

# Advanced Pain Discovery Platform

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the remit of this call in terms of disease conditions, age groups and translational versus basic research?**

The ambition of the APDP is to better understand mechanisms of pain and to identify new pathways, targets and/or approaches to both pharmacological and psychosocial treatment. The APDP aims to have an impact on patient treatment and will look to fund human centred research. As a part of this we recognize the need for back-translation into animals, however do not expect this to be a major part of consortia work. Future research funding streams under this initiative may include some aspects of animal focused work.

We expect the individual consortia to involve researchers from different disciplines tackling a common group of interrelated questions. The APDP recognizes the challenges and opportunities in the field of chronic pain research. Research plans can include common pathways across multiple pain conditions as well as consolidating efforts in a single or connected pain condition. The APDP is therefore open to flexible approaches. In terms of conditions, the APDP will take into account treatment options, clinical need, health burden and patient impact across a breadth of pain conditions, and we are looking for the community to bring their best plans forward.

The APDP is happy to consider applications centred around paediatric, adolescent and/or adult pain conditions. The use of cohorts would depend on the "big idea" formulated by the consortium.

The APDP is primarily focussed on looking at the underpinning mechanisms of pain and should allow the identification and study of new pain biomarkers. The consortia investments will establish platforms that will support the identification and validation of new interventions, including through improved access to well-phenotyped human populations. The consortia should embrace the latest technologies and may include aspects of technology development.

### **What is the anticipated structure of a consortium and who can participate?**

The APDP aims to become a national scale platform centred around large ambitious consortia that will bring together separated skills, assets and communities. These partnerships will have a common agenda that can help transform our mechanistic understanding and develop important new approaches to treat and/or manage pain. We expect each consortium to focus on a "big idea" in the chronic pain field that will have short- or long-term impact for individuals living with chronic pain. The consortia are expected to be multidisciplinary, but there are no restrictions as to who can be a member. Clinicians, academic researchers, people with lived experience and industry partners are all encouraged to participate.

Through the APDP we will support collaborations between industry partners and academic researchers. These collaborations are open to both established companies and early start-ups. Collaborations will need to be led by a researcher from an academic institution. Data from

consortia will be available to industry partners subject to the individual agreements in place. Academic institutions will be responsible for managing their IP arrangements according to the MICA guidance, and Heads of Terms agreements must be included at the full application stage. Instructions on MICAs can be found here: [MRC Industry Collaboration Agreement \(MICA\)](#)

The APDP recognizes that specialized expertise required for the consortia might be placed outside the UK. We welcome international partnerships as part of the applications – if this includes overseas CoIs then a justification is required to explain how this expertise and leadership is needed but is not currently available within the UK. There are also different costing arrangements in place for overseas CoIs. Anyone looking to include overseas CoIs must contact [SPFPain@MRC.UKRI.org](mailto:SPFPain@MRC.UKRI.org) for a short discussion before submitting your application.

### **What and who can be included in the consortium bid?**

Funding for this call follows the regular guidance of UKRI research calls, which can be found at [Funding Guidance for Applicants](#). Whilst there is no formal cap on the funding for an individual consortium, applicants should understand that we aim to fund 3-5 consortia from the £14m budget available. The decision process will evaluate the scientific excellence of the consortium as well as the value for money.

Each consortium partner should have a clearly defined role and CoIs should be essential for providing the leadership and expertise necessary to deliver the consortium's objectives. The APDP is open to researchers at all stages of their career, however we would advise that the consortia are led by researchers with demonstrable experience in running research collaborations.

Consortia funding cannot be used directly to support PhD studentships. However, we do encourage the use of the consortia to provide an excellent multi-disciplinary environment in pain research to support externally funded PhDs and other early career researchers.

Consortia can bid to establish new biological resources to fit in with their "big idea" in chronic pain research. Consortia will need to include plans for the longer-term sustainability of the biomaterial resource.

