

Research Ireland
Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
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Questions have been grouped under the below categories based on their topic.

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Terms of Reference

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1. General

Q1.1. How is Challenge Funding different to traditional research grant funding?

The key aspect that sets Challenge funding apart from traditional approaches is its **solution-focused** approach, which directs research activities to tackle specific challenges or problems. In addition, it uses defined timelines (or phases) in conjunction with a competitive process to direct and accelerate research activities.

Research Ireland's approach to challenge funding differs in a number of ways from its other funding programmes:

- **Teams** – It focuses on teams rather than individual researchers and has an expectation that non-academic and transdisciplinary members will have leadership in defining how research is planned and undertaken.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** – Challenge funding requires researchers to engage with stakeholders in order to understand the problem from the stakeholders' perspective and reflect their needs as part of research activities.
- **Training**– To support the stakeholder engagement and innovation process, Research Ireland provides training, skills development, mentoring and networking opportunities at all phases of challenge awards.
- **Flexibility** – The intensive stakeholder engagement process may significantly impact the research teams' perspectives, ideas, and approaches regarding solution development and feasibility. Challenge funding enables and supports this and encourages agility amongst teams in order to deliver impact.

Q1.2. How many projects will be funded under the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge?

Following the recommendations of the Application Review Panel, it is expected that **up to five projects** in total will be funded under the Challenge and enter the Concept Phase. At the end of Concept Phase, projects will undergo a panel review. All projects deemed competitive are expected to progress to the Seed Phase and will compete for the Prize Award. One team will be awarded to progress to Prize Phase.

Q1.3 What happens if the implementation of the proposed solution cannot be completed within the stipulated 24 months of the Prize Phase?

As part of the Seed Phase progress report, the teams will be asked to prepare a workplan for the 24-month duration of the Prize Phase. This progress report will be reviewed by an independent panel of international expert reviewers in terms of feasibility and impact potential. Research Ireland expects the applicant teams to put forward plans that can be delivered within the resources and time that is available. Nevertheless, as part of Research Ireland's approaches

towards managing grants, there are opportunities in terms of flexibility whether it's a budgetary reallocation or a no-cost extension. Such requests will be managed in close collaboration with the programme manager.

Q1.4. Can the projects have sites outside of Ireland to bring in a European or, more broadly, an international dimension?

The funding under the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge can only be utilised in the Republic of Ireland. Collaborators based outside Ireland are not eligible to receive funding through this programme.

However, international collaborations are welcome and encouraged where they add value to the project, particularly by (1) bringing wider perspective to the problem validation and solution development, and (2) exploring translatability of solutions across different contexts, sectors, or geographies.

2. Eligibility and Team Profile

Q2.1. Can an individual researcher apply to this call?

One of the key features of Challenge-based funding at Research Ireland is its focus on teams and the importance of including diverse expertise. Therefore, individual researchers cannot apply by themselves to the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge.

Q2.2. How many people should be part of the applicant team?

Applications to the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge must identify a core applicant/leadership team comprising:

- Team Lead (an academic staff member or a contract researcher at an Eligible Research Body in Ireland)
- Team Co-Lead (an academic staff member or a contract researcher at an Eligible Research Body in Ireland)

Under the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge, the Lead and Co-Lead applicants can be from STEM and/or AHSS domains, provided that their areas of expertise are distinct and complementary.

In addition to research expertise, the team will include a **Societal Impact Champion (SIC)** who will come from a non-academic background and have appropriate experience in areas relevant to the societal impact. The SIC will play a crucial role in identifying barriers and developing strategies to overcome them to maximise the societal impact of the solution.

It is strongly recommended that the Societal Impact Champion is identified at the application stage. For more information on the SIC, please refer to the Call Document.

For Eligible Research Bodies in Ireland, please refer to [Eligible Research Bodies - Research Ireland](#)

Q2.3. Can the lead and co-lead applicants be in the same institution?

Applications must be submitted by a team of researchers with complementary expertise. Applicants can be based in the same or in two different eligible research bodies ([Eligible Research Bodies - Research Ireland](#)) based in the Republic of Ireland. Please refer to the list of Eligible Research Bodies to confirm whether the institution is eligible to apply for Research Ireland funding.

Q2.4. Can an applicant who is Team Lead/Co-lead on one application be included on another project?

Core team members (Team Lead and Team Co-Lead) cannot be named as Lead or Co-Lead on more than one application to the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge.

A researcher who is already a lead or co-lead on an application may be involved in another application only as a member of the extended research team, an advisor, collaborator or in a similar capacity.

There are no restrictions on the number of applications/projects a team member can be listed on. This applies to both, paid team members (for example, RA or PDRA) and collaborators. In case of paid team members, it is important to ensure that their total commitments to challenge applications/awards, as well as any other commitments does not exceed 1 FTE.

