Research Ireland

Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge

Call Document

June 2025

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Terms of Reference

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of this document, it is provided for information purposes only and as a guide to expected developments. It is not intended, and should not be relied upon, as any form of warranty, representation, undertaking, contractual, or other commitment binding in law upon Taighde Éireann I Research Ireland ("Research Ireland")[1], the Government of Ireland, or any of their respective servants or agents. Research Ireland Grant Conditions (to include General Terms and Conditions and Letters of Offer) shall govern the administration of Research Ireland grants and awards to the exclusion of this and any other oral, written, or recorded statement.

All responses to this Call for Submission of Proposals will be treated in confidence and no information contained therein will be communicated to any third party without the written permission of the applicant except insofar as is specifically required for the consideration and evaluation of the proposal or as may be required under law, including the Research and Innovation Act 2024[2] and the Freedom of Information Acts 1997, (Amendment) 2003 and 2014.

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[1] Taighde Éireann - Research Ireland ("Research Ireland") is the national research and innovation funding agency which was established on 1 August 2024. Research Ireland amalgamates the activities of the Irish Research Council and Science Foundation Ireland.

[2] https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2024/act/15/enacted/en/index.html

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1. Challenge Funding at Research Ireland

Challenge funding is a solution-focused approach to research funding that uses a combination of grants, competition, prizes, and strict timelines to direct research activities at specific, often complex, problems. Through Challenge funding, Research Ireland seeks to support Ireland's brightest unconventional thinkers and innovators to develop novel, potentially disruptive, solutions to address significant societal challenges. Research Ireland's approach to challenge funding places strong emphasis on:

(i) **Inter and Transdisciplinary Teams**, reflecting the need to bring together experts and innovators from different disciplines, including both Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM) and Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (AHSS) disciplines, to address complex challenges;

(ii) **Engagement and Validation** with stakeholders, beneficiaries and end-users of research to understand the nature and boundaries of specific problems, in testing assumptions and co-creating solutions;

(iii) **Impact Pathways** demonstrating efficient adaptation of approaches that will lead to socially and economically relevant outcomes and translate research outputs to real-world benefits.

2. Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge

a. Background

Healthcare systems across the world are increasingly under pressure due to socioeconomic stressors, shifting demographics, geopolitical instability, climate change, and global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.[3, 4] The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 *"to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages"*, recognises that sustainable development is dependent on addressing the primary health needs of the world's population groups.[5]

In line with national and international commitments towards a fairer, healthier future, Ireland's healthcare system is undergoing a critical transformation to address long-standing issues, such as unequal access, fragmented services, and rising demand, owing to a growing and ageing

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[3] EU Health Research and Innovation
[4] The European Health Report 2021
[5] Health and population | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

population and complex health needs. [6, 7, 8] This transformation is underpinned by the need to embrace a whole-system, life-course approach[9, 10] that addresses the wider determinants of health by utilising collaboration across sectors. To this end, health and wellbeing research and innovation is a cornerstone of Ireland's strategic approach to improve healthcare delivery, provide better health and wellbeing services, promote long, healthy lives for all citizens, and reduce health inequalities across the population. [11, 12]

b. Aims

In support of its national remit [11] to deliver positive impact for the Irish society through research and innovation, Research Ireland has developed the ***Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge***. This initiative aims to support the development and implementation of effective, scalable and sustainable solutions that address complex health and wellbeing challenges in Ireland. It will do so by:

- Fostering collaboration between researchers, stakeholders, and beneficiaries of research in the health and wellbeing ecosystem;
- Incentivising the convergence of knowledge, practice, and methods from multiple disciplines and sectors across the system;
- Facilitating the generation of new knowledge and innovative approaches relevant for health and wellbeing challenges.

3. Challenge Scope

Ireland's population was estimated at 5.3 million in 2023, an increase of 14.4% from 2013.[13] The proportion of the population aged 65 years or over increased from 12.3% in 2013 to 15.3% in 2023 and is projected to increase to 26% by 2051.[14, 15] In 2021, women's life expectancy at birth was 84.3 and men's life expectancy at birth was 80.5. By 2051, these are projected to increase to 88.3 and 85.6, respectively.[15] There has been a corresponding increase in chronic disease, such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and respiratory diseases, resulting in increased demand

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[6] Sláintecare
[7] Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan
[8] HSE National Service Plan 2025
[9] The Minsk Declaration - The Life-course Approach in the Context of Health 2020
[10] WHO - The life course approach: from theory to practice
[11] Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy
[12] HSE Action Plan for Health Research 2019-2029
[13] Key Findings Measuring Ireland's Progress 2022 - Central Statistics Office
[14] Society Measuring Ireland's Progress 2022 - Central Statistics Office
[15] 20200416-AGEING-PUBLIC-HEALTH-MAIN.pdf

for chronic disease management and more long-term care.[16, 17] Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified existing pressures leading to an increased demand for mental health services and highlighting gaps in care for vulnerable groups.[18] In addition, the growing number of people living in Ireland of diverse ethnic backgrounds may mean different demands on health services.

