Winter 2026 Newsletter

AMERICAN
PARKINSON
DISEASE
ASSOCIATION

INSIGHTS

BREAKTHROUGH FUNDING TO ADVANCE PARKINSON'S RESEARCH

The American Parkinson Disease Association (APDA) has awarded

$4.04 million

in new research funding for the 2025–2026 grant cycle.

This marks a 55% increase in funding over last year. We are thrilled to share this major milestone in our ongoing mission to make hope possible.

This investment supports a dynamic group of researchers working to unlock new treatments, improve quality of life, and deepen our understanding of Parkinson's disease (PD).

These grants fund critical projects across a wide spectrum, from basic science and novel therapies to quality-of-life interventions. APDA remains especially committed to early-career scientists and newcomers to PD research, providing essential support to help them generate pilot data and secure larger grants from institutions like the National Institutes of Health.

This year, we also launched a new category encompassing Social Science Research Grants, a first for APDA. **These grants fund research into the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of PD, including patient and caregiver experiences and efforts to reduce stigma.**

We're also proud to fund the **George C. Cotzias Fellowship**, named after a pioneer in PD treatment, and continue our annual **Diversity in Parkinson's Disease Research Grant**, which focuses on understanding and addressing PD in underrepresented communities.

All grants are awarded through a competitive review process overseen by our distinguished Scientific Advisory Board, ensuring that only the most promising and impactful projects receive support.

In response to a growing national funding gap, APDA has created a special bridge funding mechanism to assist recent APDA grantees who lost support from other sources. These limited, short-term grants aim to keep promising research projects moving forward despite unexpected setbacks.

To learn more about this increased funding and the researchers who received the Bridge Award, visit

apdaparkinson.org/Research26

For more information, or to learn about the many ways you can support APDA, visit our website at apdaparkinson.org/Insights26 or call (800) 223-2732.

apda AMERICAN PARKINSON DISEASE ASSOCIATION
Strength in optimism. Hope in progress.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

Dear Friend,

As we step into a new year, I want to take a moment to sincerely thank you for your continued support. Your dedication has helped us bring hope, care, community, and critical resources to individuals and families living with PD.

In this issue of *Insights*, we celebrate a groundbreaking investment in PD research, fueling bold discoveries and supporting emerging scientists. We also share a new resource created just for care partners of those living with PD, and so much more!

I'm incredibly proud of the progress we're making together and energized by what lies ahead. Because of you, we're able to uplift the PD community in meaningful, lasting ways. Thank you for being an essential part of this journey.

Wishing you a joyful and healthy year ahead,

Leslie A. Chambers

Leslie A. Chambers
President & CEO
American Parkinson Disease Association

FROM ONE WOMAN'S VISION TO A NATIONWIDE MISSION: THE APDA STORY

Elena & Salvatore J. Esposito Sr

The American Parkinson Disease Association (APDA) began not in a boardroom, but in a Staten Island, NY, living room in 1961. It was there that Sophia Esposito Maestrone, seeking a way to honor her late mother, Elena Esposito, chose to create something lasting — **something that would help others.**

With encouragement from a trusted family advisor, Sophia met Ada Hursch, a woman living with PD who had started raising awareness and funds for the condition. Deeply moved by Ada's passion and resilience, Sophia knew she had found the cause that would truly reflect her mother's spirit of generosity.

Together with her family, Sophia helped found what would become APDA. The first chapter, named in Elena's honor, was established on Staten Island, and Sophia led it for more than 40 years. That grassroots effort soon grew into a national movement, thanks in part to early supporters like actor Ed Wynn and visionary leaders like Salvatore Esposito Sr., Fred Springer, and many of the Esposito children and grandchildren, who continued the mission across generations - several of whom remain involved in APDA to this day, making them the third and fourth generations to do so.

What started as a heartfelt act of remembrance has since grown into a robust, nationwide organization that has **raised and invested over $313 million in support services, education, and groundbreaking PD research**. Today, with a vast network of chapters and Information & Referral Centers across the country, APDA empowers people impacted by PD to live life to the fullest.

As we reflect on our origins, we honor the enduring legacy of Sophia and her family, a reminder that even the smallest acts of kindness can spark lasting change.

To learn more about the incredible origin story of APDA, including early memories from Sophia's grandchildren, visit **apdaparkinson.org/History**.

INTERESTED IN ADVOCACY?

APDA recently established a new Department of Public Policy & Advocacy. This is a vital step in strengthening our voice on behalf of the PD community.

If you're interested in getting involved, advocating for meaningful change, and making your voice heard, we want to hear from you!

Visit **apdaparkinson.org/Advocate** to sign up and stay updated on future opportunities to take action.

DID YOU KNOW DANCE CAN HELP MANAGE PARKINSON'S?

Did you know that hitting the dance floor can do more than lift your spirits? It can actually benefit people living with PD. Through music and movement, dance helps improve balance, posture, coordination, and flexibility, while reducing stiffness and enhancing mobility. Learning choreography can enhance memory, improve focus, and build problem-solving skills.

