

## **The American Parkinson Disease Association Awards Fresh Crop of Research Grants & New Diversity-Focused Research Initiative**

*From T cells to genetics, \$1.7 million in innovative research to be funded for 2019 – 2020 year*

**NEW YORK, NY – September 5, 2019** – The [American Parkinson Disease Association](#) (APDA) has just awarded \$1.7 million to support cutting-edge Parkinson’s disease (PD) research for the 2019-2020 funding year. Investigating everything from T cells and their role in PD to genetic factors for PD in Hispanics, these researchers are among the most dedicated and innovative in the PD field. Grants have been awarded in the form of: a prestigious George C. Cotzias Fellowship, three Post-Doctoral Fellowships, six Research Grants, and eight APDA Centers for Advanced Research. Additionally, a brand new diversity-focused grant opportunity has been announced. With someone diagnosed with PD every nine minutes, this research is critical as we push for better treatments and ultimately, a cure.

The grants are awarded through a competitive application process and reviewed by [APDA’s Scientific Advisory Board \(SAB\)](#) which is comprised of scientists with a wide array of backgrounds and expertise in all areas relevant to PD research. The SAB meets annually to review all grant proposals and set the scientific direction of APDA’s annual research investment. “APDA is steadfast in our research focus – identifying and supporting researchers early in their careers to encourage them to either commence or continue dedicating themselves to PD research, as well as to help established investigators pursue new and novel ideas” states Rebecca Gilbert, MD, PhD, Vice President and Chief Scientific Officer, APDA. “We are excited for these researchers to commit themselves to their work and have hope for meaningful outcomes that can make a difference for people living with PD.”

As part of its research funding announcement, APDA has revealed a brand new research grant specifically designed to support research that is focused on studying under-represented PD populations – the *APDA Research for All Grant*. This unique grant will be awarded for the first time in 2020-2021 and is the direct outcome of the first-ever Diversity in Parkinson’s Disease Research Conference hosted by APDA earlier this year. “The APDA Diversity in Parkinson’s Disease Research Conference explored the unique and urgent needs surrounding PD in diverse and under-represented communities” commented David G. Standaert, MD, PhD, John N. Whitaker Professor, Chair of Neurology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, School of Medicine and Chairman of the SAB. “We are proud to encourage and support researchers who are committed to diversity-focused research so we can learn more about how the disease affects different populations and ultimately better serve people with PD from all communities.”

### **The 2019-2020 APDA Research Grants:**

**The George C. Cotzias Fellowship** is APDA’s most prestigious grant and is awarded to a young physician-scientist with exceptional promise. The award spans three years and is designed to fund a long-range project focused on PD. This year’s awardee is:

- **Vikram Khurana, MD, PhD, Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Boston, MA**  
*Molecular mechanisms of perturbed mRNA metabolism in alpha-synucleinopathy.*

**Post-Doctoral Fellowships** are awarded to support post-doctoral scientists whose research holds promise to provide new insights into the pathophysiology, etiology and treatment of PD. This year’s awardees are:

- **Edward Griffin, PhD, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, AL**  
*The role of T cells in inflammation-induced neurodegeneration.*
- **Livia Hecke Morais, PhD, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA**  
*Microbial-brain interactions in Parkinson's disease neurodegeneration.*
- **Dorian Sargent, PhD, Van Andel Institute, Grand Rapids, MI**  
*Novel molecular mechanisms of VPS35-linked Parkinson's disease: D620N VPS35 knock-in mice.*

**Research Fellowships** are awarded to investigators performing innovative PD research at major academic institutions across the United States. This year's awardees are:

- **Brian Daniels, PhD, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey**  
*Investigating RIPK3 as a driver of inflammatory astrocyte activation in Parkinson's disease.*
- **Xianjun Dong, PhD, Harvard Medical School, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, MA**  
*Circular RNAs: A novel link between genetic susceptibility and Parkinson's disease?*
- **Monica Driscoll, PhD, Rutgers, The State University of NJ, Piscataway, NJ**  
*Identification of genes mediating a novel mitochondrial quality control mechanism impacted by Parkin*
- **Karen Nuytemans, PhD, University of Miami, Miami, FL**  
*Genetic factors for Parkinson's disease in Hispanics*
- **Mohammed Shahnawaz, PhD, University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston, Houston, TX**  
*Detection of alpha-synuclein oligomers in blood for the diagnosis of Parkinson's disease*
- **Bonnie Wong, PhD, Boston University, Boston, MA**  
*Alleviating depression and cognitive impairment in Parkinson's disease through telehealth psychotherapy.*

"A cornerstone of APDA's research funding strategy is to provide support to early career researchers with meritorious new ideas. With funding from APDA, these researchers can further develop their theories and obtain significant pilot data and initial proof of concept that enables them to apply for and receive larger grants from the National Institutes of Health and other funding institutions," states Gilbert. "Without this initial funding from APDA, some research projects might never get off the ground."

In addition, continued funding was granted for eight [APDA Centers for Advanced Research](#) in order to support large PD research programs which include research trainees, fellowship programs, early-stage discovery programs and later-stage clinical translation. These Centers facilitate research which is at the forefront of investigation into the cause, treatment and ultimately cure for PD. The current APDA Centers for Advanced Research are:

- Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, MA
- Emory University School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA
- Mayo Clinic, Jacksonville, FL
- Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, New Brunswick, NJ
- The Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, MA
- University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine, Birmingham, AL
- University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Pittsburgh, PA
- Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, MO

Learn more about these grantees and the exciting work they are doing and browse all APDA-funded research by visiting [www.apdaparkinson.org/research/what-we-fund/](http://www.apdaparkinson.org/research/what-we-fund/).

Researchers and physicians who are interested in applying for APDA funding can visit [www.apdaparkinson.org/research](http://www.apdaparkinson.org/research) for details on the 2020-2021 funding opportunities, including the brand new *APDA Research for All Grant*.

The American Parkinson Disease Association (APDA) is the largest grassroots network dedicated to fighting Parkinson's disease (PD) and works tirelessly to help the more than 1 million people in the United States with PD live life to the fullest in the face of this chronic, neurological disorder. Founded in 1961, APDA has raised and invested more than \$185 million to provide outstanding patient services and educational programs, elevate public awareness about the disease, and support research designed to unlock the mysteries of PD and ultimately put an end to this disease. To join us in the fight against Parkinson's disease and to learn more about the support APDA provides nationally through our network of Chapters and Information & Referral (I&R) Centers, as well as our national Research Program and Centers for Advanced Research, [please visit us at www.apdaparkinson.org](http://www.apdaparkinson.org).

# # #