This rapid change in demographics and healthcare needs presents health systems in Ireland with a key challenge: **How can Ireland adapt to these evolving demographics and healthcare demands while ensuring equitable health and wellbeing outcomes for its entire population - across all ages and backgrounds?**

Central to addressing this challenge is the need to develop a nuanced understanding of how health and wellbeing are shaped at different stages of life, and design strategies that enable timely and appropriate interventions across the human lifespan. A sustainable response calls for a multidimensional approach that includes person-centred strategies, community-based care, policy reform and the promotion of environments that support wellbeing.

The **life-course approach**[19] acknowledges how health and wellbeing in older age are shaped by experiences and exposures throughout a person's entire life - from early childhood through adulthood and into older age. It emphasises **acting early** to ensure the best start in life, to protect and promote health during life's transition periods, and **acting collectively**, as the whole of society, to create health-promoting environments, better conditions of daily life, and people-centred health.[20] However, many health systems remain focused on acute in-patient care rather than long-term, community-based preventive services. Care and support are often not offered sufficiently early and equitably to allow for a sustainable impact on health and to promote wellbeing across the human lifespan.

The *Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge* seeks solutions that adopt a life course perspective and which focus on prevention, equity, and continuity of care.* Researchers are invited to explore the determinants of health and wellbeing, identify existing barriers, and develop novel approaches and interventions tailored to specific population cohorts - including but not limited to, infants and children, women, and individuals with disabilities and/or chronic

[16] 20200416-AGEING-PUBLIC-HEALTH-MAIN.pdf
[17] National Framework for the Integrated Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease in Ireland 2020-2025
[18] Global Mental Health: Where We Are and Where We Are Going | Current Psychiatry Reports
[19] The Minsk Declaration - The Life-course Approach in the Context of Health 2020
[20] WHO - The life course approach: from theory to practice

diseases. To ensure that the solutions are timely, integrated and scalable, applicants are encouraged to consider:

- The dynamic interplay of biological, social, behavioural, and environmental factors influencing health and wellbeing;
- Structural and systemic barriers that limit access to care and wellbeing;
- The spectrum of stakeholders as appropriate for the challenge and solution described, such as healthcare professionals, policymakers, practitioners, health educators, public health professionals, patient advocacy groups, and the industry;
- Patient needs, end-user uptake, accessibility to healthcare and the experience of disadvantaged groups, as appropriate;
- Policy implementation and health economics aspects of the proposed research.

Challenge funding strives to create significant impact in addressing the major societal challenges in Ireland. Therefore, every project must be underpinned by a credible and robust pathway to impact, informed by direct engagement with stakeholders. It is anticipated that the successful projects in this Challenge will contribute to improved health and wellbeing outcomes, increased equitable access to quality care, enhanced evidence-based decision making in healthcare and the long-term viability of health and wellbeing systems in Ireland.

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* Due to the phased structure of Challenge funding, longitudinal studies and clinical trials are **not** covered under the remit of this call.

As the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge focuses on preventive strategies and approaches, therapeutics and curative care are **not** covered under the remit of this call.

This Challenge is intended to support pre-deployment/pre-commercial activities only, and as such, we do **not** anticipate funding the development of existing solutions or products.

If potential applicants are unsure about the alignment of their proposed challenge/solution to the remit of the call, they may wish to contact us at challenges@researchireland.ie in advance of preparing an application.

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4. Programme Structure and Funding

The Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge will comprise three phases: Concept, Seed and Prize Award (see Figure 1). Applications to the programme can request up to €250,000 in total direct costs over a duration of 18-months. Applications will be reviewed by a Panel of independent international reviewers against the criteria outlined in Section 6. It is envisaged that 5 teams[21] will be funded with up to €50k each for the Concept Phase over 6 months. Following a rigorous Panel review, all teams deemed competitive and whose projects demonstrate high impact potential may progress to the Seed Phase to unlock further funding of up to €200k for the next 12-months. Upon completion of the Seed Phase, teams will compete for the Challenge Prize Award of up to €1M over 24 months.

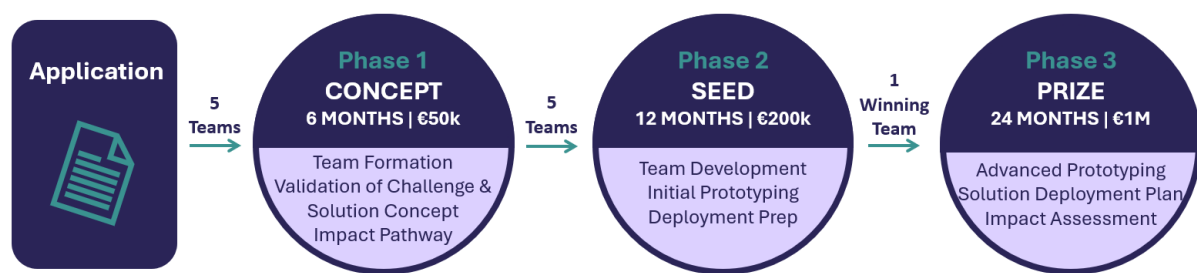Please refer to Section 6 for detailed information on the review process and evaluation criteria.

