

In Touch Newsletter May 2026

Inaugural Brian Sherman Memorial Awards Announced

Parkinson's NSW and the family of the late Brian Sherman AM have announced the results of the inaugural Brian Sherman Memorial Awards for significant contributions to the Parkinson's community.

Brian Sherman had a distinguished career in business, animal advocacy and philanthropy in addition to being a Parkinson's advocate.

Gillian O'Connor of Goulburn Support Group was awarded the Brian Sherman Memorial Award for Parkinson's Advocate of the Year.

An Honourable Mention in the Advocate of the Year category went to Sydney's Emma Tinkler.

Graham Saxby of Coffs Harbour was honoured with a Parkinson's Community Spirit Award.

Vivienne Ross from Penrith was recognised with an Honourable Mention in the Parkinson's Community Spirit category.

Dr Gene Sherman AM, wife of the late Brian Sherman, presided over the selection of award winners with other members and associates of the Sherman family.

"We worked with Parkinson's NSW to develop this awards program in order to honour the memory of my late husband Brian," said Dr Sherman.

"Brian was a very accomplished man who fought Parkinson's with the same energy and determination he brought to his career in business and as a philanthropist and advocate. In judging the Brian Sherman Memorial Awards we looked for individuals who embodied the same persistence, determination and dedication," she said.

"We received 30 nominations across two categories of the Awards, and they were all dedicated to the Parkinson's community in individual ways. It was heartening to see the energy and creativity people put into their voluntary roles while living with Parkinson's or caring for a loved one who does."

The Awards were presented at a special event hosted by the Sherman family in Sydney on 28 April.

Japan Approves First Stem-Cell Therapy for Parkinson's Disease

A major milestone has been reached as Japan has approved the world's first stem-cell-based therapy for Parkinson's disease. The innovation was developed by Sumitomo Pharma in collaboration with Dr. Jun Takahashi at Kyoto University. This treatment represents a new approach that could potentially restore lost brain cells in Parkinson's.

Marketed under the brand name Amchepry, the cells start as adult cells from healthy donors which are then reprogrammed to become induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells. IPS cells behave like embryonic stem cells, meaning they can develop into almost any type of cell in the body.

With Amchepry, researchers guide the iPS cells to become dopamine-producing cells. These cells are then surgically implanted into specific areas of a patient's brain where dopamine neurons have been lost due to the disease.

Early Results and Approval

Early clinical testing showed encouraging results. Kyoto University conducted a trial in seven Parkinson's patients from ages 50 to 69 that received between 5 million and 10 million cells implanted into both sides of the brain.

The research team reported that the cells survived without any serious safety concerns over the 2-year observation period in all patients. Four patients experienced improved symptoms.

These results led Japan's health ministry to grant conditional approval of Amchepry for Parkinson's. Because the approval of this novel and important therapy was made on more limited data than is standard, the therapy is "conditionally approved". This means that the product is approved on the condition that the company will conduct post-marketing surveillance and other studies to monitor efficacy and safety.

"I hope this will bring relief to patients not only in Japan but around the world," health minister Kenichiro Ueno stated at a press conference. "We will promptly carry out all necessary procedures to ensure it reaches all patients without fail."

Japan has created a unique regulatory pathway designed to accelerate access to regenerative therapies. Under this system, treatment can receive conditional and limited-time approval once safety and early signs of efficacy are demonstrated even if large clinical trials are still ongoing.

This would be the first commercially available iPS cell therapy that is expected to roll out as early as mid-2026 in Japan.

Next Steps

Sumitomo Pharma will continue to collect trial results from a larger pool of people to demonstrate clear efficacy to receive full approval. This unique approach has expedited Japan's advancements in regenerative medicine to become a global leader in translating stem-cell research into clinical treatments.

Japan's approval marks a significant moment in neuroscience and regenerative medicine. If long-term studies confirm Amchepry's effectiveness, stem-cell therapies like this could eventually transform how Parkinson's is treated worldwide.

