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Common variants in ABCA7, MS4A6A/MS4A4E, EPHA1, CD33 and CD2AP are associated with Alzheimer's disease

Paul Hollingworth^{1,109}, Denise Harold^{1,109}, Rebecca Sims^{1,109}, Amy Gerrish^{1,109}, Jean-Charles Lambert^{2,3,4,109}, Minerva M Carrasquillo^{5,109}, Richard Abraham¹, Marian L Hamshere¹, Jaspreet Singh Pahwa¹, Valentina Moskvina¹, Kimberley Dowzell¹, Nicola Jones¹, Alexandra Stretton¹, Charlene Thomas¹, Alex Richards¹, Dobril Ivanov¹, Caroline Widdowson¹, Jade Chapman¹, Simon Lovestone^{6,7}, John Powell⁷, Petroula Proitsi⁷, Michelle K Lupton⁷, Carol Brayne⁸, David C Rubinsztein⁹, Michael Gill¹⁰, Brian Lawlor¹⁰, Aoibhinn Lynch¹⁰, Kristelle S Brown¹¹, Peter A Passmore¹², David Craig¹², Bernadette McGuinness¹², Stephen Todd¹², Clive Holmes¹³, David Mann¹⁴, A David Smith¹⁵, Helen Beaumont¹⁵, Donald Warden¹⁵, Gordon Wilcock¹⁶, Seth Love¹⁷, Patrick G Kehoe¹⁷, Nigel M Hooper¹⁸, Emma R. L. C. Vardy^{14,18,19}, John Hardy^{20,21}, Simon Mead²², Nick C Fox²², Martin Rossor²², John Collinge²², Wolfgang Maier^{23,24}, Frank Jessen²³, Britta Schürmann^{23,26}, Eckart Rüther^{24,25,26}, Reiner Heun^{23,27}, Heike Kölsch²³, Hendrik van den Bussche²⁸, Isabella Heuser²⁹, Johannes Kornhuber³⁰, Jens Wiltfang³¹, Martin Dichgans^{32,33}, Lutz Frölich³⁴, Harald Hampel³⁵, Michael Hüll³⁶, John Gallacher³⁶, Dan Rujescu³⁵, Ina Giegling³⁵, Alison M Goate^{37,38,39}, John S K Kauwe⁴⁰, Carlos Cruchaga³⁷, Petra Nowotny³⁷, John C Morris³⁸, Kevin Mayo³⁷, Kristel Sleegers^{41,42}, Karolien Bettens^{41,42}, Sebastiaan Engelborghs^{41,43}, Peter P De Deyn^{41,43}, Christine Van Broeckhoven^{41,42}, Gill Livingston⁴⁴, Nicholas J Bass⁴⁴, Hugh Gurling⁴⁴, Andrew McQuillin⁴⁴, Rhian Gwilliam⁴⁵, Panagiotis Deloukas⁴⁵, Ammar Al-Chalabi⁴⁶, Christopher E Shaw⁴⁶, Magda Tsolaki⁴⁷, Andrew B Singleton⁴⁸, Rita Guerreiro⁴⁸, Thomas W Mühleisen^{49,50}, Markus M Nöthen^{25,49,50}, Susanne Moebus⁵¹, Karl-Heinz Jöckel⁵¹, Norman Klopp⁵², H-Erich Wichmann^{52,53,54}, V Shane Pankratz⁵⁵, Sigrid B Sando^{56,57}, Jan O Aasly^{56,57}, Maria Barcikowska⁵⁸, Zbigniew K Wszolek⁵⁹, Dennis W Dickson⁵, Neill R Graff-Radford^{5,59}, Ronald C Petersen^{60,61}, the Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative⁶², Cornelia M van Duijn^{63,64}, Monique MB Breteler^{63,64}, M Arfan Ikram^{63,64}, Anita L

[†]Corresponding authors . ¹⁰⁹These authors contributed equally to this work.

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DeStefano^{65,66}, Annette L Fitzpatrick⁶⁷, Oscar Lopez^{68,69}, Lenore J Launer⁷⁰, Sudha Seshadri^{66,71}, CHARGE consortium, Claudine Berr⁷², Dominique Campion⁷³, Jacques Epelbaum⁷⁴, Jean-François Dartigues⁷⁵, Christophe Tzourio⁷⁶, Annick Alpérovitch⁷⁶, Mark Lathrop^{77,78}, EADI1 consortium, Thomas M Feulner⁷⁹, Patricia Friedrich⁷⁹, Caterina Riehle⁷⁹, Michael Krawczak^{80,81,82}, Stefan Schreiber^{81,82}, Manuel Mayhaus⁷⁹, S Nicolhaus⁸², Stefan Wagenpfeil⁸³, Stacy Steinberg⁸⁴, Hreinn Stefansson⁸⁴, Kari Stefansson⁸⁵, Jon Snædal⁸⁶, Sigurbjörn Björnsson⁸⁶, Palmi V. Jonsson⁸⁶, Vincent Chouraki^{2,3,4}, Benjamin Genier-Boley^{2,3,4}, Mikko Hiltunen⁸⁷, Hilkka Soininen⁸⁷, Onofre Combarros^{88,89}, Diana Zelenika⁹⁰, Marc Delepine⁹⁰, Maria J Bullido^{89,91}, Florence Pasquier^{4,92}, Ignacio Mateo^{88,89}, Ana Frank-Garcia^{89,93}, Elisa Porcellini⁹⁴, Olivier Hanon⁹⁵, Eliecer Coto⁹⁶, Victoria Alvarez⁹⁶, Paolo Bosco⁹⁷, Gabriele Siciliano⁹⁸, Michelangelo Mancuso⁹⁸, Francesco Panza⁹⁹, Vincenzo Solfrizzi⁹⁹, Benedetta Nacmias¹⁰⁰, Sandro Sorbi¹⁰⁰, Paola Bossù¹⁰¹, Paola Piccardi¹⁰², Beatrice Arosio¹⁰³, Giorgio Annoni¹⁰⁴, Davide Seripa¹⁰⁵, Alberto Pilotto¹⁰⁵, Elio Scarpini¹⁰⁶, Daniela Galimberti¹⁰⁶, Alexis Brice¹⁰⁷, Didier Hannequin¹⁰⁸, Federico Licastro⁹⁴, Lesley Jones¹, Peter A Holmans¹, Thorlakur Jonsson⁸⁴, Matthias Riemenschneider⁷⁹, Kevin Morgan¹¹, Steven G Younkin⁵, Michael J Owen¹, Michael O'Donovan^{1,†}, Philippe Amouyel^{2,3,4,92}, and Julie Williams^{1,†}

