

# Early career researcher pain awards

## Summary

Understanding, treating and managing pain is among the greatest challenges facing healthcare today and is a high priority for people with arthritis. We believe that supporting innovative research will produce a fundamental change in how we understand and treat musculoskeletal pain. Since 2015, we have expanded our portfolio of musculoskeletal pain research by over £10 million and plan to continue this growth and investment through this new funding call.

We recognise that in order to support the growth of innovative pain research we also need to invest in building a capacity and support **future leaders in pain research**. This new scheme will provide pump priming funds to support researchers transitioning to independence and provide vital financial support to enable other awards and fellowships to be obtained within, or shortly after, the award timeframe. On application, the career stage of the applicant and plans for how the funding will catalyse development in their career, will be considered.

Through this call, we wish to fund proposals that seek to address the priorities listed in our [research roadmap for pain](#).

Applications will be accepted by each of our [research subcommittees](#), covering discovery (disease), treatment and health research. The lead applicant must be an early career researcher. Awards of up to 18 months in length are available for salary support, and additional research expenses of up to £37,500.

The application process is single stage. Applicants are invited to submit applications through Grant Tracker. The deadline for the receipt of applications is **16:00 on Wednesday 17 July 2019**.

All applications will undergo peer review by one of our recommending subcommittees, an integral part of which is the assessment by people with arthritis.

**If you have any questions about this call document, eligibility or would like to discuss your research proposal with the office before starting an application please email [research@versusarthritis.org](mailto:research@versusarthritis.org)**

## About Versus Arthritis – demanding more for people with arthritis

Launched on 19 September 2018, Versus Arthritis is a new charity formed from the merger of Arthritis Research UK and Arthritis Care. Building on the work and legacies of both charities, Versus Arthritis exists to push back the limits of arthritis. We are doing this by funding research, providing support and campaigning for the appropriate recognition for a condition that affects over 10 million people in the UK alone.

For far too long, arthritis has been viewed as something that is inevitable, insignificant and untreatable; shrugged off as 'just a bit of arthritis'. However, arthritis is none of these things and we no longer accept it as something that has to just be lived with.

As Versus Arthritis, we will strive to do more and to be more ambitious in everything we do, working with and for people with arthritis. We will continue to campaign to challenge the misconceptions around arthritis to ensure that it is recognised as a priority in the UK. We understand what living with arthritis is like, and realise the strength it can so often require, and so whenever people are in need of help, we are here to support them. We are also bringing together researchers from across the world, funding them to develop more and better treatments to help the many number of people with arthritis who are living in pain without access to good enough care or treatment.

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There's a lot to be done, but we won't stop until no-one has to tolerate the pain, fatigue and isolation of arthritis. We're 10 million people living with arthritis. Together, we're stronger. We are Versus Arthritis.

## Background to the call

For people with arthritis, pain is life changing. Up to 28 million people in the UK are affected by chronic pain, 75% of which is musculoskeletal in origin.

Although progress has been made, ongoing moderate and severe chronic pain remains a substantial daily problem for people with arthritis, even when the underlying disease is controlled (inflammatory arthritis) or removed completely (joint replacement in osteoarthritis). This pain often persists for decades, is poorly controlled by current treatment options and is comorbid with debilitating fatigue, cognitive and mental health issues.

Despite the prevalence of chronic musculoskeletal pain, and impact on quality of life and the economy, research funders and the government have been slow to address the problem; compared with the investment made in other less prevalent or impactful conditions, pain receives a disproportionately low level of funding in the UK. Nevertheless, in terms of excellence, the UK continues to be a world leader in pain research. Over recent years, significant advances have been made in our understanding of musculoskeletal pain, and how healthcare professionals approach its management. However, there is still more to be done.

We are committed to tackling the growing public health issue of chronic musculoskeletal pain by catalysing new levels of UK wide investment in this area of critical need. Our [research roadmap for pain](#) outlines the most pressing and vital areas for future pain research, and highlights the key priorities for research funders to address.

## Aim of this call

We recognise that in order to support the growth of innovative pain research, we need to invest in building a capacity and support **future leaders in pain research** in their career development. Therefore, this new scheme will provide pump priming funds to support researchers transitioning to independence, providing vital financial support to enable other awards and fellowships to be obtained within, or shortly after, the award timeframe.

Through this call, we wish to fund proposals that seek to address the priorities listed in our [research roadmap for pain](#). Applications should seek to answer a single question, or a small group of related objectives. Proposals can also bring together researchers from multidisciplinary groups, in order to develop and refine research plans, and generate preliminary data for future programmes of work.

There is an expectation that applicants will involve people with arthritis in the development of the proposal, as well as collaborating with them in the delivery of the proposed research.

Applicants must carefully read the application form and [guidance document](#) to ensure that the most appropriate language is being used in each section of the form.

## Disease areas

We use the term arthritis in its broadest possible sense, to include all associated musculoskeletal conditions affecting joints, bones and muscles (including back pain). This also includes autoimmune conditions, such as lupus and other rarer forms of arthritis. Further information on conditions that are within scope can be found on our [website](#).

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Cross-disease applications, as well as single disease focused studies, will be accepted. Applications specific to rarer forms of arthritis and across the life course (including arthritis in children, adolescents and older adults) are encouraged.

While applications are expected to focus on aspects of musculoskeletal pain, it is recognised that the underlying mechanisms of pain may also be relevant to both musculoskeletal and non-musculoskeletal conditions. For applications with a non-musculoskeletal pain aspect, a strong justification and case for support should be made to illustrate its relevance to, and potential impact for, musculoskeletal pain.

