

The W. Garfield Weston Foundation awards \$1.3 million to support translational neuroscience research

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TORONTO – The W. Garfield Weston Foundation is pleased to award nine grants through its Rapid Response program to researchers in the Greater Toronto Area pursuing high risk, high reward research in neurodegenerative diseases of aging. The researchers will use the \$100,000-150,000 in seed funding to explore ground-breaking advances ranging from new methods of diagnosis to improved therapies.

Neurodegenerative diseases of aging such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s are among the least understood and most undertreated diseases. These diseases are placing a large and increasing burden on Canadian society. Alzheimer’s disease alone costs Canadians \$15 billion per year now, growing to \$153 billion within a generation. Addressing this challenge requires innovative approaches to accelerating treatments, such as the projects funded by the Foundation’s Rapid Response program.

“Canada has a world-class neuroscience research community at the forefront of neurodegenerative diseases of aging,” said Stewart Green, Director of The W. Garfield Weston Foundation. “Supporting these researchers can help lead to meaningful, timely breakthroughs that will enhance the quality of life in Canada and around the world.”

The Rapid Response program is unique as it streamlines the application process and expedites timelines while maintaining a stringent level of peer review. With 50 percent of proposals funded, the program reduces demands on scientists considerably. Grantees were selected by The W. Garfield Weston Foundation’s panel of scientific advisors, a group consisting of world-renowned Canadian and international scientists.

“The projects receiving grants met an absolute bar for scientific excellence,” said Dr. Andres Lozano, Chair of The W. Garfield Weston Foundation Scientific Review Committee, RR Tasker Chair of Neurosurgery at the University of Toronto and neurosurgeon at Toronto Western Hospital. “We were extremely impressed with the caliber of the science presented. As a result, the Foundation immediately decided to increase the total funding and number of grants by more than 30 percent.”

These awards continue the Foundation’s long history of supporting medical research, from funding the Banting and Best Institute in the 1960’s to the more recent support of the Weston Fellows at the Centre for Research in Neurodegenerative Diseases at the University of Toronto.

Awarded researchers include:

- **Dr. Isabelle Aubert** of the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, who is exploring the use of MRI and focused ultrasound to help Alzheimer’s drugs reach the brain more effectively.

- **Dr. Mallar Chakravarty** of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, who is assessing whether electrical stimulation of the fornix will promote growth in parts of the brain that degenerate in Alzheimer's.
- **Dr. David Kaplan** of The Hospital for Sick Children, who is investigating whether on-market drugs can be repurposed to prevent neurodegeneration in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.
- **Dr. Romina Mizrahi** of the Centre for Mental Health and Addiction, who is exploring the use of a new test for neuroinflammation as a diagnostic and biomarker for Alzheimer's.
- **Dr. Tarek Rajji** from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, who is evaluating the use of non-invasive magnetic brain stimulation to improve cognitive function in patients with mild Alzheimer's.
- **Dr. Ekaterina Rogueva** of the University of Toronto, who aims to develop a new understanding of and diagnostic test for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and frontotemporal dementia by looking at particular genetic sequence present in both diseases.
- **Dr. Antonio Strafella** of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, who is exploring the use of a new tracer for neuroinflammation in tracking disease progression in Parkinson's.
- **Dr. Anurag Tandon** of the University of Toronto, and **Drs. Isabelle Aubert** and **Kullervo Hynynen** of the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, who are exploring whether focused ultrasound will improve the delivery of drugs to patients with Parkinson's.
- **Drs. David Tang-Wai** and **Anthony Lang** of Toronto Western Hospital, who are investigating the effectiveness of a unique, non-invasive eye test in diagnosing Alzheimer's.

About The W. Garfield Weston Foundation

The W. Garfield Weston Foundation is a private Canadian family foundation, established in the 1950's by Willard Garfield Weston and his wife Reta. In 1924, Garfield inherited his father's company and during his life established bakeries and other successful enterprises throughout Canada and in many parts of the world. Today, these businesses include the George Weston Limited and Loblaw Companies Limited, companies in food retailing, processing and distribution. The founders believed that as the funds are generated through the hard work and success of these Canadian companies, grants should be given in Canada for the benefit of Canadians. For three generations, The W. Garfield Weston Foundation has maintained a family tradition of supporting charitable organizations across Canada. Today the Foundation directs the majority of its funds to projects in the fields of land conservation, education, and science in Canada's North.

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