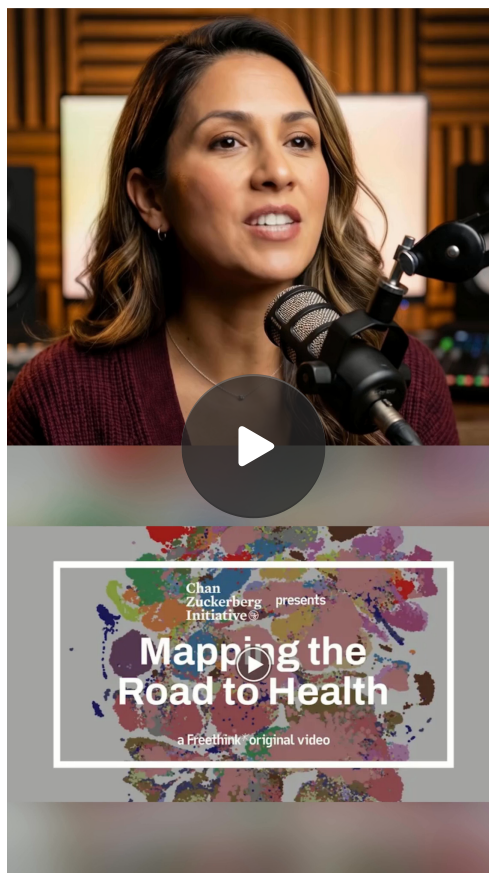


# Why a Startup Just Gave Away Four Million Living Human Neurons for Free Crownlands, Olfactory Cells, CZ CELLxGENE, and the Open Data Land Grab Reshaping Alzheimer's Drug Discovery and AI Biology

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## **Why a Startup Just Gave Away Four Million Living Human Neurons for Free: Crownlands, Olfactory Cells, CZ CELLxGENE, and the Open Data Land Grab Reshaping Alzheimer's Drug Discovery and AI Biology**

A startup just gave away 4 million living human brain cells. Free. No login. No strings. On day one of their public launch. Why would any VC-backed company do that...

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## **Abstract**

What happened: Crownlands, a San Francisco discovery-tools startup backed by Caffeinated Capital, open sourced a 4 million cell single-cell dataset built from olfactory neurons collected from 200-plus living donors, including healthy controls plus Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other neurodegenerative patients. Posted free on CZ CELLxGENE. Largest single-cell dataset on that platform from living human

How: Gateway platform = proprietary collection device + 10x Genomics Flex Agent probe-based single-cell sequencing + centralized processing across multiple IRB approved sites over a 10-month window.

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## **Why it matters for this audience:**

1. The brain has been a black box because you cannot biopsy living human cortex. Olfactory neurons are the workaround.
2. The data, not the algorithm, is the bottleneck for AI drug discovery in neurodegeneration. The current move is a data-supply move dressed as philanthropy.
3. Open sourcing the static dataset while keeping the device, the longitudinal pipeline, and the models is textbook commoditize-the-complement.
4. CZ CELLxGENE distribution turns a press release into a standard. Atlas positioning is the actual prize.

Bottom line: free data is the loss leader. The longitudinal, patient-linked, repeat collection engine is the business.

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# The thing that actually happened

Strip away the launch-day adjectives and here is the event. A previously stealthy company came out of the gate by dumping 4 million single cells onto a public repository, free, no login wall, no academic-collaboration handshake, no data-use agreement that takes six months and a lawyer to clear. The cells came from more than 200 living people. Some healthy, some carrying Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other neurodegenerative diagnoses. The collection ran across multiple clinical sites under IRB approval and took roughly 10 months end to end. They built it on 10x Genomics Flex Apex, which is the probe-based, fixed-sample chemistry, and they parked the whole thing on the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative's CZ CELLxGENE platform where a grad student with a laptop can pull it.

The framing in the release is that this is the largest single-cell dataset from living human donors on that platform. That qualifier is doing a lot of work, and it is the whole point, so hold onto it. There is a mountain of single-cell brain data already public. Almost none of it is from living people. That distinction is the entire reason this is interesting and not just another atlas drop nobody outside a sequencing company would notice.

They also shipped a natural-language query agent at [chat.crownlands.com](https://chat.crownlands.com) that lets you interrogate the full dataset by gene, pathway, or cell type without writing a line of Python. And there is a companion bioRxiv preprint, "Gateway: patient olfactory neurons for large-scale discovery in neurodegenerative disease," carrying the claim that olfactory neurons pulled from a living nose actually reflect a meaningful chunk of the gene expression you would see in living brain tissue. CEO Nate Dalva is selling the thesis that the next wave of progress in neuro follows data availability, not model cleverness. Co-founder Kevin Zhu, the Head of Discovery, is the one putting his name on the biology claim. That division of labor tells you something about where the company sits.





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