¹Medical Research Council (MRC) Centre for Neuropsychiatric Genetics and Genomics. Department of Psychological Medicine and Neurology, School of Medicine, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK. ²Inserm U744, F-59019 Lille, France. ³Institut Pasteur de Lille, F-59019, Lille, France. ⁴Université de Lille Nord de France, F-59000 Lille, France. ⁵Department of Neuroscience, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Jacksonville, Florida, USA. ⁶National Institute for Health Research Biomedical Research Centre for Mental Health at the South London and Maudsley National Health Service Foundation Trust and Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College, London, UK. ⁷Department of Neuroscience, Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College, London, UK. ⁸Institute of Public Health, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK. 9Cambridge Institute for Medical Research, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK. 10 Mercer's Institute for Research on Aging, St. James Hospital and Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. ¹¹Institute of Genetics, Queen's Medical Centre, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK, ¹²Ageing Group, Centre for Public Health, School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences, Queen's University Belfast, UK. ¹³Division of Clinical Neurosciences, School of Medicine, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK. 14 Neurodegeneration and Mental Health Research Group, School of Community Based Medicine, University of Manchester, Hope Hospital, Stott Lane, Salford, Manchester, UK. 15Oxford Project to Investigate Memory and Ageing (OPTIMA), University of Oxford, John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, UK. 16 Nuffield Department of Clinical Medicine, Medical Sciences Division. University of Oxford, Headington, Oxford. OX3 7BN. UK. ¹⁷Dementia Research Group, University of Bristol Institute of Clinical Neurosciences, Frenchay Hospital, Bristol, UK. 18 Institute of Molecular and Cellular Biology, Faculty of Biological Sciences, LIGHT Laboratories, University of Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK ¹⁹Cerebral Function Unit, Salford Royal NHS Trust, Stott Lane, Salford, M6 8HD, UK, 20 Department of Molecular Neuroscience, Institute of Neurology, London, UK. ²¹Reta Lilla Weston Laboratories, Institute of Neurology, London, UK. ²²Department of Neurodegenerative Disease, UCL Institute of Neurology, London, UK. ²³Department of Psychiatry, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany. ²⁴German Centre for Neurodegenerative Diseases, Bonn, Bonn, Germany. ²⁵Institute for Molecular Psychiatry, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany. ²⁶Department of Psychiatry, University of Göttingen, Germany. ²⁷Department of Psychiatry, Royal Derby Hospital, Derby, DE22 3WQ, UK. ²⁸Institute of Primary Medical Care, University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Germany. ²⁹Department of Psychiatry, Charité Berlin, Berlin, Germany. ³⁰Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany. 31 Landschaftsverband Rheinland-Hospital Essen, Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, University Duisburg-Essen, Essen, Germany. ³²Department of Neurology, Klinikum der Universität München, Munich,

