

Terms of Reference: Alberta ALS Research Network Established Research Program 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 launch an Established Research Program Grant to provide enhanced funding to mature, high-performing ALS research programs in Alberta that are positioned to expand their scope and impact. This opportunity is intended for ongoing, well-defined research programs that have established research infrastructure, demonstrated productivity, and a sustained track record of output (for example, longitudinal cohorts, registries, biobanks, or platform-based research programs). The objectives of this funding opportunity are to:

- Facilitate growth of established ALS research programs by supporting expansion of scope, scale, or reach beyond what existing funding allows;
- Leverage existing research infrastructure to generate greater scientific and clinical impact;
- Promote knowledge translation to improve health outcomes for individuals living with ALS; and
- Strengthen research capacity and collaboration within Alberta.

Applications are expected to demonstrate how AARN funding will meaningfully enhance an existing research program rather than initiate new, standalone work.

Funding

- Number of Grants: 2
- Amount: \$200,000 per grant
- Term: 2 years
- Funding Start Date: April 1, 2027

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, with the autonomy to conduct independent research and supervise trainees;
2. Lead an established ALS research program, defined as an ongoing, coordinated body of research with:
 - a. A sustained track record of peer-reviewed publications, presentations, and/or knowledge translation outputs;
 - b. A history of competitive, peer-reviewed external funding supporting the program;
 - c. Existing research infrastructure (e.g., active cohort, registry, biobank, data platform, established clinical or laboratory pipeline, or equivalent) that the proposed work will build upon; and
 - d. Demonstrated productivity and measurable impact in the ALS field or a directly related area.

3. Be in good standing with their institution and any current or previous AARN funding.
4. A member of AARN.

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;
- Site and operational costs: For multi-site or infrastructure-expansion work, including site onboarding, training, and harmonization activities;
- 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. 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;
- 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 6 pages) — Including:
 - Background and significance, situating the proposed work within the existing research program;
 - Specific aims and objectives (and hypotheses, where applicable);
 - Approach and methodology, which may include scientific methods, implementation and operational methods (e.g., site onboarding, recruitment strategies, data harmonization, training, governance), analytical approaches, or a combination thereof, as appropriate to the proposed work;

- How the proposed work will expand the scope, scale, or impact of the established program — for example, through new scientific directions, expanded recruitment or geographic reach, enhanced data collection or harmonization, new partnerships, or improved knowledge translation;
 - Measures of success and key deliverables; and
 - Timeline and milestones across the 2-year term.
3. **Established Program Summary** (maximum 2 pages) — A description of the existing research program, including its history, current scope, infrastructure, key personnel, recent productivity (publications, presentations, knowledge translation outputs), and external funding history. Applicants should clearly articulate what is already in place and how this award will build upon it.
 4. **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.
 5. **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 below.
 6. **Canadian Common CV** — For the Principal Applicant and each co-applicant.
 7. **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 a panel of fundamental and clinician scientists in a structured peer review process, with the weightings shown below:

- **Research Excellence (25%)** — 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.
- **Established Program Strength (20%)** — Demonstrated productivity, impact, and sustained contribution of the existing research program; quality of supporting infrastructure (cohorts, registries, biobanks, data platforms, clinical or laboratory pipelines); history of competitive external funding.
- **Program Expansion (20%)** — Clarity, ambition, and credibility of how the proposed work will expand the scope, scale, or impact of the established program beyond what current funding supports; appropriateness of the expansion to the program's strengths and to ALS research priorities.
- **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 (10%)** — 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.
- **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.

Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

Application materials will be treated as confidential and shared only with AARN staff and the peer review panel 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.

Conditions

Successful applicants must:

- Accept the terms and conditions of the award;
- Obtain and maintain ethics approval from their institution's Research Ethics Board;
- 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

- Call announced: Oct 1, 2026
- Application Deadline: Dec 1, 2026
- Notification of Award: Jan 15, 2027
- Funding Begins: April 1, 2027

Application Submission

- Combine all application materials in a single PDF file, named using the format AARN_EstablishedProgram_[PI Last Name]_2026.pdf.
- Submit the application by email to Kelsie Snow, AARN Project Manager, at kelsie@alsab.ca by Dec 1, 2026.
- 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.