplines have had a profound influence on the trajectory of Institut *Imagine*, now recognized as a world reference center in its field.

“I've been a member of Imagine's International Scientific Committee since its creation over ten years ago. I have witnessed the Institute's development and the realization of its dream, which was to bring together all the knowledge in developmental sciences and all the expertise in understanding genetic diseases in a single place, and in a spirit of synergy. I don't think you'll find this unique synthesis anywhere else,” she says of the Institute. On January 1, 2025, she handed over the presidency of the Scientific Advisory Board to Prof. Aravinda Chakravarti (NYU, USA).

The award ceremony took place at the Institute, in the presence of representatives of the scientific community, doctors, patients' families and institutional partners, all gathered to pay tribute to a woman whose scientific vision and humanist values echo the mission of the Imagine Institute. *“This award underlines the importance of Prof. Blackburn's commitment, whose contributions go far beyond the academic field. Her demanding and benevolent approach has helped consolidate our scientific strategy and anchor Imagine in a dynamic of excellence and innovation on an international scale”*, says Prof. Bana Jabri, Director of Institut Imagine.

About Institut Imagine

Located on the campus of the Hôpital Necker-Enfants malades AP-HP, Institut *Imagine* is a European leader in research, care and teaching in the field of genetic diseases. Its unique architecture, designed by Jean Nouvel and Bernard Valéro, brings together 1,000 researchers, doctors, teacher-researchers, engineers and healthcare staff in a single location, with the aim of accelerating research and diagnostic and therapeutic innovation to change the lives of families affected by genetic diseases. Institut *Imagine* has been awarded the status of Institut Hospitalo-Universitaire (IHU, in 2011 and 2019) and Institut Carnot (2020), and is supported by its six founding members, including AP-HP, Inserm and Université Paris Cité, as well as by private partners and sponsors. Every day in France, 64 babies are born with a genetic disease. Nearly 8,000 genetic diseases affect more than 3 million people, of whom nearly one in two has no diagnosis, and nearly 8 in 10 have no dedicated treatment. Faced with this public health emergency, the challenge is twofold: to diagnose and to cure.

www.institutimagine.org

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