

Terms of Reference: Alberta ALS Research Network Early-Stage Research Award 2026

About the Alberta ALS Research Network (AARN)

The Alberta ALS Research Network is aimed at making Alberta a global leader in Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) research and care. AARN's mission is to accelerate research and find a cure for ALS by fostering collaboration between top ALS researchers at Alberta Universities.

Overview

AARN is pleased to announce an Early-Stage Research Award to support innovative, high-risk/high-reward research projects. This funding opportunity is intended for Alberta-based pilot or proof-of-concept projects that explore new scientific directions in ALS research. Projects may involve fundamental, translational, clinical, health services, epidemiological, or implementation research relevant to ALS.

The objectives of this funding opportunity are to:

- Support innovative and promising new research ideas in ALS;
- Generate preliminary data needed for future peer-reviewed funding applications;
- Encourage new collaborations across disciplines and institutions;
- Build research capacity within Alberta; and
- Accelerate discoveries that have the potential to improve understanding, diagnosis, treatment, or care of people living with ALS.

Applications should clearly demonstrate how the proposed work represents an early-stage or pilot project and how successful completion will position the investigators for future research funding or larger-scale studies. Preference will be given to early career researchers. Consistent with the CIHR definition, an early career researcher is an investigator within five years of their first independent academic or research appointment as of the application deadline. Eligible leaves are excluded from this period.

Funding

- Number of Grants: 3
- Amount: \$100,000 per grant (total over the 2-year term)
- Term: 2 years

Eligibility

To be eligible, the Principal Applicant must:

1. Hold an independent academic or research appointment at an Alberta institution that meets CIHR eligibility requirements or equivalent standards recognized by AARN.
2. Be in good standing with their institution and any current or previous AARN funding.

3. Be a member of AARN. If you are not yet a member, [join here](#).
4. Propose a research project relevant to ALS that:
 - a. Addresses an important scientific or clinical question;
 - b. Represents a new line of investigation, proof-of-concept study, feasibility study, or pilot project;
 - c. Has clearly defined objectives achievable within the funding period; and
 - d. Is expected to generate preliminary data or other outputs that will support future research funding.

Eligible Expenses

Funds may be used for direct costs of research that are necessary to carry out the proposed work, including:

- Personnel: Salaries, stipends, and benefits for research personnel and trainees;
- Research materials and supplies;
- Equipment: Equipment and instrumentation directly required for the proposed research;
- Data collection, management, and analysis: Including participant recruitment costs, participant compensation or honoraria, data platform fees, software licenses, and computing or storage costs;
- Knowledge translation activities: Including stakeholder engagement, materials development, dissemination events, and open access publication fees.
- Travel: Project-related travel within Canada for research activities, fieldwork, site visits, or collaboration; conference travel for trainees and personnel to disseminate funded research.

Ineligible Expenses

- Institutional overhead and indirect costs;
- Major capital expenditures (capital items over \$10,000). Applicants anticipating such costs should contact the AARN Project Manager at least four weeks before the deadline to discuss whether an exception can be considered;
- Costs already covered by another funding source;
- Salaries or stipends for the Principal Applicant or co-applicants.

Application Requirements

Applications must be submitted as a single PDF, using 11-point Arial or equivalent font, single-spaced, with 2 cm (3/4 inch) margins. Figures, and tables include within stated page limits. References are not included in page limits and may be included at the end of the Research Proposal in any standard citation style.

Applications must include the following components, in order:

1. **Cover Page** (1 page) — Project title, Principal Applicant and co-applicant names and affiliations, total amount requested, lay summary (250 words), and scientific abstract (250 words).
2. **Research Proposal** (maximum 4 pages) — Including:
 - Background, rationale and significance, situating the proposed work within the existing research program;
 - Specific aims and objectives (and hypotheses, where applicable);
 - Approach and methodology, including study design, methods, and analytical approaches appropriate to the proposed work;
 - Future directions, describing how the work support future work and applications for research funding;
 - Measures of success and key deliverables; and
 - Timeline and milestones across the 2-year term.
3. **Knowledge Translation Plan** (1 page) — Integrated and/or end-of-grant KT activities, including target audiences, anticipated outputs, and engagement with people living with ALS, clinicians, policymakers, or other relevant stakeholders.
4. **Budget and Justification** (maximum 2 pages) — Detailed budget by year and category, with a justification linking each expense to the proposed research activities. Budgets must respect the eligible and ineligible expense categories outlined above.
5. **Canadian Common CV** — For the Principal Applicant and each co-applicant.
6. **Letters of Support** (optional, maximum 5) — From collaborators, partner organizations, or community stakeholders, where relevant.

