ETH zürich | University of Zurich[UZH] | ZNZ Zentrum für Neurowissenschaften Zürich Neuroscience Center Zurich

A New Chapter for the ZNZ

Thank you, Fritjof Helmchen – and welcome to our new co-directors Susanne Wegener and Giacomo Indiveri



Fritjof Helmchen
Outgoing Director



Susanne Wegener
Co-Director



Giacomo Indiveri
Co-Director

After more than a decade in ZNZ leadership, Professor Fritjof Helmchen from the Brain Research Institute (UZH) has stepped down as director and passed the baton to the next generation: at its last meeting, the steering committee unanimously elected Professor Susanne Wegener and Professor Giacomo Indiveri as the new co-directors of the center. To mark this transition, let's look back at some of the major success stories from Fritjof Helmchen's tenure, which included several major ZNZ initiatives as well as numerous important international collaborations, before introducing the new directors.

Looking back on Fritjof Helmchen's tenure

Strategy workshops

To ensure that the ZNZ's core strengths are continuously evaluated and its strategy adapted to its members' needs, Fritjof introduced strategy workshops for group leaders, which now take place every three years. These meetings have become a key forum for tackling common challenges and charting important research directions, and they now form the basis of our network's strategic framework.

MSc in Interdisciplinary Brain Sciences

Fritjof helped initiate the Specialized UZH/ETH Joint Master's Program in Interdisciplinary Brain Sciences (MSc IDB), which the ZNZ has been running successfully since 2022. The broad program bridges the diverse ideas, backgrounds, methods and research fields in neuroscience and fosters an interdisciplinary mindset.

URPP AdaBD

Fritjof was also a major driving force behind the URPP Adaptive Brain Circuits in Development and Learning (AdaBD), launched in 2021, in which 23 of the 25 participating groups are active ZNZ members. He co-directs the URPP AdaBD with Esther Stoeckli and Ruxandra Bachmann-Gagescu.

This highly successful initiative will run until 2028, but its impact will reach well beyond that date, as the research it has fostered continues within new frameworks.

A new professorship in organoid research

Recognising the immense potential of organoid technology for both basic and translational research, Fritjof initiated the creation of a new assistant professorship in this field. Thanks to the generous support of the ZNZ's Board of Patrons and with the help of the URPP AdaBD, Akanksha Jain was appointed Assistant Professor of Neural MorphoGenomics at the University of Zurich. Her group based in the Department of Molecular Life Sciences investigates the developmental dynamics that shape the human brain in health and disease.

International partnerships

As director, Fritjof also continued to strengthen the center's international connections. Soon after taking office, he renewed the tripartite partnership with McGill University (Canada) and Oxford University (United Kingdom) and later launched a separate bilateral Joint Pilot Project Grant scheme with McGill (Canada) that supported ambitious Zurich–Montreal projects. He also established a new strategic partnership with the Queensland Brain Institute (Australia), which funded pilot studies on topics ranging from visual stimulation as a treatment for vascular dementia and optoacoustic tracing of therapeutic antibodies to molecular dynamics during transsynaptic plasticity. Finally, he continued to strengthen our long-standing partnership with UCL (United Kingdom), whose seed fund continues to support joint projects at both institutions.

> *The ZNZ steering committee, coordination office and the whole community extend their warmest thanks to Fritjof for all the dedication and energy he has given to our center.*

Our new co-directors

And so, a new chapter begins for the ZNZ under the joint leadership of Susanne Wegener and Giacomo Indiveri. Their highly complementary expertise spanning computational and clinical neuroscience represents a fantastic opportunity for the ZNZ to strengthen connections between different fields and expand our translational efforts.



Susanne Wegener

Susanne Wegener is a Professor of Neurology at UZH and a senior leading physician at the University Hospital Zurich, where she leads the Stroke Center. Her translational research on the pathophysiology and treatment of stroke has earned her the Robert Bing Prize. In addition, her commitment to inspiring and promoting women's careers in science was honoured by the SAMS Stern-Gattiker Prize. In her own words, her aim as a ZNZ co-director is to stimulate collaborations between the clinical neuro-disciplines and basic/computational neurosciences, because excellent research and new collaborative networks can arise from them.



Giacomo Indiveri

Giacomo Indiveri is a Professor at UZH and ETH Zurich and served as Director of the Institute of Neuroinformatics from 2017 to 2025. A pioneer of neuromorphic engineering, he builds brain-inspired electronic circuits and cognitive systems. His work has been supported by three ERC grants and has earned several best paper awards. In addition, Giacomo has co-founded the UZH spin-off company SynSense, which develops neuromorphic chips based on biological neurons and synapses. As a co-director, Giacomo wants to promote the growth of Zurich's neuroscience community. To that end, he aims to leverage the community's highly interdisciplinary nature, connecting foundational biological research with applied clinical science and neuromorphic and computational systems.

We wish the new leadership all the best for their new roles and are really looking forward to what promises to be a very interdisciplinary chapter for the ZNZ.