Figure 1. Phased Structure of the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge

Purpose of the Individual Phases

a. Concept Phase

The Concept Phase is intended to support teams to develop a deeper understanding of the challenge/problem they propose to address via extensive stakeholder engagement and to explore the feasibility and viability of the solution concept presented in their application. It is expected that the Societal Impact Champion (SIC) (see Section 5a for description of the SIC) play a key role in providing teams with access to relevant stakeholder networks. Teams will be expected to further validate the challenge/problem selected, provide detail on the proposed solution and its implementation, and describe an impact pathway for their solution. As part of

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[21] Research Ireland reserves the right to fund a greater or fewer number of teams at either phase depending on quality and budget availability. In addition, the final funding decisions are at the sole and exclusive discretion of Research Ireland, which are arrived at following consideration and approval by the relevant Directorate and, if required, the Senior Leadership Team of Research Ireland.

the impact pathway, teams must describe technical and non-technical barriers to be overcome, the opportunity associated with addressing those barriers and how the solution will achieve impact.

During the Concept Phase, the core team will have the opportunity to recruit additional team members with relevant skills and knowledge to support the objectives of the proposal. It may be appropriate for a broader range of stakeholders and beneficiaries to be considered for inclusion as members of a team as it expands.

b. Seed Phase

The Seed phase enables teams to undertake further stakeholder engagement and collaborative co-development of a prototype. The development of this prototype should be guided by the needs of stakeholders and beneficiaries and be informed by key measures of success identified through engagement with stakeholders and beneficiaries. During this process, the team should commence planning for further development and deployment of the solution.

The programme will only support pre-deployment/pre-commercial activities, however, as part of the Seed Phase it may be necessary for successful applicants to consider potential impact pathways as part of the project to fully scope solution deployment. In this context, teams should take into consideration the necessary requirements to facilitate this process, and it is anticipated that the collective skill set of the challenge team will support such activity.

c. Prize Phase

The winning team will develop an advanced prototype of their solution during the Prize Phase and finalise their plan for deployment with a view to translating the solution within this phase or shortly after the project end.

NOTE: Research Ireland reserves the right not to grant the Prize Award if the review panel does not identify a winning team.

Skills Development

In addition to the provision of funding, Research Ireland will organise training workshops during the Concept and Seed Phases to support the skills and knowledge development of the teams. The topics of these workshops are selected to complement team activities within the specific

phases and include, for example, Design Thinking, Theory of Change, and Communication Skills. Further details of these workshops will be provided to teams successful in securing funding under the programme. <u>The core team members will be expected to attend the training workshops</u>.

5. Who Can Apply?

a. Team Composition

The Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge is intended to support highly motivated, interdisciplinary and collaborative research teams, committed to developing transformative and sustainable solutions that will contribute to the challenge theme outlined in Section 3. Consideration should be given to all aspects of the proposed challenge/solution as well as the broader healthcare context to enable feasibility and deployment which may require expertise from multiple disciplines including STEM and the AHSS.

As such, applications to the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge <u>must identify</u> a core applicant/leadership team comprising:

- **Team Lead** (Lead Applicant) will have responsibility for managing the activities of the team, will provide research leadership and have overall responsibility for delivery of research programme objectives. The Team Lead is expected to have a demonstrable track record relevant to the proposed solution.
- **Team Co-Lead** (Co-lead Applicant) will provide research leadership as part of the research programme and should bring complementary expertise to that of the Team Lead as appropriate for the proposed solution.

In addition to research expertise, the team will include a **Societal Impact Champion (SIC)** who will provide sectoral leadership and advise on solution development. They 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. **

- **Societal Impact Champion** - It is expected that the Societal Impact Champion will come from a non-academic background and have appropriate experience in areas relevant to the societal impact. The Societal Impact Champion may come from, for example: public sector/government, non-governmental organisations, charities, patient advocacy, philanthropy or civil society.

** Where a Societal Impact Champion is not identified as part of an application, a clear outline as to why this was not possible must be provided as part of the application in addition to a plan for how one will be identified and recruited (see Section 7i) . Such applications, if successful, must have a Societal Impact Champion in place no later than the end of month 3 of the Concept Phase. Failure to secure a Societal Impact Champion by this time may affect a team's ability to progress in the programme. Note that teams funded under the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge will undertake an extensive process of stakeholder engagement during the Concept Phase of the programme which may facilitate identification of a Societal Impact Champion.

Teams successful at application stage will have the opportunity to expand during the course of their award and be able to recruit additional researchers (e.g. at postgraduate or postdoctoral career stage) or collaborators (e.g., researchers, beneficiaries, end-users). Applications may reference individuals outside the core team who are anticipated to play a future role as team members. In such cases, it is important to highlight the knowledge and expertise that these individuals will bring to the team.

b. Eligibility Criteria

Applications will be accepted where the Lead Applicant and Co-Applicant satisfy the following eligibility criteria.

- Be a **member of academic staff** of an eligible Research Body[22] (permanent or with a contract that covers the period of the award),

  or

- Be a **contract researcher** with a contract that covers the period of the award (contract may be subject to receipt of the award),

  and

- Hold a PhD or equivalent. Please consult the Policy on PhD Equivalence[23] for further information[¶].