Source:

[American Parkinson Disease Association](#)

Parkinson's NSW hosts Research Symposium

Parkinson's NSW hosted the 2026 Parkinson's Research Symposium on 31 March in Sydney. It was attended by more than 80 members of the Parkinson's community as well as medical and research professionals.

A breakfast session was run for medical and scientific participants early in the morning. It was led by Professor Carolyn Sue AM who is the Kinghorn Chair of Neurodegeneration at Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA), Professor of Neurology at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and Director of Neurosciences at Prince of Wales Hospital (POWH), and the Chair of the National Parkinson's Alliance.

Speakers at the breakfast included:

- Professor Glenda Halliday, a career neuroscientist specialising in neurodegeneration and a Fellow of the National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC). She discussed new tests for Parkinson's disease.
- Professor Grant Dewson, Head of the Walter and Eliza Hall Parkinson's Disease Research Centre that brings together research labs with Movement Disorders clinicians and a passionate Parkinson's advocacy team. He spoke on targeting neuronal cell death machinery in Parkinson's.
- Associate Professor Florin Gandor, a neurologist and movement disorders specialist with a focus on Parkinson's disease and its treatment in the advanced stages. He addressed the topic of laryngopharyngeal pathology in Parkinsonian syndromes.
- Rachael Mackinnon, Clinical Nurse Consultant at Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA). The theme of her presentation was Beyond the Patient – Health professionals' role in carer support.

The full day session of the Symposium was opened by Mary Kay Walker, CEO of Parkinson's NSW. She introduced Andy Esteban, Chair of the Board of Parkinson's

NSW who made opening remarks around the grim statistics which make research into Parkinson's more important than ever before.

These include the fact that Parkinson's is now described as a pandemic. It is the fastest growing neurological disorder globally and a major driver of disability, falls and hospital use.

In New South Wales an estimated 68,850 people are living with Parkinson's. That's around 31% of the national total.

For every person diagnosed, at least two family members or carers are directly affected, meaning more than 206 thousand people in NSW live with the daily consequences of this disease.

Parkinson's is more common than many major cancers combined yet attracts far less government investment. That's a major challenge for both researchers in this field and service providers like Parkinson's NSW.

Andy Esteban was followed by Richard Wylie, Chief Executive Officer of the new National Parkinson's Alliance. He spoke about the structure, role and mission of the Alliance.

Professor Glenda Halliday AC, a leading neuroscientist was up next. She discussed new international programs uncovering the roots of Parkinson's.

Harnessing collaboration to advance new Parkinson's therapies and diagnostics was then presented by research scientist Professor Grant Dewson

Ashley Young, a Clinical Neuropsychologist, shifted the audience's attention to mental health when she took the floor to discuss living well with Parkinson's disease.

Craig Hewat, Director and Physiotherapist of Engage VR Rehab, then gave a presentation on how digital health and Virtual Reality are shaping a new world in allied health.

Following that presentation, a trio of speakers explained innovations in home-based swallowing management using a technology application called BiSSkApp. The presenters were Speech Pathologists Colleen Kerr and Christina Samy of Optimal Speech Pathology and Anneke Duyvestyn, a Clinical Specialist from Swaltech in New Zealand.

Following a lunch break Dr Erica Rose Jeffrey PhD, Founding Teacher and Director of Dance for Parkinson's Australia re-energised the audience by leading them through some seated dance movements.

To round out the day's formal presentations, Dr Diana Zhang, Founder & CEO of Preview Health spoke on Unlocking Precision Brain Health Care with Artificial Intelligence.

The Symposium then concluded with a Q&A session involving audience interaction with all of the keynote speakers.

This Research Symposium was generously sponsored by an AbbVie Foundation grant.

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My [Parkinson's] Life

Partnering through Parkinson's

Michael Costello and Graeme Haigh

Michael Costello and Graeme Haigh met more than 40 years ago when Michael took on a second job working as a waiter and Graeme was a friend of a friend, who introduced them.

