

World Parkinson Congress 2023: Bringing Barcelona Closer to Everyday Life for Parkinson's Patients

The 6th **World Parkinson Congress 2023**, which was held from 4-7 July 2023 in Barcelona, Spain, provided an unparalleled international and interdisciplinary forum to highlight the latest developments in Parkinson's Disease (PD) worldwide. But the benefits for Barcelona go far beyond the economic impact and overnight stays, as the event will leave an invaluable legacy in the city's social and scientific fields.

The congresses are held every three years and provide an international focus for basic scientists, clinical researchers, healthcare professionals and people with Parkinson's disease to come together under one roof to discuss and debate the latest scientific discoveries, medical practices and general care related to Parkinson's disease. The congresses are 100% inclusive scientific events, and the 2023 one will take place at the **Barcelona International Convention Centre**, a convenient location in terms of transport and accommodation for all delegates. More than 10 million people live with Parkinson's disease worldwide, around 150,000 of them in Spain, and the **World Parkinson Coalition (WPC)** – the organising body – aims to address its most pressing issues by preparing staff and professionals in Barcelona to interact confidently with delegates attending the congress.

“A significant challenge for people living with PD is traveling comfortably and safely. PD is often misunderstood, so accessibility issues and lack of awareness by local staff can present a myriad of problems causing additional stressors,” **Elizabeth Pollard, executive director of WPC**, said in a statement. More than 4,000 delegates are expected to attend this year's meeting, 50% of them being Parkinson's patients. For the **Barcelona Convention Bureau (BCB)**, ensuring a welcoming and safe experience for congress delegates meant educating public services and hospitality industry leaders about PD, leaving a lasting and conscious impact on the city. This has translated into new alliances between the local Parkinson's community and the service industry so that this relationship and the positive repercussions will continue beyond the week of the congress. The aim on both sides was clear: to leave the city better prepared after the congress was over, ensuring a broader understanding by the local community (at all levels such as hotels, restaurants, public servers) of Parkinson's phenomena and symptoms in multiple and different contexts.

Make the City Parkinson Ready!

A WPC initiative imagined for its host cities, **Parkinson's Ready** is a collaborative training programme aimed at educating and preparing frontline staff in Barcelona to interact with delegates living with disease during the congress. The programme includes a series of tailored training sessions, which began in April and ran through June, for transport workers, hotel and convention centre staff, police and first responders, and airport customs officers, among others – so that this knowledge stays with all those who have been trained and can use this new information with future guests in their hotels, meeting centres, trains, taxis. In Barcelona, the WPC partnered with the Catalan Parkinson's Association, the BCB and AbbVie pharmaceuticals to support the PD community through its legacy training programme both logistically and content-wise. “Our key requirement for any city hosting the congress is that it has to go through our Parkinson Ready Programme otherwise we won't choose that city. One of the reasons why we loved Barcelona so much is that when we presented the plan, they didn't settle for the basics but really went with it in full partnership with the various stakeholders. This is the most all-inclusive programme we've ever employed in a city,” commented Pollard.

“BCB has employed considerable enthusiasm in actively collaborating with WPC and the Catalan Parkinson's Association to create a high-impact Parkinson's Ready programme as part of its commitment to sustainability and positive impact on society. We firmly believe in the transformative power of conferences and events and strive to ensure they leave a meaningful legacy. We are convinced that the Parkinson's Ready will not only prepare the city to welcome congress participants, but also provide a welcoming and safe experience for all,”



Anna Bueno, Association Meetings Manager at BCB, told *HQ*. First applied in Glasgow at the 2010 congress, this training programme was the subject of a case study by Glasgow City Marketing Bureau and Scottish Exhibition & Conference Centre, which eventually took home the 2011 ICCA Best Marketing Award. Already in 2017, the WPC received the “Incredible Impacts Award” for fully including people with Parkinson’s in all planning decisions made prior to congress. “By educating leaders in the hospitality and public service sectors about Parkinson’s disease, we are also offering the city of Barcelona the opportunity to better understand this disease and to foster greater empathy for those living with it,” Bueno concluded.

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What is Parkinson’s disease?

It is a brain disorder that causes involuntary or uncontrollable movements, such as tremors, stiffness and difficulty with balance and coordination. Normally, symptoms start gradually and worsen over time. It is caused by a loss of nerve cells in the part of the brain called the substantia nigra responsible for producing a chemical called dopamine.

How to identify the Symptoms?

Knowing the symptoms a person may have is important to avoid unwanted confusion: Slowness or involuntary movements; changes in speech and facial expression; physical blockages.

It is also important to identify if the person is accompanied.

What to do?

Convey calmness, try to communicate; patience for speech; stay away from crowded spaces; do not leave the person alone; do not try to pick someone up if the person falls.