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[22] https://www.researchireland.ie/about/policies/eligible-research-bodies/
[23] Policy on PhD Equivalence

Applications will not be accepted where the lead applicant or co-applicant is a postgraduate researcher (e.g., MSc, MEng or PhD student).

In cases where the Lead and/or Co-Lead is a postdoctoral researcher, the application must include a Letter of Support from an established researcher confirming they will act as a mentor to the Lead/Co-Lead for the duration of the award (see Section 6i for further details).

NOTE: Members of the Core Team (Lead Applicant and Co-Applicant) are permitted to be named on only one application to the programme. Applicants who are already Lead or Co-Lead on an active Research Ireland Challenge Award (including a National Challenge Fund award) may be required to provide a plan to Research Ireland as to how they will manage concurrent awards if successful.

¶*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. Requests must be made by the Research Office of the host research body to Research Ireland by e-mail (challenges@researchireland.ie) and should include a completed narrative CV template, which must demonstrate evidence of appropriate research experience. In such cases, only current members of academic staff will be considered. The track record of eligible team members and their role in the team will be assessed as part of the review process. Eligibility for this call will not be considered in the assessment of eligibility for other Research Ireland funding calls and does not correspond to confirmation of PhD equivalence[24] .*

Research Ireland Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

Research Ireland is committed to building equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) within the Irish research and innovation sector. The Agency recognises that excellent research stems from diverse and inclusive teams, which reflect our society and the communities we serve. As such, Research Ireland aspires to proactively lead in driving the EDI agenda forward through the research and research teams that it funds.

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[24] This should be noted, for example, for the purpose of ensuring appropriate supervisory arrangements for PhD students. See https://www.researchireland.ie/about/policies/

In Research Ireland's External Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2023-2028[25]. increasing the number of women and members of Historically Underserved Communities[26] in Applicant Teams are key objectives. As such, women and members of Historically Underserved Communities are strongly encouraged to apply to this programme. Further details on application submission and success rates by gender (binary) can be found for historic programmes on the Research Ireland website.

Gender data fields on Research Ireland's Grants and Awards Management System, SESAME, have been expanded to encompass more inclusive gender identifiers. These expanded gender identifier fields support those objectives described in Research Ireland's External EDI Strategy, which aims to be a key driver of an inclusive research culture, lead in minimising barriers to participation in the research endeavour and ensure that its investment reflects the input of researchers that are representative of society, and thus the outputs are relevant to society. Gender data gathered will inform the diversity of the applicant group. It will help to inform future iterations of this and similar programme calls. The data gathered will also inform how we can best improve the representation of other Historically Underserved Communities, including individuals from underrepresented genders, in our portfolio of grants awarded.

Furthermore, as part of its EDI Strategy, Research Ireland also aims to increase awareness of the sex and gender dimension in research, by requesting that researchers demonstrate that they have considered any potential biological sex and/or socio-cultural gender aspects in their proposed research programme.

Conflict of Interest

Research Ireland recognises that applicants may have a prior relationship with an industry partner engaged in an application for funding to Research Ireland (e.g., industry consultancy role, founder of an academic spin-out company) which may be perceived as a conflict of interest. Where a potential conflict of interest exists, Research Ireland requires that it is disclosed by the applicant to Research Ireland and their Research Body and that any such situations are managed by the Research Body in accordance with the principles and mandates laid out in **Ireland's National IP Protocol 2019**.[27]

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[25] Gender and Maternity
[26] For the purposes of this Strategy, Historically Underserved Community encompasses a broad and diverse range of historically marginalised groups including but not limited to the nine protected grounds established in the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 and socioeconomic status.
[27]https://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/Reports-Publications/Ireland-s-National-IP-Protocol-2019-.pdf

6. Programme Review Process and Criteria

> **San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)**
>
> Research Ireland is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)[28] and, as such is aligning its review and evaluation processes with DORA principles. Research Ireland has reinforced its commitment to the core principles by joining DORA as a member[29]. To this end, all types of research output are recognised, and Research Ireland is committed to assessing the quality and impact of research through means other than journal-based metrics and research performance-based metrics such as impact factors and H-index. In the spirit of supporting open research and as a signatory to Ireland's National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2030[30] and a signatory of Plan S,[31] Research Ireland will also consider a commitment to making data and other types of research open and accessible. To complement these activities and further reinforce Research Ireland's commitment to the overarching objectives of the Narrative CV, Research Ireland is a signatory to the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment[32] and is a member of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).[33]

The Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge programme involves three stages of review: the Application, the end of Concept Phase, and the end of Seed Phase. Panel members secured by Research Ireland are internationally based experts in their respective fields and may be drawn from a range of backgrounds relevant to the challenge programme, including academia, industry, investment and civil society.

a. Application Stage Review

Following submission, applications are checked for eligibility[34]. Teams that submit applications that are not deemed eligible under the programme or do not strongly align with the programme remit will be notified and their application withdrawn. Following these checks, eligible applications are then assigned to a panel of international experts secured by Research Ireland.