"We were just good friends for a while," says Michael, "but now we've been together for 43 years."

While both had busy working lives with Michael also writing plays, a drama for the ABC and a novel and both enjoying overseas holidays, their lives changed in late 2015 when Michael was diagnosed with Parkinson's.

"I noticed his left arm was swinging when we were walking," recalls Graeme. "I was aware of Parkinson's but I wasn't aware of how serious it was. It was a bit of a shock when we were sent to a neurologist."

Michael says he went into positive mode, determined to find out as much as he could.

Had to get on with it

"I wasn't going to waste time," he says. "It was terrible to have this in our retirement, but I had to get on with it. I got onto Parkinson NSW's info line and was soon speaking to a beautiful woman about what was available. It was so important for people to get the right information when you're adjusting to it."

As Michael and Graeme assessed their new situation, their shared housework also gradually needed to be modified.

"We had always shared chores and cooking meals," says Graeme. "Now if Michael is particularly off, I do a little bit more. Michael doesn't drive now, so if he needs to go to the doctor's or the chemist I drive. I don't have a problem with that."

A few years after Michael's diagnosis, the couple came across The Residences at Cardinal Freeman in Ashfield, which was just opening.

"We realised our house and garden in Dulwich Hill was going to get too much for us," says Michael, who is 73. "We've been here eight years now; there's a lot of activities you can do. For instance, every Thursday night we take a plate of food to the piazza area for socialising over a couple of drinks. It's very important to keep socialising while you can. Don't shut yourself off; just get out while you can."

"Michael did a lot of the work of looking after a bigger house and we knew that couldn't continue," says Graeme. "We have a three-bedroom, two-bathroom unit which is manageable."

Maintaining routines

"We live in the same area as our house and we still go and do things like go to new restaurants or go to Summer Hill," says Michael. "We try to do things together and have our little routines."

Michael and Graeme have also worked hard on fundraising for Parkinson's NSW, including three exhibitions and sales of Michael's paintings at their village, which have raised substantial amounts from donations for Parkinson's NSW.

"A lot of people don't realise that I have Parkinson's," says Michael. "But they don't see me getting out of bed in the morning before my first lot of medications! It's a progressive disease and I work very hard with exercises and staying as fit as I can. That is vital. It has progressed more over the past two years but you've just got to help yourself as much as possible. I've always had a positive outlook and I think it's just the way I am."

"We thought our retirement was going to be travel but now it's harder for Michael," says Graeme. "We've done some cruises which are more manageable because you're not always unpacking and packing, but if there are flights involved as well that's more difficult now."

With such a long relationship before diagnosis, challenges were not unusual for Michael and Graeme, and they deal with challenges in their own way.

"I know that my executive functions are changing now," says Michael. "My memory is not as on the ball as it was but I'm still able to wash and shave and dress myself. Graeme is aware that my cognition is changing slowly. If we're going out, I can get anxious about odd things, like when is the bus going to arrive; for no good reason."

"I know that if Michael is doing something, like cooking a meal, I'm not going to interrupt him to ask him something unrelated," says Graeme. "We manage for now. If I think the stress of things is having an effect on me then I will just go into a room and close the door for a while. We try to the best of our abilities."

“In 43 years there have been many things we’ve dealt with,” says Michael. “We have trust, love, and dependency on one other. Graeme is my carer, and my spouse. How lucky am I?”

Take 5

A monthly review of the top five issues raised in calls to the Parkinson's NSW InfoLine team (call 1800 727 567).

1. Parkinson's Plus / Atypical Parkinsonism

We've seen an increase in enquiries about Parkinson's Plus syndromes, also known as atypical Parkinsonism. These conditions can share symptoms with Parkinson's but often progress differently and may respond differently to medication. Receiving this type of diagnosis can feel overwhelming and confusing for individuals and families.

It's important to stay connected with your neurologist and care team, ask questions, and seek support early. Our InfoLine can help explain terminology, connect you with reliable information, and guide you toward appropriate supports and services.