When an individual is a lead/co-led on one application, and a paid team member of a different one, there may be issues of conflict of interest that will need to be managed by the research body which requires caution.

Q2.5. Must the Lead and co-lead between them represent both AHSS and STEM or can the Lead and Co-Lead applicants both be from STEM or AHSS?

Under the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge, there is no expectation that the two academic leads must between them represent both AHSS and STEM. The Challenge remit also does not restrict the Lead and Co-Lead applicants to being from same broad domains (i.e., STEM and AHSS), provided that their areas of expertise are distinct and complementary.

The Challenge seeks to support interdisciplinary and collaborative research teams and the integration of diverse perspectives to address complex health and wellbeing challenges. It is essential that the applicant team demonstrates how their combined expertise addresses the particular challenge/problem they have defined and contributes to the innovation and impact potential of the project.

Note: Challenge-based funding supports a solution-focused approach to research which should be considered when designing the research activities. Funded projects are expected to outline a credible pathway towards solution and impact.

Q2.6. Is it a significant disadvantage if both the Lead and Co-Lead come from the same department?

The Challenge seeks to support interdisciplinary and collaborative research teams and the integration of diverse perspectives to address complex health and wellbeing challenges. We strongly encourage the prospective applicants to consider the diverse inputs (e.g. clinical, public health, social science, community engagement, digital innovation) that may benefit the challenge being addressed and broaden the impact potential of the project.

Q2.7. Can an applicant be involved in more than one challenge funding programme or other Research Ireland programmes?

This is possible but applicants need to consider their time commitment to multiple projects. In such cases, Research Ireland needs a statement from the applicant outlining how they plan to manage their time commitment – this will not be shared with reviewers.

Q2.8. Do I need to have a permanent position to apply to the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge?

A permanent position is not required. A Lead or Co-lead applicants may be a contract researcher, provided their contract covers the duration of the award or it may be subject to receipt of the award. Postdoctoral researchers are eligible to apply as Lead or Co-lead under this programme.

Q2.9. I am a post-doctoral researcher applying to this call, are there any additional requirements to my submission?

Where an applicant (lead or co-lead) is a post-doctoral researcher, they will need to identify a Mentor, who is an experienced academic staff member. The Mentor is not required to be a part of the team but will need to provide a letter of support that would ensure they will be providing appropriate advice and guidance to the postdoctoral applicant related to research and grant management.

Q2.10. Is there a minimum level of years post-PhD experience required?

There is no requirement for a minimum number of years post-PhD as long as the applicant holds a PhD (or equivalent*) and is affiliated with an Eligible Research Body. Applications will not be accepted where the lead applicant or co-applicant is a postgraduate researcher (e.g., MSc, MEng or PhD student).

**It is recognised that in certain disciplines relevant to this call, such as engineering or international development, research-active members of academic staff may not hold a PhD or equivalent. Such research-active staff members may be considered eligible to participate as a Team Lead or Co-Lead but must confirm their eligibility with Research Ireland in advance of submission of an application.*

Q2.11. Should the applicant's contract cover the full duration of all three phases, or is it sufficient for it to cover only Phases 1 and 2?

The initial application is for the Concept and Seed Phases only. Hence for researchers without a permanent contract, the main requirement is that the researcher has a contract that covers the duration of the Concept and Seed Phases (18 months in total from project start date of 1st February 2026).

This contract may be subject to applicant securing the funding, but in such cases, we require that the Host Institution clearly outlines its support and provides reassurance that the contract will be issued to the researcher, subject to securing the award.

Please also note that if a Lead or Co-lead on an application is a PDRA, they can request their salary up to 100% FTE, but the amount requested must be aligned to applicant's time commitment to the award.

Updated documents (such as Letters of Support) in relation to contractual arrangement will be required if a team progresses to Prize Phase.

Q2.12. Could an application include two Societal Impact Champions (non-profit partners)?

Only one Societal Impact Champion can be named in the application on SESAME Grant Management System, and as part of the core applicant team. Their CV and Letter of Support should also be included as part of the application.

Additional Societal Impact Champions/non-academic partners may be referred to as collaborators under the Team Profile section of the Application Form. Their contribution to the project may be discussed in this section but their CV and Letter of Support will not be required. The application form template is available to download from the call page.

Q2.13. Is it a requirement to have a clinical professional in a healthcare solution modelling problem. Could industry/healthcare professionals be part of the team? Can an HSE employee be the Societal Impact Champion?

The programme does not have any requirements on the background of the applicants beyond that the Lead and Co-lead are from an academic background and based in Eligible Research Bodies and the SIC is from a non-academic background. Industry and healthcare professionals or HSE employees can take on the role of Societal Impact Champion or they can be part of the wider team. Noting that they cannot receive direct funding from the programme.