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[28] https://sfdora.org/
[29] Contributor level membership.
[30] https://norf.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/National-Action-Plan-for-Open-Research-webversion.pdf
[31] https://www.coalition-s.org/
[32] https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2022/09/2022_07_19_rra_agreement_final.pdf
[33] https://coara.eu/
[34] Applications are checked for compliance with: non-technical mandatory criteria (e.g. all sections complete, page numbers not exceeded); technical mandatory criteria (e.g. any publication and prior funding requirements, alignment with the legal remit of Research Ireland and alignment with Research Priority Areas, where required); and any other requirements outlined in the Call Document.

Applications will be assessed by the Panel against the evaluation criteria provided below (Section 6c). Only applications deemed to be of both excellent research quality and demonstrating strong impact potential will be recommended for funding by the Panel. Applicant teams whose proposals do not proceed will be notified by Research Ireland.

The identity of international experts who conduct the application stage reviews shall remain confidential and will not be disclosed to applicants. Research Ireland shall not be liable for the release of information concerning proposals to third parties by those international peer reviewers involved in the review process.

Reviewers engaged by Research Ireland are required to abide by the Reviewer Code of Conduct[35]. The submission of an application to Research Ireland shall be construed as consent by the applicant(s) to participate in the peer-review process. Research Ireland reserves the right to return applications without review where they do not meet the eligibility criteria.

b. Concept and Seed Phase Progress Reviews

The review of progress at the end of the Concept and Seed Phases will be undertaken by a sitting panel of international experts. This process will involve the completion and submission of a progress report to Research Ireland at both stages (approx. 4 weeks before the panel date) and an interview with the Panel. Guidance on progress reports will be provided to applicants at the start of each phase.

At the conclusion of the Concept Phase, representatives from the team will be invited to present their concept to a panel of international experts drawn from a range of sectors including academia, industry, entrepreneurship, and investment. This Panel will assess the progress in the Concept Phase and plans for the Seed Phase against the evaluation criteria below (Section 6c) and make recommendations to the teams to maximise their impact potential. Based on the outcome of the panel review, all teams deemed competitive may progress to the Seed Phase as finalists. During the 12-month Seed Phase, teams may use the remaining award amount. Those teams that do not progress at the end of the Concept Phase will have their funding decommitted.

Prior to completion of the Seed Phase, the remaining teams will submit a progress report to Research Ireland, followed by a final presentation and interview with a sitting panel of international experts. Based on the evaluation criteria below (Section 6c), the Panel will assess progress made in developing the prototype and validation of the deployment strategy within the

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[35] https://www.researchireland.ie/about/policies/

Seed Phase, plans for the next phase, and the potential for societal and economic impact. At the end of this assessment, the panel will recommend an overall winning team that will receive the Prize award. If the review panel does not identify a winning team, a Prize Award may not be granted.

Research Ireland reserves the right to modify the review process. Applicants will be notified of any relevant modification to the review procedure. The final funding decisions are at the sole and exclusive discretion of Research Ireland.

c. Evaluation Criteria

At all stages (Application, the end of Concept and Seed Phases), projects will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- **Quality, experience and ambition of the applicant team** – Consideration will be given to the team's ambition, complementarity of expertise, the appropriateness of its composition for addressing the proposed challenge and that necessary partnerships/collaborations are in place to deliver the proposed impact. Consideration will also be given to the quality, significance and relevance of the individual team members' research track record and key achievements (in particular, generation and translation of knowledge, development of Individuals, leadership, teamwork and collaboration, delivering societal or economic impact, and stakeholder engagement[36]). The review will make note of individuals' career stages and research disciplines, taking into account any periods of leave.

- **Understanding of the challenge/problem** – Consideration will be given to recognition and articulation of significance of the problem identified and any insights contributing to its formulation. Any stakeholder/beneficiary engagement undertaken in validation of the problem will also be taken into account.

- **Novelty of the proposed solution, including its potential to deliver disruptive innovation** – Consideration will be given to the innovation potential of the overall proposed solution, including the novelty of the technology, comprehension of the current state of the art, value for money, the sex and gender dimension etc. Note that novelty may arise through combination or convergence of technologies in a new or unforeseen way.

- **Transformative societal impact potential of the solution** – Consideration will be given to the potential for the solution to create significant beneficial societal change or impact. Any

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[36] Examples are provided in the Applicant CV template, which is available on the Programme website.

stakeholder/beneficiary engagement undertaken in validation of the solution will also be taken into account.

- **Feasibility of execution within the budget and timeframe permitted** – Consideration will be given to the feasibility of delivering the project within the budget and timeframe of the Concept and Seed Phases and likelihood that this can lead to successful delivery of the solution during the Prize Award Phase.

> **NOTE**: The Sex and Gender Dimension Statement will be evaluated as part of **Understanding of the challenge/problem, Novelty of the proposed solution, Transformative societal impact potential of the solution** and **Feasibility of execution** components of the review, if relevant.

7. Application Process

Applications to the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge must be submitted through SESAME, Research Ireland's online grants and awards management system in advance of the application deadline. Full details of this application process can be found in the **Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge SESAME Guide** available for download from the call webpage.

Applying through SESAME involves completion of an online form with details including team members, project idea summary, alignment to research areas, and requested budget. In addition, applicants will be required to upload information in PDF documents. These uploaded documents must use the templates provided on the call webpage.

