

Pushing for Progress: American Parkinson Disease Association Funding To Accelerate Scientists' Pursuit for Answers

**From biomarker development to the use of sono-optogenetics,
\$1.85 million in innovative research to be funded for 2021– 2022 year**

NEW YORK, NY, September 1, 2021 – The [American Parkinson Disease Association](#) (APDA) has just awarded \$1.85 million to support cutting-edge Parkinson's disease (PD) research for the 2021-2022 funding year. Investigating everything from new techniques for deep brain stimulation to the differences in PD in Mexican populations, [these researchers](#) are among the most dedicated and innovative in the PD field. Grants have been awarded in the form of three Post-Doctoral Fellowships; six Research Grants; two Diversity in Parkinson's Disease Research grants; eight APDA Centers for Advanced Research; and one George C. Cotzias Fellowship, APDA's most prestigious award. With someone diagnosed with PD every nine minutes, this research is critical as we push for better treatments and ultimately, a cure.

For the second year in a row, APDA is awarding specialized grants to researchers focused on diverse and under-represented communities. APDA created the first-of-its-kind *Diversity in Parkinson's Disease Research* last year 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.

All APDA 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. "It's exciting and encouraging to review all of the innovative ideas submitted during the grant process. It is an incredibly challenging decision-making process, but 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 helping established investigators pursue new and novel ideas" states Rebecca Gilbert, MD, PhD, Vice President and Chief Scientific Officer, APDA. "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."

[The 2021-2022 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:

- [Abby L. Olsen, MD, PhD, The Brigham and Women's Hospital](#)
Harnessing the untapped therapeutic potential of glia in Parkinson's disease

APDA Diversity in Parkinson's Disease Research Grants are one-year grants to study the health inequities and/or differences among under-studied PD communities, across the spectrum of ethnicity, ancestry, geography, socioeconomic conditions, and gender. The two awardees are:

- [Jennifer G. Goldman, MD, MS, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab](#)
Understanding utilization of rehabilitation services across diverse populations
- [Miguel E. Renteria, PhD, Red Mexicana de Bioinformática](#)
Clinical, epidemiological, and cognitive characterization of Parkinson's disease in the Mexican population

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:

- [Rachel A. Coleman, PhD, University of Alabama at Birmingham](#)
LRRK2 regulation of glucocerebrosidase activity: role of Rab10 and pathological characterization
- [Enrico Opri, PhD, Emory University](#)
DBS-induced local evoked potentials for asleep intraoperative functional mapping
- [Leonardo Parra-Rivas, PhD, University of California San Diego](#)
Evaluating α -synuclein pathophysiology in human neurons

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

- [Constanza J. Cortes, PhD, University of Alabama at Birmingham](#)
Exercise-Mimetics: novel neuroprotectant pathways in Parkinson disease
- [Xianjun Dong, PhD, The Brigham and Women's Hospital](#)
Developing RNA biomarkers of early PD pathology from brain organoids and extracellular vesicles
- [Rebekah Evans, PhD, Georgetown University](#)
Defining circuit alterations that influence dopaminergic neuron vulnerability in early Parkinson's disease
- [Rafiq Huda, PhD, Rutgers University](#)
Harnessing astrocyte neuromodulation for alleviating the motor symptoms of Parkinson's disease
- [Sunil Kumar, PhD, University of Denver](#)
Identification of novel targets associated with α -synuclein aggregation
- [Huiliang Wang, PhD, University of Texas at Austin](#)
Sono-optogenetic stimulation for Parkinson disease treatment in rats

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

“The work being done as a result of the grants in this new funding cycle will have an incredible impact on the world of PD,” stated Leslie A. Chambers, President & CEO of APDA. “This work is only possible because of the steadfast support of our generous APDA donors.”

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/.

Researchers and physicians who are interested in applying for APDA funding can visit www.apdaparkinson.org/research for details on the 2022-2023 funding opportunities.

Those who want to support APDA's critical research with a donation can do so by visiting www.apdaparkinson.org and clicking the DONATE button or mailing a check payable to APDA to: APDA, PO Box 61420, Staten Island, NY 10306.

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 \$207 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.

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