Germany. ³³Institute for Stroke and Dementia Research, Klinikum der Universität München, Munich, Germany. ³⁴Department of Geriatric Psychiatry, Central Institute of Mental Health. Medical Faculty Mannheim, University of Heidelberg, Mannheim, Germany. 35Department of Psychiatry, Psychsomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University, Frankfurt, Germany. 36Department of Primary Care and Public Health, School of Medicine, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK. ³⁷Department of Psychiatry, Washington University School of Medicine, St Louis, Missouri, USA. ³⁸Department of Neurology, Washington University School of Medicine, St Louis, Missouri, USA. 39 Department of Genetics, Washington University School of Medicine, St Louis, Missouri, USA. 40 Department of Biology, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, USA. ⁴¹Institute Born-Bunge and University of Antwerp, Antwerpen, Belgium. ⁴²Neurodegenerative Brain Diseases group, Department of Molecular Genetics, VIB, Antwerpen, Belgium. 43Memory Clinic and Department of Neurology, ZNA Middelheim, Antwerpen, Belgium. 44Department of Mental Health Sciences, University College London, UK. ⁴⁵The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Wellcome Trust Genome Campus, Hinxton, Cambridge, UK. 46MRC Centre for Neurodegeneration Research, Department of Clinical Neuroscience, King's College London, Institute of Psychiatry, London, UK. 47Third Department of Neurology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece. ⁴⁸Laboratory of Neurogenetics, National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, USA. 49Department of Genomics, Life & Brain Center, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany. ⁵⁰Institute of Human Genetics, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany. ⁵¹Institute for Medical Informatics, Biometry and Epidemiology, University Hospital of Essen, University Duisburg-Essen, Essen, Germany. 52 Institute of Epidemiology, Helmholtz Zentrum München, German Research Center for Environmental Health, Neuherberg, Germany. 53 Institute of Medical Informatics, Biometry and Epidemiology, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Germany. 54Klinikum Grosshadern, Munich, Germany. 55Division of Biomedical Statistics and Informatics, Mayo Clinic and Mayo Foundation, Rochester, Minnesota, USA. ⁵⁶Department of Neurology, St. Olav's Hospital, Edvard Griegs Gate 8, 7006 Trondheim, Norway. ⁵⁷Department of Neuroscience, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU, 7491 Trondheim, Norway. 58 Department of Neurodegenerative Disorders, Medical Research Centre, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland, ⁵⁹Department of Neurology, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Jacksonville, FL 32224, USA. 60 Department of Neurology, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Rochester, MN 55905, USA. 61 Mayo Alzheimer Disease Research Center, Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Rochester, MN 55905, USA. 62Data used in the preparation of this article were obtained from the Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI) database (www.loni.ucla.edu\ADNI). As such, the investigators within the ADNI contributed to the design and implementation of ADNI and/or provided data but did not participate in analysis or writing of this report. ADNI investigators include (complete listing available at www.loni.ucla.edu\ADNI\Collaboration\ADNI Authorship list.pdf). 63Department of Epidemiology, Erasmus MC University Medical Center, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. 64Netherlands Consortium for Healthy Aging, The Netherlands. ⁶⁵Departments of Neurology and Biostatistics, Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, Massachussets, USA. 66The National Heart Lung and Blood Institute's Framingham Heart Study, Framingham, Massachussets, USA. 67Department of Epidemiology, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA. 68 Department of Neurology, The Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. ⁶⁹Department of Psychiatry, The Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. ⁷⁰Neuroepidemiology Section, Laboratory of Epidemiology, Demography and Biometry (LJL), National Institute on Aging, Washington DC, USA. 71 Department of Neurology, Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, Massachussets, USA. 72 Inserm U888, Hôpital La Colombière, Montpellier, France. 73 Inserm U614, Faculté de Médecine-Pharmacie de Rouen, Rouen, France. ⁷⁴UMR 894, Inserm Faculté de Médecine, Université Paris Descartes, Paris, France. ⁷⁵Inserm U897. Victor Segalen University, Bordeaux, France, 76Inserm U708, Paris, France, 77Centre

National de Genotypage, Institut Genomique, Commissariat à l'énergie Atomique, Evry, France. ⁷⁸Fondation Jean Dausset- CEPH, Paris, France. ⁷⁹Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Universitätsklinikum des Saarlandes, Universität des Saarlandes, Germany. 80 Institute of Medical Informatics and Statistics, Christian-Albrechts-University, Kiel, Germany. 81 Biobank Poppen, Institute of Experimental Medicine, Section of Epidemiology, Christian-Albrechts University, Kiel, Germany 82 Institute for Clinical Molecular Biology, Christian-Albrechts-University, Kiel, Germany. 83 Inst. of Medical Statistics and Epidemiology: Klinikum Rechts der Isar, TU-München, Germany, 84deCODE Genetics, Reykjavik, Iceland. 85deCODE Genetics and University of Iceland, Faculty of Medicine, Reykjavik, Iceland. 86 Faculty of Medicine, University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland. ⁸⁷Department of Neurology, University of Eastern Finland and Kuopio University Hospital, 70211, Kuopio, Finland. 88 Neurology Service, "Margués de Valdecilla" University Hospital (University of Cantabria), Santander, Spain. 89 CIBERNED, "Marqués de Valdecilla" University Hospital (University of Cantabria), Santander, Spain. 90 Centre National de Genotypage, Institut Genomique, Commissariat à l'énergie Atomique, Evry, France. 91 Centro de Biologia Molecular Severo Ochoa (CSIC-UAM, Universidad Autonoma, Campus de Cantoblanco, S-28049, Madrid, Spain. 92Centre Hospitalier Régional Universitaire de Lille, Lille, France. 93Servicio de Neurologia, Hospital Universitario La Paz (UAM) 28034 Madrid, Spain. 94Department of Experimental Pathology, School of Medicine, University of Bologna, Italy, 95 Departement de Geriatrie, CHU de Dijon, F-21000, Dijon, France. 96Genetic Molecular Unit, Hospital Universitario Central de Asturias, 33006-Oviedo, Spain. 97IRCCS Oasi Maria SS, 94018 Troina, Italy 98Department of Neuroscience, Neurological Clinic, University of Pisa, I-56100, Italy. 99Department of Geriatrics, Center for Aging Brain, Memory Unit, University of Bari, Policlinico, 70124 Bari, Italy. ¹⁰⁰Department of Neurological and Psychiatric Sciences, University of Florence, 50134 Florence, Italy. 101 Department of Clinical and Behavioral Neurology, IRCCS Santa Lucia Foundation, 00179 Roma, Italy. 102Lab of Molecular Genetics, Section of Clinical Pharmacology, Department of Neuroscience, University of Cagliari, Italy. 103 Department of Internal Medicine, Università degli Studi di Milano, Fondazione IRCCS, Ospedale Maggiore, Mangiagalli e Regina Elena, Milan Italy. ¹⁰⁴Department of Clinical Medicine and Prevention, University of Milano-Bicocca, Monza Italy. ¹⁰⁵Geriatric Unit & Gerontology-Geriatric Research Laboratory, Department of Medical Science, IRCCS Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, San Giovanni Rotondo, I-71013, Italy. 106Dept. of Neurological Sciences, University of Milan, 35 via F. Sforza, Milan, 20122, Italy. 107 Inserm, UMR S679, Hopital de la salpétirère, 75651 Paris, France. 108 Inserm U614, Faculté de Médecine-Pharmacie de Rouen, F-76183, Rouen, France.