2. Post-Prandial Hypotension (Blood Pressure Drops After Eating)

Some callers have been experiencing dizziness, weakness, fatigue, or feeling faint after meals. This may be related to post-prandial hypotension, which is a drop in blood pressure after eating and can be more common in people living with Parkinson's due to changes in the autonomic nervous system.

There are some practical strategies that may help manage symptoms, including:

- Eating smaller meals more frequently rather than large meals
- Reducing very high carbohydrate meals where possible
- Drinking water before meals
- Avoiding standing up too quickly after eating
- Remaining seated or resting for a short time after meals
- Staying well hydrated throughout the day

Because these symptoms can increase the risk of falls, it's important to mention them to your medical team. Treatment options and medication adjustments may help. If you'd like more information or support around managing blood pressure changes in Parkinson's, our InfoLine team is here to help.

3. Stress Around “Invisible” Symptoms

Many people have shared how difficult it can be when symptoms aren't obvious to others. Fatigue, pain, anxiety, cognitive changes, dizziness, and other non-visible symptoms can be incredibly challenging, especially when family and friends can't easily see them.

Talking openly with trusted people about how Parkinson's affects you day-to-day can help to build understanding and support. Some people find it helpful to share information resources or attend appointments with loved ones so they can better understand the condition. Our counsellors and InfoLine team are also here to support both individuals and family members through these conversations.

4. Gastric Reflux and Slowed Digestion

Parkinson's can slow down the digestive system, sometimes leading to reflux, bloating, nausea, or feeling full quickly. These symptoms can also impact how well Parkinson's medications are absorbed.

If digestive symptoms are becoming more noticeable, it's important to speak with your GP, neurologist, or medical team. Treatment options, dietary adjustments, and medication reviews may help improve comfort and symptom control. Our InfoLine can also help connect you with dietitians or other appropriate supports.

5. Hallucinations and Delusions

We've also had an increase in conversations around hallucinations and delusions. These symptoms can be distressing for both the person experiencing them and their loved ones, but they are more common in Parkinson's than many people realise.

Hallucinations and delusions should always be discussed with your medical team, as they can sometimes be linked to medication changes, infections, sleep issues, or progression of symptoms. Early support and treatment can make a significant difference. If you're unsure where to start, our InfoLine team can help guide you toward the right support.

For information or personalised guidance on any of these topics, please contact the Parkinson's NSW InfoLine on 1800 727 567. We're here to support you every step of the way.

10 tips to help you sleep well with Parkinson's

If you have Parkinson's, your sleep may be disrupted. This may happen if your movement symptoms make it hard to turn over in bed. You may also find it more difficult to sleep well if you experience bladder and bowel problems or pain.

Below are 10 sleep hygiene tips, recommended by psychologists, to help you get a good night's sleep with Parkinson's.

1. Don't have caffeine before you go to bed

This includes tea, coffee, chocolate and cocoa. Many soft drinks also contain caffeine, so check the labels.

Caffeine is a stimulant, which means it can make you feel more awake. Its effects can last for 3 to 4 hours. If caffeine is affecting your body at bedtime, it can increase the time it takes you to get to sleep and make sleep lighter and more restless.

It is also important to limit the total amount of caffeine you drink during the day too.

2. Avoid drinking alcoholic drinks 4 to 6 hours before bedtime

Alcohol can make you feel sleepy. But as its effects wear off, we get what's called 'withdrawal' and that has the opposite effect. Although alcohol can help you get to sleep, the withdrawal effect can lead to restlessness and waking up during the night.

Another effect of drinking alcohol at night is nocturia – the need to get up and go to the toilet, which will also disturb your sleep.

3. Try not to smoke around bedtime or when awake during the night

Like caffeine, nicotine is a stimulant and the effects are similar, even if you feel smoking relaxes you.

4. Try to relax before going to bed

If you are in a relaxed mindset before you go to bed, then you may find it easier to drift off.