In cases where an industry partner is involved, applicants may need to demonstrate compliance with State Aid regulations. Please refer to pages 22-24 of the Call Document for further information.

Q2.14. What is the expectation from the Lead, Co-Lead and the Societal Impact Champion in relation to their time commitment to the project?

There are no specific figures on the minimum time commitment required from core team members. However, Challenge awards involve a time-intensive process of stakeholder engagement and training. The Lead and Co-Lead Applicants are responsible for project delivery so it is expected they will dedicate a reasonable proportion of their time in line with project plan. This is particularly important for early career researchers who may be less experienced with project and team management.

The core team—including the Lead Applicant, Co-Applicant, and Societal Impact Champion—is expected to actively participate in key activities such as training sessions and review processes throughout the project. The programme also involves regular catch-up calls with the Lead and Co-Lead applicants. SICs are encouraged to join these calls as well, although this is not a requirement.

Q2.15 Is it possible to have international collaborators listed as co-applicants for this grant?

This call is open only to applicants based in Eligible Research Bodies in the Republic of Ireland (Please refer to [Eligible Research Bodies - Research Ireland](#)). Both the Lead and Co-lead applicant must fulfil this eligibility criteria. Researchers from outside of the Republic of Ireland cannot lead or co-lead an application, but they may be referred to as international collaborators in the proposal text, noting that they are not eligible to receive funding through this programme. However, international collaborations are welcome and encouraged where they add value to the project, particularly by (1) bringing wider perspective to the problem validation and solution development, and (2) exploring translatability of solutions across different contexts, sectors, or geographies.

3. Challenge Scope

Q3.1. Regarding the life course approach mentioned in the call, does this imply that the proposed project must target all age groups across the life span? Or would it still be acceptable if the project focuses on a specific age group?

No, proposed projects are not required to target all age groups across the lifespan. The life course approach, as outlined in the Call Document, does not require that proposed projects target all age groups across the lifespan. Rather, it encourages applicants to consider how health and wellbeing are shaped by factors and interventions at different stages of life – from early childhood through to older age.

Applicants are expected to identify a specific population cohort that is relevant to the specific challenge/problem they aim to address in their project. This could be an age group (e.g. infants, children, older adults etc) or a group defined by other characteristics such as gender, chronic illness, disability, or socioeconomic status. The rationale for the choice of specific population cohort should clearly be articulated in the proposal and demonstrate alignment with the overall aims of the Challenge.

Q3.2. Would a project with an AHSS orientated solution fit with the theme of this call or is this intended for more medical focused/ clinical solutions?

The Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge supports the development and implementation of preventative and scalable solutions to address complex health and wellbeing challenges. As such, proposals for such strategies that show alignment to national policy priorities would be appropriate and is not limited to medical/clinical approaches. Under the framework of the life course approach, the call seeks proposals for solutions tailored to specific

population cohorts. Researchers are expected to define a specific challenge/problem that considers the specific population cohort/end-user needs and their uptake of the solution.

Q3.3. Can a new model of care/ or validated care pathway be proposed as a solution?

A new model of care or a validated care pathway is acceptable under the *Innovating in Health and Wellbeing* funding call, provided it aligns with the overall scope and objectives of the call. The call is designed to support innovative, evidence-informed solutions that focus on specific population cohorts and can improve health and wellbeing outcomes in Ireland. This includes the development, adaptation, or implementation of models or pathways that focus on preventative strategies and address identified needs, enhance service delivery, or improve access, equity, or efficiency in care.

Q3.4. Are innovations/projects that address health service delivery eligible under the programme?

Innovative solutions that address health and wellbeing needs of specific population cohorts and that can be implemented within the health service would be eligible under the programme.

Q3.5. Prevention is mentioned centrally in the call, how broadly is prevention defined?

In the context of the *Innovating in Health and Wellbeing* funding call, prevention is defined broadly and encompasses a wide range of strategies and interventions aimed at improving health and wellbeing outcomes for specific population cohorts by addressing risks and determinants before they lead to illness or adverse outcomes. The call is **not** designed to support solutions that aim to cure diseases, develop therapeutics or design new treatments that will be used in curing diseases.

Q3.6. What is the expected Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of proposed solutions at the application stage?

The Challenge is designed to support pre-deployment and pre-commercial activities only. Activities related to market launch, sales, or commercial deployment are outside the scope of the programme. The focus is on early-stage validation, initial prototyping, and preparation for deployment, rather than final product development or market launch.

Challenge Funding expects the teams to develop fit-for-purpose solutions through adapting and iteratively co-developing their technologies to best address a challenge. During the Concept Phase, teams are expected to engage extensively with stakeholders. This process should inform product development to ensure maximum impact on end-users. As such, proposed solutions that are already at a high TRL level are less likely to deliver the intended impact through this programme.

Successful teams will be expected to explore and outline clear impact pathways, which may include future commercialisation beyond the funded activities.

