

Submission: ACT Government – ACT Budget 2026-27

March 2026

Executive Summary and Budget Ask

Parkinson's disease is the fastest growing neurological condition in Australia and is placing increasing pressure on hospitals, specialist services, general practice and families. In the ACT, limited access to community-based Parkinson's care contributes to avoidable hospital presentations, longer lengths of stay and increased workforce strain.

THRFG – Parkinson's ACT seeks \$1.5 million over four years to fund two full-time equivalent community-based Parkinson's Specialist Nurse roles, addressing a critical gap in integrated neurological care. This core investment will support hospital avoidance, improve care coordination, relieve pressure on neurologists and GPs, and enable people with Parkinson's to live safely at home for longer.

In total, THRFG – Parkinson's ACT seeks \$4.4 million over four years (2026–27 to 2029–30) to deliver an integrated, preventative model of community-based Parkinson's care.

Summary of Funding Requested

- \$1.5 million over four years – Two FTE community-based Parkinson's Specialist Nurse roles delivered by THRFG – Parkinson's ACT
- \$1.0 million over four years – ACT Parkinson's Infoline (\$250,000 per year)
- \$300,000 over four years – Innovation and sustainability through AI-enabled service integration
- \$1.6 million over four years – Subsidised Brain x Body Fitness Studio programs in the ACT

This package represents a high value, preventative investment that shifts care from hospital settings into the community, aligns with Canberra Health Services' strategic priorities, and delivers measurable returns through hospital avoidance and workforce efficiency.

All funding requested will be expended in the Australian Capital Territory and used exclusively to deliver services for people living with Parkinson's in the ACT and surrounding region.

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About The Hospital Research Foundation Group Parkinson's

The Hospital Research Foundation Group (THRFG) funds medical research and delivers patient care services in the community in partnership with public hospitals, universities and health services.

Parkinson's ACT, established in 1986 and part of THRFG since 2022, is the peak body for people living with Parkinson's in the ACT and surrounding region. THRFG – Parkinson's ACT provides support, services and advocacy for people living with Parkinson's, their families and carers, and works collaboratively with government and health partners.

Parkinson's Disease in the ACT: System Pressures and Unmet Need

Parkinson's disease is the second most common neurological condition in Australia after dementia and the fastest growing.

- Up to 150,000 Australians are currently living with Parkinson's¹
- Incidence is increasing globally by approximately 4% per year²
- An estimated 3,500 people are living with Parkinson's in the ACT³

Despite this growing prevalence, access to government-funded, community-based Parkinson's services in the ACT remains limited. In a small health system, this gap has a disproportionate impact, with people presenting later and sicker to hospital, avoidable admissions due to falls and medication issues, increased care-coordination burdens on clinicians, and rising carer burnout.

¹ <https://www.parkinsons.org.au/information-hub/understanding-parkinsons/>

² [https://www.parkinsons.org.au/information-hub/incidence-prevalence/#:~:text=In%20Australia%2C%20Parkinson's%20incidence%20rates,%25%20from%20Queensland%20\(4\).](https://www.parkinsons.org.au/information-hub/incidence-prevalence/#:~:text=In%20Australia%2C%20Parkinson's%20incidence%20rates,%25%20from%20Queensland%20(4).)

³ Prevalence estimates are based on Monash University and University of Melbourne–led research published in Parkinsonism and Related Disorders (2019), which estimated Parkinson's disease prevalence in Victoria at 0.85%. This rate has been extrapolated nationally using Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Estimated Resident Population data (2021). State and territory distributions are indicative only. Further detail provided through national submission material prepared by The Hospital Research Foundation Group. <https://www.parkinsons.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Ecosystem-of-Parkinsons-Part-3.pdf>

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The Hospital Research Foundation Group Parkinson's ACT priorities:

Priority 1: Community-based Parkinson's Specialist Nurses (Core Investment)

Funding request: \$1.5 million over four years to deliver two full-time equivalent community-based Parkinson's Specialist Nurse roles

Parkinson's ACT has long advocated for community-based specialist Parkinson's nursing. As prevalence rises, service capacity has not kept pace, resulting in unmet need and avoidable pressure on hospitals, emergency departments and primary care.

In the ACT, limited access to coordinated specialist support outside acute and outpatient settings means symptoms escalate before intervention, falls lead to avoidable hospital presentations, clinicians carry complex care coordination, and carers experience burnout – all contributing to increased demand on the health system.

Community-based Parkinson's Specialist Nurses address this gap through early intervention, proactive symptom and medication management, and coordinated care across hospital, primary and community settings. Evidence shows these roles reduce avoidable emergency department presentations, inpatient admissions and length of stay.

Proposed ACT model

THRFG – Parkinson's ACT seeks funding to deliver **two full-time equivalent community-based Parkinson's Specialist Nurse roles**, based in the ACT and delivering services exclusively to ACT residents. Together, these roles provide coverage and continuity and deliver system-level impact in a small but high-need jurisdiction.