If your submission relates to a previous unsuccessful application to any Research Ireland scheme, a statement referencing the previous application and explaining the differences must be provided as part of the SESAME application and must make reference to reviewer comments where relevant. This statement will assist Research Ireland staff in the assessment of the eligibility of a revised application and will not be shared with reviewers. See Resubmission policy for further details[37]. Given the time commitment involved with leading on a Research Ireland Challenge award, Research Ireland may follow up with individuals managing other/multiple Research Ireland grants to provide justification and rationale for how they would manage two or more major awards. This information is provided for planning purposes by Research Ireland staff and will not be shared with reviewers.

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[37] Resubmission of Grant Proposals

Sections of the Application

Applications to the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge comprise several sections as described below.

a. Summary of Idea

This section of the application allows you to provide a summary of the idea you are proposing. Ensure that you describe what elements of the challenge/problem you intend to address and the proposed solution. Describe what is novel or unconventional about the approach, why you expect it to succeed and how it will deliver impact.

b. Research Alignment

This section includes drop-down questions for the applicants to identify the research areas most relevant to their proposed projects.

c. Team, Challenge/Problem, Solution & Societal Impact

For this section, please download the application form template from the challenge website. The completed application form should be converted to PDF and uploaded in SESAME as part of your application.

- **Team Profile:** Applicants should provide a clear description on how, through its composition, complementarity and formation, the team brings a unique perspective in addressing this problem. Applicants are advised not to provide biographies of team members rather to convey the team's ambition and its ability to deliver. Information on the team will be complemented by the curricula vitae submitted as part of the application;

- **Challenge/Problem:** Applicants should describe clearly the specific challenge/problem that will be addressed, articulate their understanding of it and identify key issues or barriers in addressing this problem. As part of this description, insights from engaging with stakeholders/beneficiaries, and how this has validated the problem should be included;

- **Solution:** Applicants should clearly describe the solution concept proposed. This should include a description of how the proposed solution is novel and/or unconventional in its approach, what is its current stage of development, what is the current state-of-the-art and how will the proposed approach overcome current barriers. Applicants should include consideration of ethical or regulatory issues where relevant. Evidence that the solution is feasible/viable associated risks should be provided. Applicants may consider providing a number of high-level milestones/deliverables (and achievement times);

- **Societal Impact:** Applicants should outline the societal impact that their proposed solution can achieve in Ireland as well as in the broader health and wellbeing landscape. Applicants should outline outcomes their solution is expected to deliver, as well as an estimated timeframe for delivery.

> **NOTE:** As described in Section 4, successful teams will be expected to further refine and validate their understanding of the challenge/problem and the solution concept through stakeholder engagement during the Concept Phase. Research Ireland will provide the teams with guidance and training during this process.

e. Ethical Issues

In preparing your application to the programme, please consult the Guidance for Applicants on Ethical and Scientific Issues.[38]

f. Sex and Gender Dimension in Research Statement

In accordance with the Research Ireland External Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy[39], all applicants must complete a statement articulating the consideration of biological sex and/or social gender variables in their research programme. Please consult the Guidance for Applicants on Ethical and Scientific Issues[40] for resources on how to address the sex and/or gender dimension of research in your grant.

Do not include information on how you have addressed gender equality, diversity and inclusion in your research team/environment; this should be addressed in the body of the proposal and/or in your CV, as appropriate.

To complete this section, please consider the following questions:
1. Is sex as a biological variable taken into account in the research design, methods, analysis and interpretation, and/or dissemination of findings?
2. Is gender as a socio-cultural factor taken into account in the research design, methods, analysis and interpretation, and/or dissemination of findings?

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[38] Guidance on Ethical and Scientific Issues
[39] Gender and Maternity
[40] Guidance on Ethical and Scientific Issues

If the answer is yes, please describe how sex and/or gender considerations will be integrated into your research proposal.

If no, please explain why sex and/or gender are not applicable to your research proposal.

g. Budget

This section should be used to describe the budget (direct costs) and resources needed. 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). Given the phased structure of the programme, the requested budget and resources for the Seed phase may not be as detailed. It is recommended that applicants maximise the budget requested at each stage. In this section:

- Provide a breakdown of the indicative eligible direct costs (in €) associated with the application.
- Please review the Grant Budget Policy and Team Member Salary Scales for eligible costs and salary levels for research staff. [41]
- Please include any subcontracting to be undertaken in the Materials & Consumables category.
- Please provide a high-level justification for Concept Phase requests

Teaching replacement costs (Technological Universities/Institutes of Technology)

Team Leads and Co-Leads in Technological Universities (TUs) or in 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. It is noted that postdoctoral researchers based in any eligible research body who are acting as a Team Lead or Co-Lead may include up to 100% of their salary as part of the budget request in line with their time commitment to the project.

