

# Impaired facial emotion communication in Parkinson's Disease: Impacts on social wellbeing and potential strategies to mitigate

## Goal and vision

Conduct a robust qualitative approach to better understand the impact of impaired facial emotion communication on psychosocial well-being in Parkinson's Disease (PD) and use this information to create an information support resource for clinicians, patients, and their loved ones.

## Background

Interpreting facial emotion is a crucial aspect of non-verbal communication in humans <sup>[1]</sup>. Facial emotion communication is impaired in PD in 2 ways: (1) facial masking, present in 92% of cases <sup>[2]</sup>, reduces emotional expressivity, and (2) patients are less accurate when interpreting others' facial emotions <sup>[3]</sup>. Significant social and emotional consequences of this dual impairment include social rejection <sup>[4]</sup>, negative social judgements <sup>[5]</sup>, and poorer assumptions about mental and/or physical health status <sup>[6]</sup>.



## Knowledge gaps and need

- Majority of PD patients will experience impaired facial emotion communication
- Currently lacking is a central resource that can inform patients, and support both loved ones and clinicians when navigating non-verbal interactions with patients e.g., demonstrative alternatives to emotional reading, strategies to emphasise emotional cues, strategies to reduce miscommunication
- There is no validated empirical tool for assessing impaired facial emotion communication in PD

## Methods

- Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with patients and loved ones. Validated using member-checking
- Patient-driven empirical scale development

## Findings thus far and next steps

- Complete interviews, validate through member checking, scale development and piloting
- Create and evaluate information support resource

“I try to mirror expressions, so I'm more cognitively engaged [...] It's a cue to me, for my own facial expression. But I'm also on the lookout for a change in [others'] expression so that I can pick that up, copy it.”