When tackling multi-omic analysis of sample collections, this can be delivered through your consortium partners or, when justified, by contracting out through a commercial provider. Sub-contracting of specific types of services follows the below policy:

- *Subcontracting out activities must be justified by either: (i) the required expertise to deliver the quality of service needed is not demonstrably available in the UK academic sector (thus could not be delivered through a grant collaboration) and/or (ii) contracting out offers the most cost-effective approach to delivering these specialist needs - of course this is complicated by the fact that economies of outsourcing may offset funding by 100% rather than 67%.*
- *A third party is contracted to deliver a service for the project – they must not themselves be eligible to apply for MRC funding;*
- *The service should be procured through external competition and should be presented as a single cost that does not include indirect or estates costs;*

*Under these circumstances, UKRI may be able to accommodate 100% exceptions for 'omics' work as long as it is demonstrably a transactional relationship with a clearly specified 'end-product'.*

### **How will the different phases of the APDP be funded?**

The consortia call is focussed on setting up collaborations and bringing together tools and resources to generate the data needed to answer questions laid out as a big idea in the pain field. Aligned with this consortia call, there will be an additional funding stream in 2021 for hypothesis-based research programmes as well as funding for data science activities, such as bioinformatics and computational approaches (e.g. AI) to bring together, integrate and interrogate various data (e.g. 'omics, pain phenotypes, imaging, and psychosocial and cognitive measures) to help build a comprehensive cellular, systems and network 'data library' for chronic pain. Applications to these additional funding streams can be from both within and outside of the established consortia but should be aligned to the consortia activities.

There will be a separate call for an Open Data Platform, which will involve a scoping phase where we aim to ensure that the needs of the chronic pain research community are successfully captured across the breadth of research domains, both in regard to already obtained data as well as future data. It will be a requirement of the consortia to work with the open data platform, which will also be open and accessible to other UK researchers.

### **How will the consortia be evaluated?**

The applications will be reviewed and evaluated by international experts in the field as well as people with lived experience of chronic pain. They will be evaluated based on their scientific excellence, ambition to bring multi-dimensional consortia together to tackle the biggest challenges in understanding the complexities of pain, leadership and partnerships, scientific plans, involvement of patients and value for money. The APDP intends to strengthen connections in the pain research field and build collaborations that serve as a foundation for future interdisciplinary research, hence sustainability of the consortium will also be taken into account when evaluating applications.

### **How are the consortia expected to interact with each other?**

The APDP aims to support a complementary package of consortia that together will form the basis of an enduring national platform for pain research and translation. There will be areas of overlap between the consortia reflecting common ambitions, tools and approaches and we expect the consortia to come together as part of a broader network to explore joint areas of interest and common ambitions to add value and strengthen national co-ordination.

Both the Director and the International Scientific Advisory Board will give strategic input to the way the APDP can facilitate interaction within the chronic pain research field. We will look to

identify common needs, for example scientific infrastructure, that is shared across consortia to make sure that we are exploiting the resources in the most efficient way.

If we identify significant overlap between different consortia applications at the EoI phase, we will initiate discussions between the groups to consider bringing themselves together into a single consortium. We will share the EoI summaries and the name of the PIs from the overlapping EoIs to help support the initial interaction. Once consortia have been funded there will be targeted activities led by the Programme Director to bring them together to create a cohesive platform.

We want to emphasize that the EoI stage is an interactive phase where we can work with the research community to make sure that we achieve a truly step-wise change in chronic pain research. So please get in touch with the APDP secretariat at [SPFPain@MRC.UKRI.org](mailto:SPFPain@MRC.UKRI.org) or Director at [David.Walsh@MRC.UKRI.org](mailto:David.Walsh@MRC.UKRI.org) for further discussions.

### **How can we get involved in consortia applications?**

During this initial EoI phase the APDP Director is available to discuss research plans with the community. David Walsh can be contacted at [david.walsh@mrc.ukri.org](mailto:david.walsh@mrc.ukri.org).

The APDP Consortia are expected to include the participation of people with lived experience of pain in all parts of the consortia planning and execution. Please get in touch with Versus Arthritis for further discussions: [research@versusarthritis.org](mailto:research@versusarthritis.org).

To learn more about the Advanced Pain Discovery Platform please visit our webpage. If you have further questions, please email [SPFPain@MRC.UKRI.org](mailto:SPFPain@MRC.UKRI.org).

### **How will the recent Covid-19 outbreak affect the Consortia Call?**

The Corona-virus outbreak has had great impact on the research community. With the extended Expression of Interest phase we hope to allow enough time for both clinicians and academic partners to participate in the APDP consortia. Should anyone have further questions relating to the current COVID-19 outbreak then do get in touch at [SPFPain@MRC.UKRI.org](mailto:SPFPain@MRC.UKRI.org).

### **Additional information:**

We would encourage all medical questions to be directed to your GP. Versus Arthritis have information about support for those living with chronic pain, which can be found at [www.versusarthritis.org](http://www.versusarthritis.org).

To learn more about the Advanced Pain Discovery Platform please visit our webpage. If you have further questions, please email [SPFPain@MRC.UKRI.org](mailto:SPFPain@MRC.UKRI.org)