

Op-Ed Submission: Vote Yes on Proposition 14 for Texas to lead in fight against Neurodegenerative Diseases

On the November ballot, Proposition 14, the “Establish Dementia Prevention of Research Institute of Texas Amendment” describes the State of Texas allocation of 3 Billion of existing general revenue funds into research and improving care in dementia and neurodegenerative disease, including Parkinson’s disease. Notably, Proposition 14 will not be funded by increasing taxes. . Championed by Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, the State Legislature overwhelmingly approved this amendment, with bipartisan support, during sessions in the Spring of 2025 in the House and Senate which Governor Abbott signed into law in May, 2025.

There are several critical reasons for your “YES” vote. First, 60 million people are projected to have Parkinson disease (PD) by 2037. In Texas, the prevalence of PD will grow faster than in the entire nation and will mirror global prevalence rates. This funding will give Texans an opportunity to not only take care of Texans first, but, with the advances from the research borne from these funds, a chance for Texas to lead the Nation in the fight. At present, federal funding for neurodegenerative diseases is at historically low levels. Several of our Board Members here at the newly founded Parkinson Discovery Institute regularly submit major grant applications for Parkinson’s disease research to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The chances of success for any application to be funded is very low. Only about 40% of all submitted grants make it past the first review, with the rest being triaged, before discussion by the review panel. Only those applications scoring within the top 10th percentile, after discussion by the NIH review panel, will then be considered for funding. Whereas the NIH is the major source of biomedical research funds, private foundations may provide opportunities for funding, but these awards are very limited in number and budgets are generally far less than awards from the NIH. The Department of Defense (DoD), in their Congressionally-Directed Medical Research Program, used to have a Parkinson’s Research Program. However, this program was eliminated in 2024. Even so, the funding levels were very low. In the year before this program ended in 2024, only the top 3 proposals of ~50 were funded. Our proposal was ranked 4th, making the top 9th percentile. Yet, due to limited funds, our project could not advance forward as planned.

The time it takes to develop a competitive Federal grant proposal requires a minimum of 12- to 36 months before submission. This is because to be competitive, grant proposals must already have preliminary or published results to support the main goals of the proposal and show feasibility to do the work. Review panels also judge whether or not the grant addresses a significant knowledge gap. Although there are numerous knowledge gaps concerning Parkinson’s disease symptoms, which also include dementia, seed money must be obtained to acquire the preliminary data that is needed to compete for funding. Therefore, a “YES” vote for Proposition 14 will help biomedical research scientists and clinicians in Texas compete to obtain funding to generate preliminary data needed to be more competitive in an already intensely

competitive Federal funding environment. Moreover, some Proposition 14 funds can be used to develop more effective therapies and provide caregiver support. With every grant dollar obtained from the federal government coming into Texas institutions, there is more investment possible within Texas to keep the effort going to fund efficacious preventative therapies for neurodegenerative diseases – such as Parkinson disease, Huntington’s disease, and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (Lou Gehrig’s Disease); none of which have any cure at present. Essentially, Proposition 14 creates an unprecedented opportunity to generate the finances needed for the high caliber of research needed to treat, and eventually conquer, neurodegenerative diseases.

Despite the potential for long-sustained positive impact of this state funding, there is some opposition to this proposition. A primary and common objection is that this type of research is best funded by private enterprise, and that the Federal Govt already funds what is necessary. Indeed, if the argument is made on the assumption that “handing money to bureaucrats”, with no oversight on its handling, is what would unfold, then perhaps that viewpoint holds some water. Most assuredly, however, as boots-on-the-ground researchers, with ~ 20 years of experience, would tell you, nothing could be further from the truth. Every grant dollar spent from either private or federal sources is accounted for and researchers are obligated to provide annual or semi-annual progress reports to the funding agency, be it the DoD, a private foundation, or NIH. Moreover, scientists are judged by their peers, within the institutions they work as well as in the international science community for their contributions and productivity in publications. If the administration of this new funding source models systems already in place at the federal level for peer review and accountability at the post-award level, the opposition to this amendment for these reasons has no basis.

With a nearly 24 billion budget surplus, this amendment would require just 1.25% of that surplus on a yearly basis. However, the impact of those funds would provide substantial benefit for the fueling innovation and new technology, the generation of needed answers to long-standing questions in neurodegenerative diseases, and put the State in prime position to leading the way to ultimately mitigate the negative impact of neurodegenerative disease on patients and caregivers alike. The typical NIH grant budget for 5 years is ~3 million. Thus, 300 million per year would go a very long way to address long-standing knowledge gaps in understanding disease and improving clinical treatment options. Discoveries and advances could come at unprecedented levels, beginning here in Texas, with these research findings taking hold of lines of research inquiries worldwide. Investment in state infrastructure means that researchers and clinicians here will have much higher probabilities to get projects finally running, and above all, maintained. Highly qualified people can be trained and hired to advance understanding and treatment of neurodegenerative diseases. Moreover, expanding research production at the fundamental level means identification of possible drug targets, which then encourage investors

and industry to invest in the research results and eventually take them to clinic by funding large clinical trials.

We the Executive Board at the Parkinson Discovery Institute in Fort Worth adamantly and unanimously support Proposition 14. These funds will put the State of Texas at the forefront of neurodegenerative disease research and above all, support the health and welfare of Texans.

The Parkinson Discovery Institute (PDI) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization designated as a public charity, with an Executive Board of scientists, physicians, physical therapists, caregivers and patients, that was co-founded in 2024 by Drs. Michael F. Salvatore and Vicki Nejtek-Salvatore. The members of the board have together published over 100 manuscripts combined. They have received funding from the NIH, DoD, and private foundations, and regularly give lecture updates to patients and caregivers to educate the Parkinson's community and provide them a platform to voice their concerns in the North Texas area.