

J. Craig Venter, genomics pioneer and founder of JCVI and Diploid Genomics, Inc., dies at 79

LA JOLLA, CA, UNITED STATES, April 30, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- La Jolla, California—April 29, 2026—The J. Craig Venter Institute (JCVI) announced that J. Craig Venter, Ph.D., the Institute's founder, board chair, and chief executive officer, died today in San Diego following a brief hospitalization for unexpected side effects that arose from treatment of recently diagnosed cancer.

Dr. Venter was a visionary scientific leader whose work helped define modern genomics and launch the field of synthetic biology. He drove scientific and technological change by building interdisciplinary teams, pushing for bold ideas and faster methods, and insisting that discovery should translate into real-world impact. He was also a fierce advocate for robust federal science funding and for partnerships that accelerate progress across government, academia, and industry.



J. Craig Venter Headshot. Credit: Brett Shipe / J. Craig Venter Institute.

“Craig believed that science moves forward when people are willing to think differently, move decisively, and build what doesn't yet exist,” said Anders Dale, president of JCVI. “His leadership and vision reshaped genomics and helped ignite synthetic biology. We will honor his legacy by continuing the mission he built—advancing genomic science, championing the public investments that make discovery possible, and partnering broadly to turn knowledge into impact.”

Across his career, Dr. Venter helped move genomics from slow, gene-by-gene discovery to scalable, data-driven science—and then helped take the next step: demonstrating that genomes

could be designed and constructed.

At the National Institutes of Health, he helped pioneer gene discovery using expressed sequence tags (ESTs), enabling rapid identification of large numbers of human genes and accelerating genome mapping efforts.

He went on to lead efforts that produced the first draft sequences of the human genome, a milestone that helped usher biology into the digital age. He and colleagues later published the first high-quality diploid human genome, demonstrating the importance of capturing genetic variation inherited from both parents.

In synthetic biology, Dr. Venter and his teams achieved a landmark by constructing the first self-replicating bacterial cell controlled by a chemically synthesized genome—proof that genomes could be designed digitally, built from chemical components, and “booted up” to run a living cell.

He also pursued scientific discovery at global scale. Through the Sorcerer II Global Ocean Sampling Expedition, Dr. Venter and his teams used metagenomics to reveal extraordinary microbial diversity, reporting the discovery of millions of new genes and expanding the known universe of protein families—work that deepened understanding of the ocean microbiome and its role in planetary systems.

Beyond his scientific achievements, Dr. Venter was a builder: of teams, platforms, and institutions designed to take big scientific bets. In addition to founding JCVI, he was a serial entrepreneur who co-founded Synthetic Genomics, Inc., Human Longevity, Inc., and most recently Diploid Genomics, Inc., advancing efforts to translate genomics and synthetic biology into tools for health and society.

The Institute asks that the privacy of Dr. Venter’s family be respected. Additional information regarding memorial arrangements will be shared when available.

About J. Craig Venter Institute

The J. Craig Venter Institute (JCVI) is a not-for-profit research institute in Rockville, Maryland and La Jolla, California dedicated to the advancement of the science of genomics; the understanding of its implications for society; and communication of those results to the scientific community, the public, and policymakers. Founded by J. Craig Venter, Ph.D., JCVI is home to approximately 120 scientists and staff with expertise in synthetic biology, human and evolutionary biology, genetics, bioinformatics/informatics, information technology, high-throughput DNA sequencing, genomic and environmental policy research, and public education in science and science policy. JCVI is a 501(c)(3) organization. For additional information, please visit www.jcvi.org.

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