

Early Detection and Targeted Treatments 2026: Call for applications

Summary

We have extended the lifespan of our [research strategy](#) from Spring 2026 to Spring 2028, to align our organisational and research strategies. We fund research that covers the causes, consequences and effects of the most prevalent arthritis conditions, and those that have the highest impact on people. We will also support those conditions most frequently associated with arthritis. We do not actively exclude any areas of arthritis-related research. We will prioritise our investments to ensure that we maintain a varied and balanced research awards portfolio that covers the most prevalent arthritis conditions as well as rarer conditions.

Across previous Early Detection and Targeted Treatments Calls, we have invested in several projects focussed on disease prediction and detection. We recognise that early detection and intervention is very important in optimising disease management, and these areas are **not** excluded from this Call. However, applications that expand our investment in targeted treatments will be prioritised in this fifth *Early Detection and Targeted Treatments Funding Call*.

This Call is seeking to support discovery and clinical research that aims to take the guesswork out of treatment of arthritis by increasing effective, reliable and timely drug and non-drug solutions to halt or reverse the impact of disease or treatment.

We expect the outcomes from this investment to progress toward any of the following:

- Identification, development or improvement of treatments to optimise management or cure disease
- Reliable determination of who benefits most from what treatment
- Development of reliable early and diagnostic disease indicators to inform treatment

Funding is available for up to 60 months duration, between £100,000-£1,200,000 in value. We plan to invest around £3M, making between 3-6 awards.

We welcome applications from fellows and lecturers who are looking to secure project support as a new investigator or mid-career researcher. If your proposal is suitable for co-funding with another funder, please email us as early as possible, at awards@arthritis-uk.org as we may be able to facilitate such partnerships.

Please note, we are transitioning to a new Grant Management system. We anticipate associated guidance materials being available in mid-March. Applications to this one-stage process will be through our new Grant Management System (anticipated access online from 1 April).

The application deadline is **16:00 Wednesday 3 June 2026**.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss your research proposal, please email the Awards Office at awards@arthritis-uk.org.

What we are looking for

Arthritis UK is the largest dedicated funder of arthritis research globally. We fund research driven by the needs of people with arthritis and with the greatest potential to improve the quality of their lives. Our research ambition is to accelerate the pace and precision of research that benefits people living with arthritis.

We have extended the lifespan of our [research strategy](#) from spring 2026 to spring 2028, to align our organisational and research strategies. Our organisational strategy is 'Arthritis First' which means that we will continue to fund research that focuses on the most prevalent and impactful arthritis conditions in our existing priority areas; early detection and prevention, targeted treatments, living well, and people and partnerships.

We aim to maintain a research award portfolio that will bring most benefit and impact for people with arthritis. We fund research that covers the causes, consequences and effects of the most prevalent arthritis conditions, and those that have the highest impact on people. We will also support those conditions most frequently associated with arthritis.

We do not actively exclude any areas of arthritis-related research. Where necessary, we will prioritise our investments to ensure that we maintain a varied and balanced research awards portfolio that covers the most prevalent arthritis conditions as well as rarer conditions. We will support research into the causes and consequences of arthritis. We may also actively seek research proposals in defined, narrower areas where needed.

All our research investments aim to generate the best possible impact for the benefit of people with arthritis. Proposed studies should advance the translational pathway towards impact for people with arthritis.

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This Call is **seeking to support** discovery and clinical research that aims to take the guesswork out of treatment of arthritis by increasing effective, reliable and timely drug and non-drug solutions to halt or reverse the impact of disease or treatment.

We welcome applications from fellows and lecturers who are looking to secure project support as a new investigator or mid-career researcher. The panel will be asked to take career stage into account during the assessment process.

We actively encourage applications for clinical trials, especially in partnership with others.

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- Identification, development or improvement of treatments to optimise management or cure disease
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We particularly want to support:

- cost-effective psychotherapeutic and social interventions
- post operative treatments, especially those that help prevent or manage poor outcomes after joint replacement
- the long-term effects and safety profiles of drugs and minimising the adverse effects of commonly used drugs e.g. steroids, Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs
- research into novel target identification, validation and development
- enabling the use of existent/identified presymptomatic markers and diagnostic indicators in clinical management
- advancing personalised treatment by developing approaches that can reliably manage different factors that influence how people respond to and tolerate treatments – including genes, environment, lifestyle and stages of life
- the management of refractory inflammatory disease
- better understanding the causes and consequences of premature mortality, co-morbidities like kidney and cardiovascular disease, multiple long-term conditions, pain and fatigue in arthritis.

These areas of support and outcomes sought have been informed by the research priorities work of our [Research Advisory Groups](#), collated in our gaps and opportunities document which can be found at the bottom of this page on our Research Strategy [Our research strategy | Arthritis UK](#).

A list of previously funded projects through this funding scheme is available on the webpage for the call.

If you have any questions about the scope of this call or would like to discuss the eligibility of your proposal please email awards@arthritis-uk.org.

