

Averna Therapeutics, formerly known as Exsilio Therapeutics, Appoints Thomas M. Barnes, Ph.D., as Chief Executive Officer

Dr. Barnes brings more than 25 years of biotech leadership expertise and a proven track record in advancing transformative early-stage therapies

Interim CEO Tal Zaks, M.D., Ph.D., to continue as executive chair

BOSTON, January 27, 2025 – Averna Therapeutics, Inc. (“Averna”; formerly known as Exsilio Therapeutics, Inc.), a biotechnology company developing genomic medicines that insert therapeutic changes into the genome, today announced the appointment of Thomas M. Barnes, Ph.D., as chief executive officer (CEO) and director. Dr. Barnes brings more than 25 years of biotech industry leadership experience, with a proven track record of advancing innovative therapies, most recently as the CEO of Orna Therapeutics. Dr. Barnes replaces Tal Zaks, M.D., Ph.D., who served as interim CEO and will continue as the executive chairman of Averna’s board.

“Tom has an extraordinary talent for transforming groundbreaking science into scalable biotechnology companies focused on developing entirely new ways of treating disease,” said Dr. Zaks. “His ability to lead the translation of scientific innovation into real-world medicines is unparalleled. We are excited to have Tom at the helm as we develop our RNA/LNP-based genomic medicines.”

Averna is developing RNA/lipid nanoparticle (LNP)-based genomic medicines to insert genes into “safe harbor” sites in the genome – places where a gene can be inserted safely and without disrupting normal cell function.

“The ability to insert therapeutic genetic material into the genome in a safe and durable way is the last great missing tool from the genetic medicine toolkit, and I have been deeply impressed by the progress the team has made under Tal’s leadership,” said Dr. Barnes. “Averna is now poised to complete that toolkit and deploy it where it will have the greatest impact. I’m proud to work with and expand the talented team at Averna to advance our therapeutic programs and deliver meaningful solutions for patients.”

Dr. Barnes most recently served as CEO of Orna Therapeutics Inc., an RNA/LNP company pioneering the use of circular RNA payloads combined with immune cell LNP delivery. During his tenure, Orna raised more than \$450 million and established a major collaboration agreement with Merck, that was then the largest deal for a preclinical company in biotech history. With Orna’s acquisition of ReNAGade Therapeutics Inc., he transitioned the CEO role to Amit D. Munshi, CEO of ReNAGade. Dr. Barnes also served as an Entrepreneur Partner at MPM BioImpact. Prior to Orna, as chief scientific officer and a member of the founding team at Intellia Therapeutics Inc., he established the discovery team and led efforts to expand the company’s CRISPR platform, helping to raise more than \$300 million including through its initial public offering. Earlier in his career Dr. Barnes also co-founded or played a key role in launching several biotech companies,

including Eleven Biotherapeutics. Dr. Barnes earned his doctorate from the University of Cambridge and completed research fellowships at Harvard Medical School and McGill University.

Company Changes Name from Exsilio Therapeutics to Avera Therapeutics

In addition to the appointment of the new CEO, the company has changed its name from Exsilio Therapeutics to Avera Therapeutics. Recently, the company was named as one of [BioSpace's](#) "25 Promising New Biopharma Companies to Watch in 2025."

About Avera Therapeutics

Avera Therapeutics is a biotechnology company developing RNA/lipid nanoparticle (LNP)-based genomic medicines to durably and safely treat a broad range of diseases, including genetic diseases, cancer, and autoimmune conditions. Avera's proprietary technology is based on a natural system and inserts therapeutic genetic instructions into "safe harbor" sites in the genome – genomic regions that allow stable gene integration without disrupting normal cell function. Because Avera's medicines are encoded in RNA, they can be delivered using validated, non-viral delivery platforms that are safe, efficient, scalable, and cost-effective, and that allow redosing to effect with a curative intent. For more information, please visit www.avernatx.com.

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