Q3.7. Can the solution be the development of a therapeutic device/approach which may serve as a preventative measure to reduce symptoms or progression of conditions related to chronic diseases?

The novelty of a solution can come from a particular technology or approach being entirely new to the sector or that repurposing and development of an existing solution in the context of a new challenge. As such, the development of a therapeutics device or approach that may serve as a preventative measure – particularly in support of health and wellbeing of individuals with chronic diseases – can be considered within scope, provided it aligns with the objectives of the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge.

However, Challenge Funding expects the teams to develop fit-for-purpose solutions through adapting and iteratively co-developing their technologies to best address a challenge so applicants should expect significant research and development.

Also to note that the call does not fund commercialisation activities. This means that while early-stage development, validation, or piloting of an innovative preventative concept may be eligible, activities focused on product marketing, scaling for commercial sale, or securing intellectual property for commercial purposes would fall outside the scope.

Q3.8. Are we limited to working with healthcare institutions, or can we look at the role of facilitating and protecting health in cultural and educational institutions?

No, teams are not limited to working solely with healthcare institutions. The Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge encourages a broad and inclusive approach to improving health and wellbeing, which can include cultural, educational, and community-based organisations, particularly where these settings play a meaningful role in facilitating or protecting health. Projects that explore how health and wellbeing can be supported through non-clinical environments are within the scope, especially if they address prevention, equity, or access in innovative ways. Applications should demonstrate how the proposed solution aligns with the objectives of the call and contributes to improved outcomes for specific population cohorts or communities.

4. Application

Q4.1. Can costs associated with the Societal Impact Champion (SIC) be requested as part of the budget under the Challenge?

Societal Impact Champions cannot receive direct funding from the programme such as salary, fees etc. However, other expenses that can be directly aligned to the research programme may be eligible, these can include travel costs, organisation of workshops etc.

Q4.2. Can costs associated with the external collaborators be requested as part of the budget?

While it is not permitted to request direct support for external collaborators (e.g., salary or fees), expenses that can be directly aligned to the execution of the research programme may be eligible. Activities may include, for example, travel costs associated with team activities, organisation of workshops, stakeholder engagement, and other related activities. Requests for such costs must be appropriately justified.

Q4.3. Should clinical ethics be in place at the time of proposal submission?

The application process does not require the ethics approvals to be in place at the time of submission. If an application is successful and the award is in place, the applicant team will need to ensure that any relevant ethical approval is in place aligned with the activities that need to be delivered.

Q4.4. What level of detail is expected when describing a proposed technological solution at the application stage?

The application form includes a section on the solution. Applicants are expected to discuss their solution concept in as much detail as possible in this section, including any background information that would help the application review panel assess the novelty of the concept. However, applicants should be aware that if awarded, their solution concept may evolve during the initial phase of the project through stakeholder engagement and iterative development. This flexibility is a core feature of Challenge Funding and is intended to ensure that solutions are responsive to stakeholder needs and real-world conditions.

Q4.5. Can other funding streams be used in conjunction with this funding?

Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge expects that the applications submitted to this call are unique. Duplicating funding streams is not permitted.

Q4.6. Can funding be used to buy out teaching hours for university staff?

Teaching buyout/replacement costs are in general not eligible costs.

Exception to this is that the Team Leads and Co-Leads affiliated with the Technological Universities (TUs) or the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) are permitted to apply for teaching replacement of up to a maximum of 50% of their teaching load for the duration of each phase of the programme. Salary scales for replacement lecturers must be reasonable and justified appropriately within the budget justification. Teaching replacement requests must be pro-rata and proportional to the time commitment to the award.

Q4.7. Can you provide guidance on eligible costs for Concept and Seed Phases?

Up to €50,000 can be allocated for use during the Concept Phase of the programme (Months 1–6) while the remaining request of up to €200,000 can be allocated to and will be accessible only during the Seed Phase (Months 7–18).

Concept phase budget can include staff costs, travel, materials & consumables. The primary activity during the Concept Phase will be stakeholder engagement, and the budget should include relevant costs. Equipment, or access-to-equipment, costs are not eligible in Concept Phase.

Seed phase budget can include all cost categories - staff, travel, equipment, materials & consumables.

For staff costs, please refer to the Team Member Salary Scales and Grant Budget Policy available at <https://www.researchireland.ie/about/policies/financial/>

Q4.8. Are Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) costs eligible to include in the budget?

A maximum of €100 per person per calendar year may be allocated as a token of appreciation for participation in Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) activities. This is a cumulative annual limit, meaning that if an individual participates in multiple events, the total amount they can receive across all activities within the year must not exceed €100. These amounts should be reasonable, proportionate to the level of involvement, and clearly justified within the project budget. Please also ensure that any such costs comply with your host institution's financial policies and procedures regarding PPI.