Abstract

We sought to identify new susceptibility loci for Alzheimer's disease (AD) through a staged association study (GERAD+) and by testing suggestive loci reported by the Alzheimer's Disease Genetic Consortium (ADGC). First, we undertook a combined analysis of four genome-wide association datasets (Stage 1) and identified 10 novel variants with $P 1 \times 10^{-5}$. These were tested for association in an independent sample (Stage 2). Three SNPs at two loci replicated and showed evidence for association in a further sample (Stage 3). Meta-analyses of all data provide compelling evidence that ABCA7 (meta- $P4.5\times 10^{-17}$; including ADGC meta- $P=5.0\times 10^{-21}$) and the MS4A gene cluster (rs610932, meta- $P=1.8\times 10^{-14}$; including ADGC meta- $P=1.2\times 10^{-16}$; rs670139, meta- $P=1.4\times 10^{-9}$; including ADGC meta- $P=1.1\times 10^{-10}$) are novel susceptibility loci for AD. Second, we observed independent evidence for association for three suggestive loci reported by the ADGC GWAS, which when combined shows genome-wide significance: CD2AP (GERAD+ $P=8.0\times 10^{-4}$; including ADGC meta- $P=8.6\times 10^{-9}$), CD33 (GERAD+ $P=2.2\times 10^{-4}$; including ADGC meta- $P=1.6\times 10^{-9}$) and EPHA1 (GERAD+ $P=3.4\times 10^{-4}$; including ADGC meta- $P=6.0\times 10^{-10}$). These findings support five novel susceptibility genes for AD.

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the most common form of dementia, with both environmental and genetic factors contributing to risk. AD is genetically complex and shows heritability up to 79% ¹. Rare variants in three genes (APP, PSEN1 & PSEN2) ¹ cause disease in a minority of cases, but until recently the Apolipoprotein E gene (APOE), was the only gene known to increase disease risk for the common form of AD with late-onset². In 2009 we published a genome-wide association study (GWAS) of AD in a sample designated GERAD1 (Genetic and Environmental Risk in AD Consortium 1), which identified two new genome-wide significant susceptibility loci: clusterin (CLU: P=8.5×10⁻¹⁰) and phosphatidylinositolbinding clathrin assembly protein gene (*PICALM: P*=1.3×10⁻⁹). We also observed more variants with P-values $<1\times10^{-5}$ than were expected by chance $(P=7.5\times10^{-6})^3$. These included variants in the complement receptor 1 (CR1) gene, the bridging integrator 1 (BIN1) gene and the membrane-spanning 4A gene cluster (MS4A gene cluster). A second independent AD GWAS by Lambert and colleagues⁴ using the EADI1 sample (European Alzheimer's Disease Initiative 1) showed genome-wide significant evidence for association with $CLU(P=7.5\times10^{-9})$ and $CR1(P=3.7\times10^{-9})$, and support for $PICALM(P=3\times10^{-3})$. Combined analysis of the GERAD1 and EADI1 data yield highly significant support for all three loci (*CLU* meta-P=6.7×10⁻¹⁶, *PICALM* meta-P=6.3×10⁻⁹, *CR1* meta-P=3.2×10⁻¹²). The associations in CLU, PICALM and CRI have since been replicated in several independent datasets⁵-8, shown trends in another⁹ and relationships with neurodegenerative processes underlying disease 10. In addition, members of this consortium have since reported genome-wide significant association for BIN1 ($P=1.6\times10^{-11}$) and support for ephrin receptor A1 (*EPHA1*; $P=1.7\times10^{-6}$)¹¹...

This study sought to identify new common susceptibility variants for AD by first undertaking a three-stage association study based upon predominantly European samples (GERAD+, see Figure 1) and second, by testing these samples for loci showing suggestive evidence for association in the American Alzheimer's Disease Genetics Consortium (ADGC) GWAS¹².

The first stage of this study comprised a meta-analysis of four AD GWAS datasets (6688 cases, 13685 controls), including: GERAD1³, EADI1⁴, Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGEN1)¹³ and Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI)¹⁴. Single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) which remained significant at *P* 1×10⁻⁵ were then tested for replication in the second stage of this study, comprising 4896 cases and 4903 controls including genotyping of the GERAD2 sample and *in silico* replication in the deCODE and German Alzheimer's disease Integrated Genome Research Network (AD-IG) GWAS datasets. In Stage 3, novel SNPs showing significant evidence of replication in Stage 2 were then tested for association in a sample comprising 8286 cases and 21258 controls, which included new genotyping in the EADI2⁴ and Mayo2 samples, and *in silico* replication in the Cohorts for Heart and Aging Research in Genomic Epidemiology (CHARGE) sample¹¹. Sample descriptions and characteristics can be found in the Supplementary Note and Supplementary Table 1.