To meet immediate need, THRFG – Parkinson's ACT currently funds a part-time community-based Parkinson's nurse through philanthropy, demonstrating strong demand and engagement. However, philanthropy is not a sustainable mechanism for meeting ongoing workforce need. Government investment is required to transition to a stable, scalable and preventative community-based model.

System benefits

Evidence from South Australia shows community-based Parkinson's Specialist Nurses improve symptom management, reduce falls and avoidable hospital admissions, support earlier intervention and relieve pressure on neurologists, GPs and acute services. A 2025 independent evaluation found the service generated **\$1.86 in social value per dollar invested**, rising to **\$2.43 under sensitivity analysis**.

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In the ACT, two community-based Parkinson's Specialist Nurses would improve care coordination, support carers, delay entry into residential aged care and directly reduce hospital utilisation and workforce pressure.

Collaboration with the ACT health system

Should the ACT Government proceed with an Advanced Practice Nurse role for Parkinson's care within the public health system, THRFG's community-based nurses would work collaboratively with that position to support a coordinated hospital-to-community model, without duplication of roles or funding.

Priority 2: ACT Parkinson's Infoline

Funding request: \$250,000 per year for four years (\$1.0 million total)

The ACT Parkinson's Infoline will be a territory-specific service, staffed by locally trained personnel with knowledge of ACT-based health, community and disability services.

Access to timely, accurate and localised information is critical for people living with Parkinson's and their carers. Without it, individuals often present to GPs, emergency departments or hospital outpatient clinics for issues that could be resolved earlier and more efficiently. The ACT Parkinson's Infoline would provide:

- Expert Parkinson's-specific information
- Personalised referral and navigation support
- Community connection and early intervention
- Guidance that reduces unnecessary clinical presentations

By acting as a first point of contact, the Infoline would support informed self-management, reduce demand on overstretched clinicians, and improve system flow in a small -jurisdiction.

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Priority 3: Innovation and Sustainability – AI Integration

Funding request: \$300,000 over four years

To enhance long-term sustainability and responsiveness, THRFG – Parkinson's proposes integration of AI-enabled solutions, including:

- A website and phone-integrated chatbot to respond to frequently asked questions
- Initial triage capability to prioritise urgent enquiries
- An AI-supported knowledge base to assist staff in delivering accurate, up-to-date advice
- Tailored recommendations for ACT-based specialists and support services

This investment ensures services remain responsive as demand grows, while protecting clinical workforce capacity and reducing system costs over time, supporting hospital avoidance by managing demand more efficiently and protecting emergency and inpatient capacity. AI-enabled tools will be configured specifically for ACT services, supporting local staff and directing users only to ACT-based clinicians, programs and supports.

Priority 4: Funding for accessible Brain Body Fitness Studio sessions

Request: \$1.6 million over four years

Exercise is one of the most effective evidence-based interventions for slowing functional decline and improving quality of life for people living with Parkinson's. By reducing falls and functional decline, these programs directly reduce emergency department presentations and inpatient admissions.

THRFG has an established Brain x Body Fitness Studio model in South Australia, where around 43% of members live with Parkinson's, with strong engagement, retention and positive functional and wellbeing outcomes.

The Studio delivers evidence-informed programs supervised by qualified Exercise Physiologists, focused on neuroplasticity, strength and flexibility, balance and falls prevention, and social connection and wellbeing.

Members access individualised programs alongside small group sessions including yoga, boxing, Pilates and dance.

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We seek \$1.6 million over four years to establish a subsidised Brain x Body Fitness Studio model in the ACT, supporting:

- Employment of qualified Exercise Physiologists
- Individualised exercise programs and small group classes
- Home-based options for those with advanced disease

By reducing falls, improving mobility and supporting healthy ageing, this investment directly addresses hospital avoidance and demand pressures in the ACT.

Funding will support the establishment of a dedicated Brain x Body Fitness Studio model in the ACT, including ACT-based staff, venues and participants. While informed by evidence from South Australia, no funding will flow to existing interstate studios.

Conclusion

Parkinson's disease prevalence in the ACT will continue to rise, placing increasing pressure on hospitals, clinicians and families unless community-based, preventative care is strengthened. Priority 1 represents the minimum investment required to address current system pressures and strengthen community-based Parkinson's nursing support in the ACT.

THRFG – Parkinson's ACT seeks a total investment of **\$4.4 million over four years** in the 2026–27 ACT Budget to deliver:

- Community-based Parkinson's Specialist Nurses
- A dedicated ACT Parkinson's Infoline
- Sustainable, AI-enabled service integration
- Evidence-based exercise programs to prevent falls and functional decline

This package represents a **high value, preventative investment** that improves quality of life, reduces hospital admissions, strengthens workforce sustainability and delivers long-term savings to the ACT health system.

THRFG – Parkinson's ACT will provide ACT-specific reporting, outcomes measurement and financial acquittal, ensuring transparency and accountability for all ACT Government funding.

THRFG – Parkinson's ACT looks forward to partnering with the ACT Government to address unmet need and support people living with Parkinson's, their families and carers across the Territory.

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