Review Process

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria by external reviewers with expertise in fundamental, clinical, or health research relevant to ALS, in a structured peer review process, with the weightings shown below:

- **Research Excellence (30%)** — Originality, scientific merit, and significance of the proposed work; clarity of aims, methodology, and analytical or implementation approach; rigour appropriate to the type of research proposed.
- **Innovation (20%)** – Novelty of the research question, approach, or methodology. Degree to which the project opens a new line of investigation or applies established methods in a new context. Appropriateness of the risk taken relative to the potential reward.
- **Impact and AARN Alignment (20%)** — Alignment with AARN founding principles, potential to advance ALS knowledge, improve health outcomes for people living with ALS, strengthen Alberta's ALS research ecosystem, or generate broader scientific, clinical, or policy benefit.

- **Feasibility (15%)** — Appropriateness of methods, timelines, milestones, and resources; realism of the budget; capacity of the team to deliver on the proposed work within the 2-year term.
- **Investigator and Environment (10%)** – Track record of the Principal Applicant relative to career stage. Complementarity of the team. Suitability of the institutional environment and access to the participants, samples, infrastructure, or expertise the project requires. Early career status of the Principal Applicant will be considered favourably under this criterion.
- **Knowledge Translation (5%)** — Quality, appropriateness, and feasibility of integrated and/or end-of-grant KT activities; meaningful engagement with relevant audiences, including people living with ALS where applicable.

Funding decisions will be made by AARN based on reviewer scores and recommendations. Applicants will receive a summary of reviewer comments. Funding decisions are final.

Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

Application materials will be treated as confidential and shared only with AARN staff and external reviewers for the purpose of evaluation.

Reviewers with a real, perceived, or potential conflict of interest, including current collaboration, financial interest, or close personal relationship, will be recused from scoring the relevant application. Reviewers will be external to AARN and will be asked to declare any conflicts before receiving application materials.

Conditions

Successful applicants must:

- Accept the terms and conditions of the award;
- Obtain and maintain ethics board and animal care approval, where applicable, from their institution's Research Ethics Board;
- Return unspent funds to AARN at the end of the funding period. Requests for a no-cost extension of up to 12 months must be submitted in writing before the end of the funding period;
- Submit an interim progress report at the end of Year 1, summarizing progress against objectives, milestones achieved, expenditures to date, and any anticipated changes to the work plan;
- Submit a final report within 90 days of the end of the funding period, including scientific outcomes, knowledge translation activities, publications and presentations, trainee outcomes, and a final financial statement;

- Notify AARN in writing of any significant changes to the research program, including changes to objectives or scope, key personnel, host institution, or budget reallocations exceeding 25% between categories. Material changes require AARN approval;
- Participate in AARN activities, including but not limited to meetings, knowledge-sharing events, and reasonable requests to contribute to AARN communications or strategic initiatives;
- Acknowledge AARN in all publications, presentations and knowledge translation outputs arising from the funded research;
- Comply with Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications;
- Share research data and outputs in accordance with best practices and applicable policies.

Important Dates

- Application Deadline: December 1, 2026
- Notification of Award: February 2027
- Funding Begins: March 2027

Application Submission

- Combine all application materials in a single PDF file, named using the format AARN_EarlyStageResearch_[PI Last Name]_2026.pdf.
- Submit the application by email to Kelsie Snow, AARN Project Manager, at kelsie@alsab.ca on or before the Application Deadline.
- Applicants will receive an email confirmation of receipt within two business days. If confirmation is not received, it is the applicant's responsibility to follow up before the deadline.
- Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.
- Questions about the application or eligibility may be directed to kelsie@alsab.ca. Applicants are encouraged to reach out well in advance of the deadline.