In Stage 1 we identified 61 SNPs associated with AD at P 1×10^{-5} following meta-analysis of 496763 SNPs in the GERAD1, TGEN1, ADNI and EADI1 (see Supplementary Table 2 and the Supplementary Note). Ten SNPs at novel loci and two at previously identified susceptibility loci that surpassed the $P 1\times10^{-5}$ threshold, were selected for further analysis (see below). One SNP, rs610932 (Stage 1 P=1.8×10⁻⁸) at the MS4A (membrane spanning 4A) gene cluster, surpassed the threshold (P<5.0×10⁻⁸)¹⁵ for genome-wide significance. We also observed strong evidence for association at ABCA7 (ATP-binding cassette, sub-family A, member 7; rs3764650; Stage 1 P=2.6×10⁻⁷).

When selecting SNPs for testing in Stage 2, we excluded known susceptibility loci that had previously been tested in GERAD2 and limited analysis of *BIN1* and *CR1*, which had not been tested in GERAD2, to the most significant SNPs at each locus (See Supplementary Table 2). Following pruning for linkage disequilibrium, twelve SNPs were taken forward for replication in Stage 2 (10 excluding *BIN1* and *CR1*).

Five of the twelve SNPs tested in Stage 2 showed significant evidence for replication using a Bonferroni adjusted threshold for significance of P=4.2×10⁻³ (see Table 1 and Supplementary Table 3). In addition to SNPs at BIN1 and CR1, one SNP within ABCA7 (rs3764650, Stage 2 P=1.9×10⁻⁵) and two SNPS at the MS4A gene cluster (rs610932, stage 2 P=1.6×10⁻³; rs670139 Stage 2 P=1.1×10⁻³) showed evidence of replication in Stage 2. The three SNPs implicating novel risk loci were tested for association in the Stage 3 sample and showed further evidence of replication (rs3764650, Stage 3 P=2.9×10⁻⁷; rs610932, Stage 3 P=2.1×10⁻⁵; rs670139, Stage 3 P=3.2×10⁻³; see Table 1 and Supplementary Table 3).

We conducted an inverse variance weighted meta-analysis of data from Stages 1, 2 and 3 (See Table 1 and Supplementary Table 3). This provided strong evidence for association with rs3764650 at ABCA7 (meta-P=4.5×10⁻¹⁷) and two SNPs at the MS4A gene cluster: rs610932 (meta-P=1.8×10⁻¹⁴) and rs670139 (meta-P=1.4×10⁻⁹). When combining GERAD + and ADGC results (after removing overlapping samples) ABCA7 has a P-value of 5.0×10^{-21} (OR=1.22). The two SNPs at the MS4A gene cluster, rs610932 and rs670139, showed P-values of 1.2×10^{-16} (OR=0.91) and 1.1×10^{-10} (OR=1.08), respectively, in the combined analysis of GERAD+ and ADGC results. It is noteworthy that the most significant ADGC SNP at the MS4A locus is in LD with our top SNP (rs4938933 with rs610932 r^2 =0.62, D'=0.86), thus both datasets may be detecting the same underlying signal.

This study also provides additional independent support for association with CR1 (Stage 2 P=1.4×10⁻³) and BIN1 (Stage 2 P=3.8×10⁻⁵; see Table 1 for meta-analysis.) We did not observe interaction between APOE and the novel variants identified in this study, indeed we did not find evidence of epistasis between any of the genome-wide significant variants identified to date (ABCA7, MS4A, BIN1, CR1, PICALM, CLU or APOE) (see Supplementary Table 4a). Likewise, adjusting for the presence of at least one APOE ϵ 4 allele had little effect on the results of analysis of the three novel variants (see Supplementary Table 4b). We also found no evidence for association between these loci and age at onset of AD (rs3764650: P=0.17; rs670139: P=0.38; rs610932: P=0.95; rs744373: P=0.87; rs3818361: P=0.58).

This study therefore shows strong statistical support for two novel AD risk loci, which replicate over a number of independent case-control samples. The first of these is the ATP-binding cassette, sub-family A, member 7 (ABCA7) locus (Figure 2A). The associated marker is rs3764650, which is located in intron 13. This SNP was the only variant in the gene that passed our Stage 1 criterion, which is not unexpected given the low levels of linkage disequilibrium (LD) between this SNP and others included in the GWAS. However, in a preliminary attempt to identify an associated functional variant at the ABCA7 locus, we genotyped the GERAD2 sample for rs3752246, a non-synonymous SNP in exon 32 of the gene, which showed the highest LD with rs3764650 out of all HapMap ABCA7 coding variants based on r^2 (r^2 =0.36, D'=0.89). This variant (which was not genotyped in Stage 1) was also associated with AD (GERAD2 P=1×10⁻³, OR=1.17). Rs3752246 encodes a glycine to alanine substitution at position 1527 of the protein (accession number NP_061985.2) which is predicted to be a benign change 16, and is unlikely to be the relevant functional variant. We used data from two published expression quantitative trait loci (eQTL) datasets (derived from lymphoblastoid cell lines 17 and brain 18) to determine if

rs3764650 is associated with the expression of *ABCA7*. However, no association was observed (see Supplementary Table 5). Further work will be required to identify the causal variant(s) at this locus.