Requirements

Pace and Precision - a translational approach

We want research to **rapidly enhance** better-tailored solutions that directly benefit people with arthritis, translating discoveries more quickly and efficiently into practice.

Proposed studies can be based in mechanistic science but **must** advance the translational pathway towards new or improved approaches to prevention, diagnosis or treatment. Applicants should take care to ensure future benefit for people with arthritis is clearly and reasonably discussed within the application. It **must** be clear from the application what the next step will be beyond the proposed study.

Applicants proposing new therapeutic approaches should demonstrate an understanding of current practice and have engaged with clinical colleagues to determine the suitability of their approach for implementation. Applicant teams should include sufficient expertise in all aspects proposed within an application, please consider carefully if clinical colleagues should be included.

Research Involvement

Applications should involve people with arthritis in the development and design of the outlined work. There should be clear plans for continued collaboration with them in the oversight, delivery and dissemination of the proposed project, this includes discovery research. More information and guidance can be found in our Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement Hub on our website: [support for researchers to involve people with arthritis](#).

Diversity and Inclusion

Our vision is for our research to reflect, and address, the diverse needs of all those living with arthritis. We aim to be open, inclusive and equitable in the support and service we provide to our stakeholders. We are committed to ensuring meaningful inclusive involvement in research and the promotion of equitable access to participation in, and the benefits from research. We are committed to diversity, equity and inclusion in who does research, what research is done, and who benefits from research. We will publish our research equity, diversity and inclusion plans in 2026.

We expect people with arthritis from a diverse range of backgrounds, cultures and experiences to be partners and participants in our research activities, representing the full life-course of the population. Where a research proposal involves the participation of people with arthritis, we will only fund research that is able to demonstrate appropriate representation and diversity (ethnicity, socioeconomic, gender and age) as relevant to the aims of the proposal.

Research involving animals, cells and tissues should consider sex, genetic and other relevant characteristics. For research using animals use the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) [Experimental Design Assistant](#) to support experimental design.

We will fund health service research that accounts for differences in local environments, noting that specific needs of the four UK nations devolved healthcare and research funding contexts require tailored solutions.

Applicants should design research carefully to ensure that project outputs, outcomes and impact do not contribute to exacerbation of health inequities. Applications should show that they have deliberately considered the desired impact on health inequities, any risks or possible unintended consequences, and identified any relevant barriers.

Animal Research

We will only fund animal research where there is no viable alternative, that is well designed, ethical and scientifically justified. We are committed to the principles of reduction, replacement and refinement (3Rs) in animal studies. More information and guidance can be found on [Applying for an Award](#).

Collaboration and partnership

We welcome collaborations and partnership with industry and international stakeholders. If your proposal is suitable for co-funding with another funder or you have third party funding, please email awards@arthritis-uk.org as early as possible.

In some areas – such as multiple long-term conditions, rare diseases and collective immune-mediated inflammatory diseases – we particularly welcome partnership approaches.

Clinical Research

Please contact your relevant national service supporting and advising applied health, public health or social care researchers, or a relevant Clinical Research Facility or Clinical Trials Unit before starting an application:

- England [NIHR Research Support Service](#)
- Scotland: [NHS Research Scotland Research Design Service](#)
- Wales: [Health and Care Research Wales Support and Delivery Service](#)
- UKCRC-registered Clinical Trial Unit: [find a CTU – UKCRC](#)

Pilot/feasibility studies to inform the development of a clinical trial to test an intervention, will be accepted. Beyond preliminary studies, clinical studies must show feasibility evidence relating to outcome measure selection, study design and statistical methods, participant recruitment and retention and delivery of the intervention.

Clinical studies can include a mechanistic evaluation, either as a sub study within a clinical trial or as part of an observational study.

With the current clinical research challenges in the NHS, investigators and sponsors are required to make transparent and realistic assessments of capacity and capability to deliver.

Co-applicants and collaborators at NHS sites are asked to support proposals only if there is a certainty that they can meet recruitment targets and timelines indicated.

It will be taken that institution signatories in the role of Sponsor are wholly satisfied and supportive of the assurances provided upon submission of the application.

Data and sample resources

We encourage researchers to make use of established, pre-existent cohorts, collections, bioresources and registries. When proposing to make use of human tissue, consider carefully whether existing resources meet your needs and justify why any new collection is necessary.

We require those receiving funding to create a tissue collection, provide access to this and register the collection in a publicly accessible directory.

Intellectual Property

Applicants should make careful consideration regarding use of background IP. Use of patents, software, datasets, biological materials, compounds, cell lines or any background IP owned by your institution or other institutions involved and confirm access through the required agreements (Material Transfer Agreements, licenses and permissions).

Applicants should assess whether the proposed research will create protectable IP: including therapeutics compounds, diagnostics, new methods, new targets, MoA (Mechanism of action), devices, software, algorithms, research tools, datasets or proprietary know-how. Consider anything that produces new IP or provides a competitive advantage. Even negative results or optimisation data can constitute valuable know-how.

