Tackling multimorbidity at scale: Understanding disease clusters, determinants & biological pathways

Questions and Answers

1. Call Remit and General Questions

1.1 Are chronic infections or diseases with infectious triggers within the scope of the call?

Yes, we welcome broad spectrum of applications including research looking into multimorbidities which may include chronic infections or conditions triggered by infectious agents. These are within the scope of this call.

1.2 Does the work supported through this call have to be conducted in a UK population or can the research pertain to an overseas population be considered?

While we ask the PI to be based in the UK, the initiative is not restricted to the UK resources. It may be appropriate to involve international participants in collaborations where they could add significant value to the proposal e.g. unique expertise or infrastructure required to achieve the objectives of the study. The work done in other populations – based both in low- and middle-income settings and in high-income countries - will be eligible as long as it benefits better understanding of multimorbidity, can be generalised and would have relevance to the diverse UK population, and could be aligned with the UK-based data resources. Applicants are advised that there is an expectation that all data generated by the projects supported through this initiative will be made discoverable and available through the health data infrastructure currently developed by HDR UK. The panel will be assessing the strength of the applicants’ plans to contribute to this work, and this will be one of the key assessment criteria.

1.3 Do I have to include a biopsychosocial approach in my research if it’s just looking at biological mechanisms?

The biopsychosocial approach does not exclude projects that take a biomedical perspective, where this is appropriate and justified in terms of the research questions. However, thought and acknowledgement should be given to how the wider
psychological, social and environmental factors influence and interact with biological pathways.

1.4 Can the Collaborative funding be used to fund primary research?

*Given the aims of this funding call we are expecting most Research Collaboratives to be carrying out secondary data analysis. However, where justified and clearly supporting the overall research aims, primary research could be funded. It would need to be achievable within the duration of the award.*

1.5 My research doesn’t directly address health inequalities, am I eligible for funding?

*We expect all applicants to consider health inequalities in their proposed research. However, it is not a requirement for all funded projects to directly address health inequalities, but applicants should briefly outline how it was considered and why this was not possible in their research design.*

1.6 Is there going to be another multimorbidity call either for Consolidator grants or for outlines of Collaborative awards under this SPF initiative?

*No, this is a ‘one off’ call and though there may be other funding opportunities in this field in the future, they are likely to have different focus and/or be realised through different funding schemes.*

1.7 Will we be able to apply for a Research Collaborative award later if we did not submit an outline proposal or a Consolidator grant application?

*No, this is a staged competition and to be able to submit a full Research Collaborative proposal, applicants should either have received a Consolidator grant or have a successful outline application.*

1.8 When are we expected to submit a full Research Collaborative application after receiving a Consolidator grant?

*Applicants who received a Consolidator grant will be invited to submit their full Research Collaborative proposal in 6 months, by the end of the Consolidator grant tenure. Details of the application process will be communicated to the applicants separately shortly after the receipt of their awards but an outline timeline is included in the call text.*

2. Applicants and partners

2.1 Is there a minimum core set of inter-disciplinary researchers that you expect to see in a Collaboration?
There is no minimum core set of inter-disciplinary researchers that we expect to see in a Collaborative; the expertise should be relevant and sufficient to answer the research questions set out in the proposal. The funding panel will be looking for evidence that the proposal takes a truly inter-disciplinary/team science approach rather than developing workstreams where a mix of researchers work in silos on individual questions. Applicants should bear in mind that this programme seeks to tackle Multimorbidity at Scale, and as such we expect to see a broad representation of inter-disciplinary researchers if proposals are to achieve the progression required to move this field forward.

2.2 Can I have a co-investigator based outside the UK?

Yes, see answer to Question 1.2.

2.3 Can social scientists lead an award?

Yes, social scientists can lead an award. The lead PI should have expertise to lead the consortium to answer the questions set out in their proposal and there is no reason why that shouldn’t be someone with a social science background.

2.4 Our partnership is still forming. Can we engage with more Co-investigators/Project Partners during the tenure of our Consolidator grant to include them in our full Research Collaborative application?

We recognise that those applying for a Consolidator grant may still be developing their partnerships and would require additional time to form the membership of the proposed Research Collaborative. Therefore, the configuration of the research partnership may differ at the Consolidator and full Research Collaborative application stages.