Second, we implicate the membrane-spanning 4A (*MS4A*) gene cluster (Figure 2B). The association spans an LD block of 293 kb (chr11: 59,814,28760,107,105) and includes 6 of 16 known genes comprising the membrane-spanning 4-domains, subfamily A (*MS4A*). These are *MS4A2*, *MS4A3*, *MS4A4A*, *MS4A4E*, *MS4A6A* and *MS4A6E*. The associated SNPs are found in the 3' UTR of MS4A6A (rs610932) and the intergenic region between *MS4A4E* and *MS4A6A* (rs670139). rs610932 shows nominally significant association with expression levels of *MS4A6A* in cerebellum and temporal cortex (0.01<*P*<0.05; see Supplementary Table 5), but not in frontal cortex, pons, or lymphoblastoid cell lines. The non-synonymous SNP that is most strongly associated with the genome-wide significant variants is rs2304933. This SNP was analyzed in Stage 1 but showed weaker evidence for association (*P*=0.006) than the genome-wide significant variant at this locus in the same sample.

We also sought to follow up four additional loci showing suggestive evidence for association with AD $(1\times10^{-6}>=P>5\times10^{-8})$ from the ADGC GWAS¹². These loci included *CD33, EPHA1, CD2AP* and *ARID5B*. It should be noted that evidence for suggestive association with *EPHA1* and *CD33* has been reported previously. Members of this collaboration were the first to report *EPHA1* as showing suggestive evidence of association with AD (rs11771145, $P=1.7\times10^{-6}$; LD with ADGC SNP rs11767557: $r^2=0.28$, D'=0.75)¹¹, which included GERAD1 and EADI1 samples reported on here. Similarly, Bertram and colleagues were the first to show suggestive evidence for *CD33* (rs3826656, $P=4.0\times10^{-6}$; LD with ADGC SNP rs3865444: $r^2=0.13$, D'=1.0)¹⁹.

We combined data from the GERAD+ dataset comprising GERAD1, EADI1, deCODE and AD-IG GWAS datasets (up to 6992 cases and 13472 controls) using inverse variance meta-analysis. The TGEN1, ADNI and Mayo1 datasets were included in the ADGC discovery set and were thus excluded from these particular analyses. We observed support for association with CD2AP (rs9349407, P=8.0×10⁻⁴, OR=1.11), CD33 (rs3865444, P=2.2×10⁻⁴, OR=0.89) and EPHA1 (rs11767557, P=3.4×10⁻⁴, OR=0.90).

When these data were combined with ADGC we observed genome-wide evidence for association with AD (rs9349407, GERAD+ & ADGC meta-P=8.6×10⁻⁹, OR=1.11; rs3865444, GERAD+ & ADGC meta-P=1.6×10⁻⁹, OR=0.91; rs11767557, GERAD+ & ADGC meta-P=6.0×10⁻¹⁰, OR=0.90). We observed nominally significant evidence of association with ARID5B (rs2588969, P=3.3×10⁻², OR=1.06), however the direction of effect was opposite to that reported by ADGC¹², and was not significant overall (GERAD+& ADGC meta-P=3.6×10⁻¹, OR=0.99). See Table 2 for results and Supplementary Table 6 for results of additional SNPs at these loci.

Taken together, these results show compelling evidence for an additional five novel AD susceptibility loci. *ABCA7* encodes an ATP-binding cassette (ABC) transporter. The ABC transporter superfamily has roles in transporting a wide range of substrates across cell membranes²⁰ *ABCA7* is highly expressed in brain, particularly in hippocampal CA1 neurons²¹ and in microglia²². ABCA7 is involved in the efflux of lipids from cells to lipoprotein particles. Notably, the main lipoproteins in brain are APOE followed by CLU. Although no evidence for epistasitic interactions between the three genetic loci was observed (see Supplementary Table 4a), however, this is not a prerequisite for biological interaction between these molecules. In addition, ABCA7 has been shown to regulate APP processing and inhibit β-amyloid secretion in cultured cells overexpressing APP²³. *ABCA7*

also modulates phagocytosis of apoptotic cells by macrophages mediated through the C1q complement receptor protein on the apoptotic cell surface²³. *ABCA7* is an orthologue of *C. elegans ced-7*, the product of which is known to clear apoptotic cells and the high levels of expression of *ABCA7* in microglia are consistent with such a role.

The genes in the MS4A cluster on chromosome 11 have a common genomic structure with all other members of the family, including transmembrane domains indicating that they are likely to be part of a family of cell surface proteins²⁴. MS4A2 encodes the beta subunit of high affinity IgE receptors²⁵. The remaining genes in the LD block have no known specific functions. CD33 is a member of the sialic-acid-binding immunoglobulin-like lectins (Siglec) family which are thought to promote cell-cell interactions and regulate functions of cells in the innate and adaptive immune systems²⁶. Most members of the Siglec family, including CD33, act as endocytic receptors, mediating endocytosis through a mechanism independent of clathrin²⁷. *CD2AP* (CD2-associated protein) is a scaffold/adaptor protein²⁸ which associates with cortactin, a protein also involved in the regulation of receptor mediated endocytosis²⁹. It is striking that these two new susceptibility genes for AD, and the recently established susceptibility genes PICALM and BIN1 are all implicated in cell-cell communication and transduction of molecules across the membrane. EPHA1 is a member of the ephrin receptor subfamily. Ephrins and Eph receptors are membrane bound proteins which play roles in cell and axon guidance³⁰ and in synaptic development and plasticity³¹. However EphA1 is expressed mainly in epithelial tissues³² where it regulates cell morphology and motility³³. Additional roles in apoptosis³⁴ and inflammation³⁵ have also been proposed.