Who can apply

Arthritis UK research awards may only be held in universities, NHS Trusts or recognised academic research institutes in the UK. The lead applicant does not need to have a permanent position, but at least one applicant must have a substantive position at the host (lead) institution.

People with lived experience and international collaborators may be included as co-applicants.

Individuals who are employed by, or whose salary derives from, a commercial organisation are not eligible to lead an Arthritis UK award, they can be included as a co-applicant or a collaborator. We expect applications to take a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to answering research questions where appropriate to the proposed research.

We welcome applications affiliated to the [UK Musculoskeletal Translational Research Collaboration](#).

For further details on who can apply and other roles in the application, please see our website [Applying for an award | Arthritis UK](#) for general information and see the associated guidance document that will be available on our website for information specific to this funding call (anticipated mid-March).

What you can apply for

Awards of up to 60 months duration, between £100,000-£1,200,000 in value are available.

Costs for salaries, expenses and small items of essential equipment can be requested.

If you intend to outsource parts of the project, to be undertaken by a third party, please email awards@arthritis-uk.org as early as possible to discuss this with us.

For further details on what you can apply for, please see our website [Applying for an award | Arthritis UK](#) for general information and see the associated guidance document that will be available on our website for information specific to this funding call.

How to apply

This is a single stage application process.

Apply via our new Grant Management System (anticipated access 1 April). Applicants must carefully read the application form and call-specific guidance document that will be available on our website before starting an application. Please ensure the most appropriate language is used in each section of the form and that the correct sections are completed.

The deadline for the receipt of applications is **16:00 on 3 June 2026**.

Submissions after 16:00 will not be accepted. Please allow time for management of appropriate reviewers and signatories to access the grant management system and provide their approvals.

How will applications be assessed

Applications will be reviewed by our discovery science or clinically focussed funding panels, which include people with lived experience of arthritis. All eligible applications will be reviewed and feedback provided. If necessary, a panel triage process may be implemented such that only a proportion of the proposals will advance to provide rebuttal to reviews before a formal funding panel meeting.

Applications will be reviewed and assessed on the following criteria:

- importance and potential impact
- relevance and scope
- novelty and innovation
- involvement in application development
- involvement plans
- research design, delivery and clarity
- feasibility
- value for money.

We expect applications to include information on how the research will bring impact and benefit to people with arthritis. We currently capture the impact of our funded research using our framework below, which focuses on seven areas

- Policy and Practice – our research is influencing how arthritis is treated or managed.
- Intellectual property, products, and services – new innovations, treatments or tools which improve patients' lives.
- New knowledge – our research has changed what we know about arthritis.
- Patient and Public Involvement – the benefit that patients bring to the research itself.
- Partnerships – new networks, partners and collaborations which extend research.
- Capacity Building – our investments are increasing the human or technical capacity to conduct research.
- Leveraged funding – new funding that has been awarded to continue the research we funded.

More detail around these impact areas can be found in the guidance document that will be available on our website, including examples of outcomes which relate to each impact area.

Award management

Reporting We expect all awards outputs and outcomes to be reported annually during the funded period and for 3-5 years post-completion. Reporting expectations are agreed at the start of the project.

All award holders must also provide an annual expenditure report for monitoring of finances and project progress. A meeting will be held to discuss any budget variance and agree payment for the following year.

Projects that require recruitment of human participants are required to complete a six-monthly progress report to the Progress Review Committee.

Publications - All original peer-reviewed articles published as a result of our funding **must** comply with our open access policies. Award holders should tell us directly about all articles in peer-reviewed literature or disseminated publicly (for example, press releases) as soon as possible and by the time the article has been accepted for publication or dissemination.

More information and guidance can be found on [Managing your award](#).

Intellectual property - Award holders must notify us of **any** potential for, or activities relating to, development of intellectual property and seek our consent before progressing any commercial activity arising from this award.

Award holders can get help on IP management from their local technology transfer or commercialisation offices. Early consultation will help prevent issues that might arise during the course of the project and can identify additional opportunities.

Research Engagement - We are dependent on funds raised from public donations. It is important that you join us in raising the awareness of Arthritis UK. Our current logo and acknowledgement of Arthritis UK's support should be used on all documents/presentations relating to this award.

Award holders may be invited to meetings with Arthritis UK to discuss their research and/or asked to contribute written summaries.

Timelines

Call published	Mid-March 2026
Call opens in grant management system (application form available)	Anticipated Wednesday 1 April 2026
Deadline for applications	16:00 Wednesday 3 June 2026
Invitation to provide a rebuttal to the panel review	Approximately early September 2026
Deadline to provide a rebuttal to the panel review	End of September 2026
Notification of award	December 2026
Project start	From February 2027 at earliest

Contact details

For all enquiries, please email the Awards Office at awards@arthritis-uk.org.