## **Additional considerations within the scope of this call**

- As with all our calls, we expect all applications to involve, and consider the needs of, people with arthritis in their design.
- Collaborations with international partners are welcome.
- Collaborations with industry partners are encouraged. Further information can be found on our [website](#).
- In line with our [research roadmap for pain](#), we welcome applications aiming to use novel methodological and experimental designs and/or making use of advances in technology and computing (such as artificial intelligence).
- Applicants with proposals that have agreement for part-funding from a third party are not excluded, but applicants should contact us ([research@versusarthritis.org](mailto:research@versusarthritis.org)) to discuss their application as early as possible.

## **Areas beyond the scope of this call**

- Studies exploring the acute management of musculoskeletal trauma.
- Applications to complete a systematic review only.
- Studies with a primary focus or hypothesis of managing or treating musculoskeletal disease, where pain is only used as the outcome measure to assess this.

**If required, please contact the research team for guidance ([research@versusarthritis.org](mailto:research@versusarthritis.org)) on the scope of the call and the relevance of your application.**

## **Application and assessment process**

### **Application content**

Applications are invited to our disease, treatment and health subcommittees. Applicants should review the [remit](#) of our three subcommittees, prior to deciding which subcommittee to submit their application to. Applications which come under the remit of more than one subcommittee should be submitted to the subcommittee that best fits the predominant focus of the research. Please contact the research team for further guidance ([research@versusarthritis.org](mailto:research@versusarthritis.org)) if you are unsure which subcommittee to submit to.

Applicants should indicate the alignment of the proposal to a defined priority area within our [research roadmap for pain](#), in the application form.

How the project will contribute to supporting the applicant's career development should be clearly presented within the application.

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Applications should pose innovative and novel approaches to meet the challenge of the call, providing a clear pathway to success and patient impact. Applications can include lead applicants and/or co-applicants with expertise relevant to this initiative, but who do not have a track record of musculoskeletal research. We expect applications to take a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to answering research questions. Patient partners may be included as co-applicants.

Applicants should take care to ensure future patient benefit is clearly discussed within the application.

## Who can apply and what you can apply for

The lead applicant must be an early career researcher, defined as researchers and academics who have not received previous significant research funding (in excess of £100,000) as principal investigator. This does not include personal fellowships. There is no limit on number of years post-PhD.

The application must include at least one tenured academic at the lead UK university, hospital or recognised research institute, this can be as the lead applicant or as a co-applicant. There are no restrictions on additional co-applicants or collaborators.

Awards of up to 18 months in length are available for salary support, and additional research expenses of up to £37,500. Costs for salaries, expenses, animals (where relevant) and small items of essential equipment can be requested. For further details on what you can apply for, please see the associated [guidance document](#).

We are open to partnership discussions with institutions, and match funding to extend the award beyond 18 months where possible.

We welcome applications from international candidates intending to move to a UK institution.

Applications from part-time early career researchers are allowed. If you wish to apply as a part-time lead applicant, please contact the research office ([research@versusarthritis.org](mailto:research@versusarthritis.org)) before applying to discuss.

- Time allocation for any early career researcher salary applied for should be at least 0.6 FTE (three days per week).
- Part-time working can be taken from the start of the award or requested partway through.
- Grant end dates can be extended to accommodate time lost through part-time working.

If you have had a period off work of a year or more and have concerns about how this may impact your suitability for this call, please contact a member of the team ([research@versusarthritis.org](mailto:research@versusarthritis.org)) prior to applying. Any career breaks will be taken into consideration by our awarding panels.

Further information and general guidance for applicants can be found on the Early career researcher pain challenge 2019 [webpage](#), and in the associated [guidance document](#). For any pre-clinical studies using animal models, applicants should additionally read our [policy on animal research](#).

## Exclusions

- Principal investigators who have received in excess of £100,000 research funding, not including personal fellowships.
- Applications not within the broad research priority area.
- Funding for PhD studentships.

## Application stage

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Applicants are invited to submit an application that provides an overview of the project and funding requested. This should be submitted through [Grant Tracker](#), where the application form is available. Applicants should select the appropriate application form for the subcommittee they wish to submit to. The deadline for the receipt of applications is **16:00 on Wednesday 17 July 2019**. Submissions after 16:00 will not be accepted.

## How will applications be assessed

Assessment by people with arthritis forms a key part of the review process and is integrated into all assessment stages. Further information and guidance can be found on our [website](#) or by emailing our research involvement team ([patientinsight@versusarthritis.org](mailto:patientinsight@versusarthritis.org)).

All applications will undergo expert peer review by one of our recommending subcommittees. The criteria used to assess applications includes:

- Relevance to the call.
- Potential for long term impact on quality of life for people with arthritis.
- Involvement of people with arthritis in the proposed research.
- Quality of the research design and methodology.
- Importance of hypothesis.
- Clarity of objectives.
- Applicants' track record.
- Applicants' ability to deliver, appropriate experience and facilities to conduct the proposed research.
- Future potential of the applicant and proposal.
- Feasibility and the potential to deliver the stated outcomes within the timescales and budget.
- Value for money.

## Award management

It is expected that all research awards will report annually via Researchfish. During the course of the award, applicants may be invited to meetings with Versus Arthritis to discuss their research findings and/or asked to contribute written summaries.

## Timelines

Call opens	April 2019
Deadline for applications	17 July 2019
Notification and Feedback	December 2019

## Contact details

For all enquiries, please contact [research@versusarthritis.org](mailto:research@versusarthritis.org)