Our study has generated strong statistical evidence that variants at *ABCA7* and the *MS4A* gene cluster confer susceptibility to AD, which replicates over a number of independent case control samples. We also provide independent support for three loci showing suggestive evidence in a companion paper¹², *CD33*, *CD2AP* and *EPHA1*, which when the data are combined show genome-wide levels of significance. Finally, we provide further evidence for *BIN1* and *CR1* loci as susceptibility loci. What is striking about our findings is the emerging consistency in putative function of the genes identified. Five of the recently identified AD susceptibility loci *CLU*, *CR1*, *ABCA7*, *CD33* and *EPHA1* have putative functions in the immune system; *PICALM*, *BIN1*, *CD33*, *CD2AP* are involved in processes at the cell membrane, including endocytosis and *APOE*, *CLU* and *ABCA7* in lipid processing. It is conceivable that these processes would play strong roles in neurodegeneration and Aβ clearance from the brain. These findings therefore provide new impetus for focused studies aimed at understanding the pathogenesis of AD.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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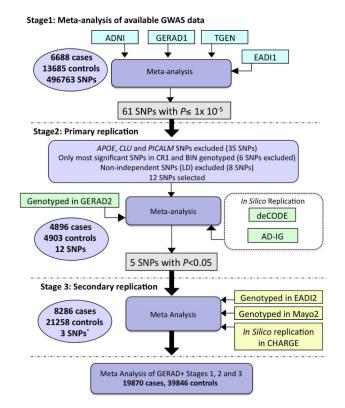


Figure 1. GERAD+ study design.

* Data for rs744373 and rs3818361 in the CHARGE consortium have been presented elsewhere¹⁵, as has data for rs381861 in the EADI2 samples⁴, as such these SNPs were not included in Stage 3.

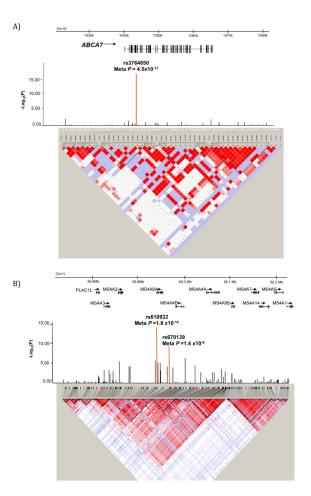


Figure 2. Schematic of the associated variants reported in reference to (A) the ABCA7 gene and (B) chromosomal region chr11:59.81Mb-60.1Mb harboring members of the *MS4A* gene cluster. Chromosome positions are shown at the top of the schematics (UCSC Feb 2009). Gene schematic: horizontal arrows indicate directions of transcription, black boxes indicate gene exons/UTR. The –Log₁₀(*P*) of the SNPs analyzed in Stage 1 are shown in chart graph. The GERAD+ Stage 1, 2 and 3meta-analysis *P*-values for SNPs rs3764650 (*ABCA7*), rs610932 (*MS4A6A*) and rs670139 (*MS4A4E*) are indicated by the red lines. The D' LD block structure of the *ABCA7* gene plus surrounding region, and chr11:59.81Mb-60.1Mb according to the CEPH HapMap data, are provided at the bottom of each schematic with lines indicating where each SNP genotyped on the Illumina 610-quad chip is represented.

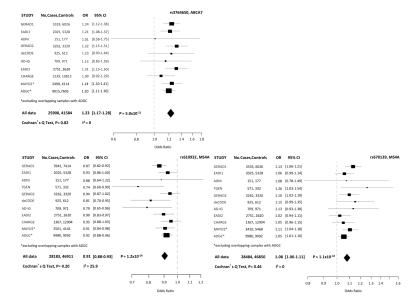


Figure 3. Forest plots showing association in the different datasets for SNPs at the *ABCA7* (rs3764650) and *MS4A* (rs610932 & rs670139) loci.

Table 1

Results of the GERAD+ study.