In addition to direct costs, Research Ireland also makes an indirect or overhead contribution to the host research body, which is reflected as a percentage (30%) of the direct costs (excluding equipment). Overheads are payable as a contribution to the Research Body for the indirect costs

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[41] https://www.researchireland.ie/about/policies/financial/

of hosting research programmes funded by Research Ireland and are intended to enable the research body to develop internationally competitive research infrastructure and support services.

h. Curricula Vitae

CVs of the Lead and Co-Lead Applicants, using the template provided on the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge call webpage, must be completed (max. 3 pages) and uploaded. **Please click on "Save Draft" after upload.** The current template allows for the provision of additional information such as that relating to periods of leave from research, where relevant.

The Societal Impact Champion is <u>not</u> required to use the CV template provided and may use a format of their choosing. However, the overall length of the CV must not exceed 3 pages.

The CVs of collaborators, or research team members are <u>not</u> required, but appropriate references to experience and expertise of team members can be made in the Team section of the application form.

Reference to indicators/metrics such as journal impact factor, h-index and total number of publications are not permitted. If these indicators/metrics are included in CVs or the Team section, they will be redacted prior to expert review.

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i. Letters of Support

As part of an application to the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge, Letters of Support must be provided as follows:

- Letter(s) of Support from the **Host Research Bod(y/ies) of the Lead <u>and</u> Co-Lead applicants** (max. 2 pages)**,** which should comment on how the applicant's expertise aligns with the proposed research, confirm eligibility of the applicants, and detail the infrastructure, services and research environment available to the applicant as relevant for the proposal. In addition, in cases where team members will be transferring from another active Research Ireland grant, an outline of the management plan (i.e., a description of how the individual will be replaced on the original award) to assure how these awards progress satisfactorily should be provided. Also note that the Host Research Body Letter of Support should contain a description of the institutional policy regarding management of conflicts of interest. Members of the applicant team may be located at different eligible research bodies. In this case, funding awarded under the programme will be administered through

the Research Body of the Lead Applicant.

- Where any applicant is a postdoctoral researcher, a Letter of Support from **an established researcher from the same Host Research Body endorsing the postdoctoral researcher** must be provided (max. 2 pages). This Letter of Support must confirm that the established researcher has agreed to act as mentor for the duration of the award. In cases where the established researcher is not the current mentor/supervisor, the Letter of Support must outline how this situation will be managed and must be countersigned by the current mentor/supervisor of the postdoctoral researcher. The Letter of Support must include details of the postdoctoral researcher's current role and funding arrangements including remuneration level. The grant identification code and grant title under which the postdoctoral researcher is currently funded should also be provided. If an established researcher is co-applying with the postdoctoral applicant, they can be the mentor of their co-applicant, if appropriate.

- A Letter of Support from the **Societal Impact Champion** outlining their role in the team and how they propose to actively guide/support the team to deliver impact (max. 2 pages). If a Societal Impact Champion is not identified as part of an application, the academic applicants should, in place of this letter, provide a statement (max. 1 page) outlining why this was not possible and providing an overview of how they intend to identify and recruit a Societal Impact Champion.

NOTE: No additional Letters of Support may be included at the application stage. Any additional/unsolicited Letters of Support will be removed from an application.

Research Body Approval

For an application to be accepted, it must be authorised for submission by the host research body of the Lead Applicant. It should be noted that Research Body submission of an application confirms that the Research Ireland Grant General Terms & Conditions have been read and understood.[42] Submission may only be made by an authorised Research Body representative (e.g. the Research Office). In particular, the Research Body is approving:

- The eligibility of the applicants;

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[42] https://www.researchireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Research-Ireland-Grant-GTCs.pdf

- That the applicants are, or will be upon receipt of the grant, recognised as employees of the Research Body for the duration of the grant;

- That the requested budget including salaries/stipends, equipment, travel and consumables are in line with accepted institutional guidelines;

- The availability of infrastructure within the institution as outlined by the applicant in the research proposal;

- That the proposed research programme has not been funded by other sources;

- That the project is in full agreement with all legal and regulatory matters governing research in Ireland;

- That relevant ethical and regulatory approval has been or will be sought and must be granted prior to the award commencing;

- That relevant licences will be in place at the time of grant;

- That the details provided in relation to research funding history i.e., current, pending or expired grants, as detailed in the application, are valid and accurate;

- That permission from all team members and collaborators has been obtained, such that Research Ireland may receive their personal information, and may process such data for the purpose of peer review;

- That the information supplied in the application is correct and the research proposal is the applicant's own work.

Failure to comply with requirements outlined in this call document, will deem an application ineligible resulting in its withdrawal prior to expert review.

Research Ireland 's Grant Conditions shall govern the administration of Research Ireland grants and awards to the exclusion of this and any other oral, written, or recorded statement.

8. State Aid and Intellectual Property Management

As per Research Ireland's Grant Conditions (inclusive of Research Ireland's General Terms & Conditions[43], Letters of Offer and Research Ireland Policy documents[44]), all Research Ireland funding granted is subject to, and must be compliant with, State aid legislation based on Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).[45] Namely, research

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[43] https://www.researchireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Research-Ireland-Grant-GTCs.pdf
[44] https://www.researchireland.ie/about/policies/
[45] Commission Notice on the notion of State aid as referred to in Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union TABLE OF CONTENTS (europa.eu)

activities undertaken as part of a Grant awarded under the Research Ireland Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge, and agreed to subject to Research Ireland 's Grant Conditions, must be "non-economic" in nature and be designed to ensure that any funding received does not, directly or indirectly, give rise to the granting of State aid.