5. Avoid vigorous exercise within 2 hours of bedtime

Regular activity, such as a daily walk, can make you feel better both physically and mentally. But it's best to avoid intense exercise within 2 hours of bedtime, as the effects of the activity may make you less able to fall asleep.

6. Keep your bedroom calm and comfortable

Try to reduce clutter and furniture and keep your bedroom tidy.

7. Avoid excessively hot or cold temperatures

High room temperatures (24°C or higher) may disturb normal sleep and make you restless. Most people sleep better if their bedroom is cool. If possible, it's best to keep your bedroom temperature at around 16°C to 18°C.

8. Reduce noise and light in the bedroom

Light and noise can disturb sleep. Try to close windows, use ear plugs or move to a quieter room if noise is a problem. It's important to have a dark bedroom with curtains or blinds that keep out street lights or daylight. If this is a particular problem, try using an eye mask.

9. Keep your bedroom mainly for sleeping

Ideally, bedrooms should be calm spaces for sleeping. Keep your bedroom for sleep, so your mind associates it with activities that lead to sleep. Try to avoid things like watching television or using laptops or tablets in bed.

10. Try to keep to a regular routine

A regular routine is the key to better sleep. Try to stick to a regular pattern of times for bed, getting up, meals, exercise and other routine activities.

Source:

[Parkinson's UK](#)

Update By Support Group Coordinator, Stacey Foster

National Volunteer Week (18 – 24 May) is the annual celebration to recognise and thank all the wonderful volunteers around the country.

According to the Centre for Volunteering (NSW peak body for volunteering) 2025 State of Volunteering Report, the value of volunteering in NSW is \$205.3 billion. For every dollar invested in volunteering, there is a remarkable \$5.60 return. In the same report, the stated replacement cost of volunteering is \$45.5 billion.

Other interesting key findings include:

69.5% of the NSW adult population volunteered, which is 4.9 million people.

Volunteers contributed 1.3 billion hours with an average of 22.7 hours per month

49.6% of volunteers give their time within their local community

At Parkinson's NSW, volunteers drive the success of our 75-strong network of face-to-face support groups. Without our incredible volunteers, there would be no support groups.

Support groups can provide immeasurable benefits to people living with Parkinson's, their care-partners and families.

Our volunteer support group leaders and committees organise meeting venues and guest speakers; plan meetings, outings and extra circular activities; create newsletters; provide food; fundraise; raise awareness...just to name a few! They come from all walks of life – small business, farming, school principals, health professionals, artists, public service. Some are still working; most are retired. They are living with Parkinson's, caring for someone with Parkinson's, or work with both.

Year after year, they play a vital role in building connected and inclusive communities. They provide a safe place for the Parkinson's community to come together to access education, support and a sense of belonging.

My sincere thanks to all of our volunteers who are juggling multiple priorities and who are still creating a sense of community. You give so much of your time and Parkinson's NSW is so appreciative.

If you are a part of a support group and would like to give back, or help others, or use your skills and experience, please reach out to your leader or committee. There is no one way to volunteer. Every contribution matters.

Thank you.

Join a discussion on the future of regional healthcare

Anyone interested in the future of healthcare across regional and rural NSW is invited to join an upcoming online forum with Member for Wagga, Dr Joe McGirr MP.

The session will include a presentation from Dr Joe on the:

- Key issues currently impacting rural health services
- Direction and priorities of his [Rural Health Action Plan](#)

Participants will also have the opportunity to ask questions following the presentation and share their experiences of healthcare in regional and rural NSW.

When: Thursday, 21 May, 6pm to 7pm

Where: Online via Zoom

Register to attend at

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/DBzCVdhSRxC41sruQR2CUg>

For evidence-based information and advice call the Parkinson's NSW InfoLine

1800 727 567

Parkinson's NSW InfoLine

Email: pnsw@parkinsonsnsw.org.au

Web: www.parkinsonsnsw.org.au