That's why APDA is proud to partner with the internationally acclaimed *Dance for PD®* program. Our partnership began in 2020 to bring virtual classes like Dance for PD PRO and PD Movement Lab with Pamela Quinn to people during the pandemic and has grown into a vibrant, ongoing collaboration. Today, five years later, APDA continues to provide Community Grant funding to support the programs and is the exclusive Parkinson's-focused partner across the multilingual Dance for PD portfolio — which has now expanded to include classes in English, Spanish, and Mandarin, available both in-person and online.

***Dance for PD®* is an innovative initiative that uses the power of music and movement to help people with PD live more fully.** Beyond the physical benefits, dance fosters connection, self-expression, and joy, creating a supportive community that empowers people with PD to move with confidence.

> **"The benefits of dancing are impactful! We love to see how classes like Dance for PD help our community thrive. And there's something for everyone — whether you are brand new to dance, have mobility issues, or maybe have a little experience under your belt – all are welcome."**
>
> *Rosa Peña, Vice President of Programs & Services, APDA.*

Learn more and find a class near you at **apdaparkinson.org/Dance**

Care Partner Connection

APDA Care Partner Connection™ is a *free*, eight-week virtual support program designed specifically for care partners of people living with PD. Whether you're caring for a spouse, parent, or friend, this program offers a supportive space to connect, share, and learn alongside others who understand the caregiving journey.

Do you find yourself overwhelmed with questions about caregiving? Feeling anxious about the future? Struggling with emotions like stress or grief? You're not alone, and we're here to help.

Facilitated by a credentialed mental health professional, each session offers emotional support, practical resources, and education around planning and caregiving considerations. **The group helps care partners navigate changing relationships, manage stress, and feel more confident in their role.**

To learn more and register, visit **apdaparkinson.org/Care26**.

“ASK THE DOCTOR”

with Dr. Rebecca Gilbert

Q. How does a neurologist diagnose normal pressure hydrocephalus as opposed to Parkinson’s disease? My doctor is not sure which one I have.

A. Normal pressure hydrocephalus (NPH) is a condition that happens when cerebrospinal fluid builds up inside your skull and presses on your brain, and it is diagnosed based on the size of the ventricles on a brain MRI. (Ventricles are fluid-filled cavities within the brain). If they are too big, they can cause cognitive problems, urinary problems, and problems walking that can resemble the walking issues of someone with PD. However, the size of the ventricles exists on a spectrum — they can be just slightly enlarged or very big. If they are only a little enlarged, then the contribution of the size of the ventricles to any neurological issues may not be clear. To treat NPH, an indwelling shunt is placed into the ventricle to drain fluid. It is an invasive procedure with its own set of risks, so your doctors want to make sure that the potential benefits are worth the risks.

Datscan will be very helpful here. It should not be positive if there is only NPH as the cause of the walking difficulties.

Q. My father is 87 years old, has Parkinson’s disease, and has a lot of drooling/excess saliva. Are there ways to treat this?

A. Yes! There are lifestyle modifications such as chewing gum or sucking on a hard candy that may be helpful for certain people to stimulate more frequent swallowing. Speech and swallow therapy with a speech-language pathologist (SLP) trained in neurodegenerative conditions can be helpful, although gains are typically difficult to maintain.

Oral medications are available to decrease excess saliva. Unfortunately, they can also cause effects in other parts of the body such as urinary retention, constipation, blurry vision, and cognitive side effects, especially in older adults. Botulinum toxin injections into the salivary glands can decrease production of saliva and thereby decrease drooling. Botulinum toxin injections are generally well-tolerated, with effects typically lasting 2–4 months.

Visit **apdaparkinson.org/Tips** to learn more.

Dr. Rebecca Gilbert is the Chief Mission Officer at APDA. She oversees APDA’s research portfolio in conjunction with APDA’s Scientific Advisory Board. She also provides medical and clinical expertise to support APDA programming as well as print and web content.

A LEGACY OF HOPE

We are deeply honored to announce a transformational bequest of more than $7 million from the Estate of Dorothy Zahars, one of the largest gifts in APDA history. Dorothy and her late husband, Harry, were beloved for their kindness and generosity, and this extraordinary legacy ensures their impact will be felt for generations to come.

This remarkable gift will propel APDA’s mission forward in significant ways, enabling us to provide the vital support, trusted education, and pioneering research we are known for while also enabling us to explore new and innovative endeavors. The Zahars’ generosity is more than a donation; it is a legacy of compassion, vision, and commitment to a brighter future. We are incredibly grateful for their generosity.

You too can create a legacy of hope. By including APDA in your will, trust, or estate plans – no matter the size — you help ensure life-changing programs and the search for a cure continue for years ahead. Learn more at **apdaparkinson.org/planned-giving**.

apda AMERICAN PARKINSON DISEASE ASSOCIATION
Strength in optimism. Hope in progress.

Published quarterly by the American Parkinson Disease Association, P.O. Box 750, Merrifield, VA 22116
(800) 223-2732

apda@apdaparkinson.org

apdaparkinson.org

For more information, or to learn about the many ways you can support APDA, visit our website at apdaparkinson.org/Insights26 or call (800) 223-2732.