Those applying with an outline of the Research Collaborative proposal would be expected to have their partnership plans already developed.

2.5 Can we include a charity or a patient representative in our application as a project partner and request funds to support the activities/work they will be carrying out?

Yes, applicants are advised that participating charities and patient representatives should be listed as named project partners. Unlike with other MRC applications, project partners will be allowed to receive t funds to support their involvement and engagement in the research project. Project partners do not need to be based at an eligible research organisation (RO) or have a verified Je-S account.
All funded projects must have patient, public involvement and engagement (PPIE). Even if a charity or patient representative is not included as a project partner, all PPIE activity must be appropriately compensated and costed for in the application.

2.6 Can we have an industry partner as part of our Collaborative?

Yes, industry partners can be part of the proposed Research Collaborative, in which case they should be listed as a **project partner**. Applicants are advised that industry partners are not expected to request funding to participate in the Research collaborative, and applicants must follow the guidance relating to the [MRC Industry Collaboration Agreement (MICA)](#).

Please note the role of a **subcontractor** is distinct from a **project partner**. Subcontractors should not be named as part of the project team. They carry out a specific piece of work on behalf of the investigators on a fee-for-service basis, with no potential claim as an inventor over any arising intellectual property (IP).

2.7 We are applying for a Consolidator grant and have an industry partner. Do we need to complete a MICA form?

We do not require completed MICA documents at the Consolidator grant or the Research Collaborative **outline** stage but will be requesting those at the time of the **full** Research Collaborative application. As public funders we are responsible to ensure that the research funding arrangements comply with the State Aid regulations. Therefore, applicants planning to include industry as partners are advised to contact the Head Office to clarify the industry involvement and to receive further advise and guidance.

2.8 Can I submit multiple proposals or be a co-I on several applications?

We are not expecting each investigator to lead more than one proposal, but given the collaborative nature of the scheme, an individual researcher may be a principal investigator (PI) on one and a Co-I on another proposal or appear as a co-investigator (Co-I) on several applications. Applicants are advised that the Panel will be assessing the level of engagement/commitment of all Co-Is on the proposal.

2.9 Would funders expect Research Collaboratives to obtain additional/matched funding or in-kind contribution from other sources?

This is not a prerequisite of getting the award. Leveraging additional funding is, however, welcome, as well as are strong sustainability plans to allow the Collaborative to maintain its research beyond the tenure of the award.
3. Filling in application form

3.1 How should I fill in financial part of the Je-S application?

Applicants submitting an outline of the Research Collaborative proposal are advised that they are expected to provide an estimate of the proposed Research Collaborative award resource request within the ‘Case for Support’ template. They are not required to detail any costs within the Je-S proposal form. Full costing information will be required at the full proposal stage. The outline application should be submitted as ‘Zero’ cost through Je-S to MRC.

Consolidator grant applicants are requested to provide an estimate of their future Research Collaborative application resource request in the relevant section of the ‘Case for Support’ template and to detail the expenses, expected during the 6-month consolidator stage period in the Je-S form. We understand that for the evolving partnerships it may be difficult to accurately allocate all associated costs of their Consolidator grant and, therefore, will only require a high-level breakdown of the proposed expenses. Applicants are advised that directly incurred (DI) costs are allowed to be vired between other DI fund headings and Exceptions, as per standard MRC rules. Should a Consolidator grant holder require further adjustment of the spend within their award budgets, they are advised to contact the Head Office.

3.2 I am applying with an outline of the Research Collaborative, but the Je-S system does not allow me to have a ‘zero’ cost proposal when I include a Researcher Co-investigator (RCo-I) on my application?

This is a known issue. Applicants are advised to add any proposed RCo-I staff in their Research Collaborative outline proposal as a Co-Investigator (Co-I) in the Je-S form at this stage. Please make a note of that in your Proposal Cover Letter letting the Panel know if any Co-I will be a RCo-I in the full proposal.

3.3 I see there is a Data Management Plan attachment on Je-S, do I need to submit one?

This attachment is optional and aims to provide an opportunity for groups with more mature data approaches to describe their data strategies in more detail.

3.4 I am submitting an outline for the Research Collaborative award proposal, but the Je-S does not allow me to enter the duration of the project over 6 months?