SNP	Closest	CHR MAF	MAF	9 2	Stage 1*			Stage 2†	*	3 2	Stage 3 ‡	% 4.	Meta-analysis of GERAD+ Stage 1, 2 and 3 \S	a-analysis of GERA Stage 1, 2 and 3 \S	SERAD+ 13 §	Meta-analysis of GERAD+ & ADGC	ysis of	GERAD+
	a delle			Ь	OR	95% CI	Ь	OR	95% CI P OR 95% CI P OR 95% CI P OR 95% CI P OR 95% CI	Ь	OR	95% CI	Ь	OR	95% CI	Ь	OR	95% CI
rs3764650	ABCA7	19	0.10	rs3764650 ABCA7 19 0.10 2.6×10 ⁻⁷ 1.22	1.22	1.13-1.32	1.9×10 ⁻⁵	1.28	$1.13-1.32 1.9\times 10^{-5} 1.28 1.14-1.44 2.9\times 10^{-7} 1.22 1.13-1.32 4.5\times 10^{-17} 1.23 1.18-1.30 5.0\times 10^{-21} 1.23 1.17-1.28 $	2.9×10^{-7}	1.22	1.13-1.32	4.5×10^{-17}	1.23	1.18-1.30	5.0×10^{-21}	1.23	1.17-1.28
rs610932	MS4A6A	11	0.42	<i>MS4A6A</i> 11 0.42 1.8×10 ⁻⁸ 0.88	0.88	0.85-0.92	1.6×10^{-3}	0.90	$0.85-0.92 1.6\times10^{-3} 0.90 0.84-0.96 2.1\times10^{-5} 0.91 0.87-0.95 1.8\times10^{-14} 0.90 0.87-0.92 1.2\times10^{-16} 0.91 0.88-0.93 0.91 0.98-0.93 0.91 0.9$	2.1×10^{-5}	0.91	0.87-0.95	1.8×10^{-14}	06.0	0.87-0.92	1.2×10^{-16}	0.91	0.88-0.93
rs670139 MS4A4E 11	MS4A4E	11		$0.41 1.0 \times 10^{-5} 1.11$	1.11	1.06-1.16	$1.1{\times}10^{-3}$	1.11	$1.06-1.16 1.1\times 10^{-3} 1.11 1.04-1.19 3.2\times 10^{-3} 1.06 1.02-1.11 1.4\times 10^{-9} 1.09 1.06-1.12 1.1\times 10^{-10} 1.08 1.06-1.11 1.04-1.11 $	3.2×10^{-3}	1.06	1.02-1.11	1.4×10^{-9}	1.09	1.06-1.12	$1.1{\times}10^{-10}$	1.08	1.06-1.11
rs3818361	CRI	-	0.19	3.2×10^{-12} 1.21	1.21	1.14-1.27	1.4×10^{-3}	1.14	$1.14-1.27$ 1.4×10^{-3} 1.14 $1.05-1.23$	NA	NA	NA NA	$3.7{\times}10^{-14}$	1.18	3.7×10^{-14} 1.18 1.13-1.24	NA		NA NA
rs744373	BINI	2	0.29	$0.29 1.5 \times 10^{-10} 1.17$		1.11-1.22	3.8×10^{-5}	1.17	3.8×10^{-5} 1.17 1.08-1.25	NA NA	NA	NA	2.6×10^{-14}	1.17	1.12-1.21	2.6×10 ⁻¹⁴ 1.17 1.12-1.21 NA NA NA	NA	NA

CHR=Chromosome, MAF=Minor Allele Frequency in cases and controls.

* GERAD1, EAD11, ADN1, & TGEN1 <6688 Cases, 13685 Controls.

[†]GERAD2, deCODE, AD-IG: 4896 AD Cases, 4903 Controls.

[‡]EADI2, CHARGE, Mayo2 <8286 AD Cases, 21258 Controls,

⁸GERAD1&2, EAD11&2, ADNI, TGEN1, Decode, AD-IG, CHARGE, Mayo2 <19870 AD Cases and 39846 Controls

Table 2

Results of the combined analysis of the ADGC and GERAD+ consortia.

SNP	Closest Gene	CHR	MAF	Linkage Disequilibrium with the top ADGC SNP at each loci	age Ibrium ee top SNP at		GER	GERAD+ Consortia	rtia *		GERAD+ & ADGC Metaanalysis	ADGC N	ſetaanalysis
				\mathbf{r}^2	D,	Cases	Cases Controls	Ь	OR	95% CI	Ь	OR	95% CI
rs9349407†	CD2AP	9	0.29	N/A	N/A	6283	7165	8.0×10 ⁻⁴	1.11	8.0×10 ⁻⁴ 1.11 1.04-1.18	8.6×10^{-9}	1.11	1.07-1.15
rs9296559	CD2AP	9	0.29	0.71	0.95	6283	7165	1.5×10^{-3}	1.10	1.04-1.17	NA	NA	NA
rs11767557	<i>EPHA1</i>	7	0.21	N/A	N/A	6283	12935	3.4×10^{-4} 0.90	0.90	0.85-0.95	6.0×10^{-10}	06.0	0.86-0.93
rs2588969†	ARID5B	10	0.40	N/A	N/A	6283	7165	3.3×10^{-2}	1.06	1.06# 1.01-1.13	3.6×10^{-1}	0.99	0.95-1.02
rs4948288	ARID5B	10	0.26	0.55	0.78	6992	13472	3.6×10^{-3}	1.07	1.07# 1.03-1.15	NA	NA	NA
rs3865444 <i>§</i>	CD33	19	0.31	N/A	N/A	6283	7165	2.2×10^{-4}	0.89	0.84-0.95	2.2×10^{-4} 0.89 0.84-0.95 1.6×10^{-9}	0.91	0.88-0.93

CHR=Chromosome, MAF=Minor Allele Frequency in cases and controls.

 * GERAD1, EAD11, deCODE, AD-IG.

† results generated from imputed data. The results from the top genotyped SNP are also shown. See Supplementary Table 6 for full details.

 $\vec{\tau}_{\text{opposite}}$ direction of effect to that reported by Naj et al.

 $\ensuremath{\delta}$ data imputed in the deCODE dataset.