

# Research Roundup

This month we reflect on Parkinson's research highlights in 2024, and thank you for the role you play in helping push forward Parkinson's research.

## Research news

### 2024 Research Summary

2024 was a busy year for Parkinson's research, both in research results and in how the community came together to push for better.

### **Parkinson's research gathers momentum: making progress to find better tests for Parkinson's**

In 2024, Parkinson's UK funded research at University College London (UCL) made headlines after identifying a blood test which may be able to detect Parkinson's earlier, before symptoms appear.

Led by Professor Kevin Mills and Dr Jenny Hällqvist, the work showed that a simple blood test was 100% accurate in identifying Parkinson's in over 130 people with and without the condition, and could also predict the development of Parkinson's in high risk individuals.

The news captured the media's attention, with Parkinson's UK featuring on BBC Breakfast and local radio across the UK to highlight how this research could be a vital tool in trialling new treatments, could shape diagnosis in the future, and sparking conversations about what it might mean for the Parkinson's community.

### **Exploring growth factors as new Parkinson's treatments**

Growth factors are molecules that can help feed, protect and stimulate new growth of brain cells. This has made them of key interest to researchers when looking for new treatments for Parkinson's.

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In 2024, we announced we'd no longer be funding research exploring device-delivered GDNF, via complex surgery, as a therapy for Parkinson's. However, we're still interested in the potential of growth factors.

We're now investing in a trial of HER-096, a potential treatment designed to protect and restore brain cells affected by Parkinson's. The drug is based on a growth factor, called CDNF, that is naturally produced in the brain and helps to keep cells healthy. Unlike GDNF, HER-096 can be administered through injection, avoiding the need for brain surgery. With a £1.55m investment from the Parkinson's Virtual Biotech, the first clinical trial of HER-096 offers new hope for growth factor-based treatments for Parkinson's. The trial is now underway in Finland.

Parkinson's UK funds pioneering research projects towards new treatments. Thanks to our supporters, we continue to fund crucial research projects that aim to bring us closer to better treatments for Parkinson's. In 2024 we've committed over £2.5m towards 11 new projects through our research grants programme, and over £8m to a further 5 projects through our Parkinson's Virtual Biotech partnership. All of our projects are selected based on the insights of people living with Parkinson's.

We were also pleased to launch our pioneering Landmark programme. Applying groundbreaking new scientific approaches to the most precious research resource we have - donated tissue from the world-leading Parkinson's UK Brain Bank - to unlock new treatments. Our hope is that this powerful collaboration of charities, academia and industry will significantly strengthen our ability to develop potential new treatments for Parkinson's, and bring them to clinical trials.

### **Connecting people living with Parkinson's at Par-Con**

In October, we were delighted to host Par-Con, a 2-day in-person and online event for the Parkinson's community. Taking place in Leeds, the event saw over 1200 people come together, to meet others affected by the condition, hear from

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expert speakers, and learn about living well with Parkinson's. Highlights included a live recording of the podcast '2 Parkies in a Pod' with special guest Professor Bas Bloem and sessions on hidden symptoms and revolutionary research.

### **Our Research Support Network reaches over 10,000 people**

In May we shared the message that "Parkinson's research needs you" to make sure everyone has the chance to consider how they can stay up to date and get involved in Parkinson's research and called for people to join our Research Support Network. 10 members of the Research Support Network shared their stories about why they got involved and what difference the network makes to them.

Thanks to the Network sharing these stories far and wide, in 2024 our Research Support Network grew by nearly 2000 to well over 10,000 people! We're thrilled to have reached such a milestone of people coming together to get the latest research information, opportunities and having their say on research.

### **Ensuring everyone has a voice in Parkinson's research**

#### **Driving forward race equality in Parkinson's research**

We know it's vital that Parkinson's research represents all members of the community. In 2024, Parkinson's UK came together to work with Equality, health charities, community organisations and people with lived experience to co-produce a film, INVISIBLE, to encourage greater diversity in health research. The film features a powerful spoken word piece about making those who are currently invisible in the healthcare system more visible.

This is just one highlight out of many we've made in our Race Equality in Research project. We're continuing to work closely with volunteers and community members towards our 5 priorities aiming to increase diversity in Parkinson's research.

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### **Working with you to shape what we do**

Parkinson's research simply couldn't move forward without the whole community being involved at every step, from prioritising research questions to taking part in research trials. In 2024, we've supported more than 70 research projects by linking them with people in the Parkinson's community to make the research as relevant and impactful as possible. And we've supported a further 40 by helping them find participants to take part in their research studies.

### **Ensuring the patient voice is included in research**

The power of community voice was also recognised at an international event. Since 2021, at Parkinson's UK we've been working with pharmaceutical company UCB and the Parkinson's Foundation on an initiative called the Patient Engagement Council for Parkinson's Research (PECPR). The PECPR embeds the voices of people with Parkinson's in clinical research, and aims to ensure that people with Parkinson's are involved at every stage of drug development

In 2024, the PECPR was awarded the Made with Patients award, recognising the outstanding contribution it has made towards improving clinical research for people with Parkinson's.

### **Looking ahead: 2025**

There's plenty to look forward to in Parkinson's research in 2025. It will see the launch of a number of new drug trials, including a new platform trial called ACT-PD which rethinks how clinical trials for new Parkinson's drugs are carried out. The study will take a new approach, trialling drugs in parallel to speed up the research process. The study should be ready to start registering interest in early 2025.

We're also looking forward to hosting Par-Con again. We're in the process of putting together a steering group of people with Parkinson's to help shape the event, and look forward to being able to share details about the 2025 event soon.