Because the same Je-S form is being used for both Consolidator applications and Research Collaborative outlines, applicants submitting outline proposals should detail
the duration of their suggested Research Collaboratives in the ‘Case for Support’ template, and in the Project Details section of the Je-S form put the project duration as 6 months.

3.5 Our proposal has many project partners and collaborations do we need to provide all letters of support?

We ask applicants to limit the length of each Letter of Support to 1 side of A4 and submit only letters from the key project partners.

3.6 Can I get help to work out whether I have excess treatment costs associated with my proposal?

Treatment Costs are the care costs that would continue to be incurred if the patient care service in question continued to be provided following the end of the research study. The difference between the Treatment Costs and the costs of the existing standard treatment is referred to as the Excess Treatment Cost (ETC). Guidance from the Department of Health and Social Care for the Attribution of Costs for Research and Development (AcoRD) sets out the principles for determining who pays for the different costs. Researchers are required to complete one of the Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Template (SoECAT) forms which help calculate an average per patient ETC value for the study. The NIHR Clinical Research Network provides AcoRD specialists to support researchers, their teams and sponsors in completing this. For more information about AcoRD support, visit our study support service.

4. Assessment process

4.1 How will our application be reviewed?

At this stage, all Consolidator grant applications and outlines of the Research Collaborative award will be reviewed by members of the Expert Review Panel and discussed at the funding Panel meeting in March/April 2020 (date TBC). The criteria for success are included in the call text.

Full Research collaborative applications will be reviewed by external peer-reviewers prior to the Panel assessment.

4.2 What feedback will we receive on our application, and will there be a rebuttal stage?

Consolidator grant applications and outlines of the Research Collaborative award will receive feedback from the Panel following the funding Panel meeting. There will be no rebuttal at this stage.
4.3 Can I challenge Panel's decision?

No, the Panel’s decision in final, and there is no mechanism for appeal.

4.4 Are all the criteria listed in section 6 all essential?

All the success criteria are desirable and will be used by the Expert Review Panel to assess the applications. The more criteria applicants address, the greater the likelihood of success.

4.5 Are the success criteria the same for the Consolidator grants and the Research Collaborative Awards?

The success criteria are the same for the Consolidator grants and the Research Collaborative Awards. However, the Expert Review Panel will be aware that the Consolidator grants are a step towards the Collaborative Award and as such will take into account that applications seek to move towards a state of readiness but will not yet have achieved it.

4.6 My research is basic science so do I need to include PPI? Does PPI need to be costed?

All applications will need to include PPI, and this will be considered in the assessment of applications. All PPI will need to be appropriately funded and costed. Guidelines on suitable funding for PPI can be found on the INVOLVE website.

4.7 Is sustainability beyond the lifetime of the award mandatory?

Sustainability beyond the lifetime of the Research Collaboration Awards is one of the success criteria against which proposals will be assessed. It is not mandatory, but the Expert Panel will look for evidence of this in high quality proposals.

4.8 Is it a requirement of this funding to make the data available open access upon project completion?

Applicants are advised that there is an expectation that all data generated by the projects supported through this initiative will be made discoverable and available through the health data infrastructure currently developed by HDR UK. The panel will be assessing the strength of the applicants’ plans to contribute to this work, and this will be one of the key assessment criteria. However, if applicants are unable to comply with making the data generated available this should be outlined and justified.

4.9 Expectation of pathway to health and/or social care impact and patient benefit?
High quality proposals should consider the trajectory towards benefiting the health and wellbeing of patients and users of the NHS and social care services as part of the long-term impact aims of their proposal. These should be realistic to make a convincing case. We appreciate that some projects will be further away from direct patient benefit but are still an important step in the pathway.

5. Starting and managing your award

5.1 When can/should we start our Consolidator grant?
Consolidator grants have a fixed start date (01/05/2021) and duration of the tenure to ensure all applicants have equal amount of time to develop their approaches and mature plans before submitting their full Research Collaborative applications at the end of the 6 month period.

5.2 When can we start our Research Collaborative Award?
Research Collaborative awards will start in two waves. Wave 1 Collaboratives are expected to be able to start no later than October/November 2020, subject to confirmed dates of the funding Panel meeting, and Wave 2 Collaboratives – in early 2021.

5.3 We have not used all our funds, can we extend the duration of the Consolidator grant beyond 6 months?
No, the duration of the Consolidator grants is fixed and cannot be extended.