The arrangements related to the management of IP arising out of the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge Programme are the responsibility of the Research Bodies and must comply with the practices and procedures described in the national IP protocol document Ireland's National IP Protocol 2019[46]. They shall reflect the collaborative nature of the project, the level of commitment of partners, and compliance with State aid regulations.

Where a proposed programme of research involves collaboration with an 'undertaking'[47] or industry party, the activities *must* comply with the definition of "effective collaboration"[48] and the conditions relating to the allocation between the parties of the results and/or intellectual property rights arising from the collaboration as per the 2022 Framework for State Aid for research and development and innovation (2022/C 414/01) (the "Framework"[49]). See 'Guidance on State Aid for applicants to, and recipients of, Research Ireland Grant funding' for further information.[50]

Where a proposed programme of research activities involves a collaboration with an industry party or "undertaking", for all or part of the term of the Grant, grant holders must demonstrate compliance with the conditions of "effective collaboration" and complete and "**Industry Collaboration Form" (ICF).**[51] The ICF is to assist grant holders in defining the relationship with the relevant industry partners in order to comply with the conditions of "effective collaboration." Research Ireland require that the ICF is completed and returned to Research Ireland on or before the date that the Collaborative Research (or Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement has been 'agreed' with, or signed by, the relevant partner(s). For the Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge, the form should be submitted by the Principal Investigator and uploaded to SESAME.

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[46] https://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/Reports-Publications/Ireland-s-National-IP-Protocol-2019-.pdf

[47] The concept of an "undertaking" under EU competition law rules is an entity that is engaged in an "economic activity" regardless of its legal status or the way that it is financed. An activity is economic in nature when it involves offering goods or services on a market.

[48] Effective Collaboration is defined at paragraph 28 of the RDI Framework2022 Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation (2022/C 414/01)

[49] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2022.414.01.0001.01.ENG

[50] State aid Guidance

[51] https://www.researchireland.ie/about/policies/state-aid/

A download of the ICF and related guidance, inclusive of an FAQ document, can be found on the Research Ireland website.[52]

A copy of each CRA arising from the Grant must be held on file by the relevant Research Body. Research Ireland may request a copy of the signed CRA to be provided (as advised in the Grant Terms & Conditions) and held on file by Research Ireland for audit purposes.

Applicants are advised to seek independent legal advice in advance of applying to Research Ireland for funding where further clarification is sought.

9. Data Management Plan

Good data governance and stewardship are key components of good research practice. **While Data Management Plans are not required to be submitted at the application stage of this programme, teams are encouraged to consider data management at an early stage in their project.** At the end of the Seed Phase, as part of the Seed Phase Progress Report, teams will be required to provide a 2-page Data Management Plan (DMP). In preparing this plan, consideration should be given to Guidance on Data Management Plans.[52] A DMP is a living document which details the procedures for careful handling of data and other research outputs. A DMP follows the data through the lifecycle of the programme of research[53], from collection to analysis and interpretation, sharing and dissemination, and long-term storage.

DMPs will be reviewed to ensure that they contain sufficient information on practices and standards as guided below; this assessment will be incorporated into the overall scoring criteria for the Research Programme section of the application. Although practices and standards vary across disciplines, Research Ireland recommends the use of Science Europe DMP templates and guidelines. Each DMP should include the following as appropriate to the programme or project[54]:

- Data description and collection or re-use of existing data
- Documentation and data quality
- Storage and backup during the research process
- Legal and ethical requirements, codes of conduct

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[52] https://www.researchireland.ie/about/policies/

[53] Research Ireland -funded research programmes, can range from a single research project to a collection of research projects encompassed in several work packages. The data management plan should reflect the relevant standards for individual research projects while describing a cohesive approach to managing data across the overall programme of research as appropriate.

[54] Based primarily on guidance provided by Science Europe: https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/practical-guide-to-the-international-alignment-of-research-data-management/ and supplemented by guidance from the European Research Council of the European Commission: https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/ERC_info_document-Open_Research_Data_and_Data_Management_Plans.pdf

- Data sharing and long-term preservation

Data management responsibilities and resources including institutional or project-specific resources dedicated to managing data and ensuring adherence with the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Re-usable).

10. Research Ireland 's Policies and Positions

In addition to complying with the Grant terms and Conditions, applicants are expected to be familiar and consult with Research Ireland policies/positions and with all relevant national policies when preparing their application to any programme. All members involved in the funded research should be apprised of the following non-exhaustive list of relevant policies. Please note that some policies are being updated to reflect the expanded remit of Research Ireland and in the interim, the existing polices of the legacy agencies should be followed.

- Animal Usage
- Research Integrity
- Maternity Supplement
- Appeals Process
- Child Protection
- Data Protection Policy
- Open Research
- Grant Budget Policy

As noted, Research Ireland's policies are under development and will be added to the Research Ireland website once finalised. For information on other policies:

- Visit https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/ if grant was formerly with Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)
- Visit https://research.ie/about-us/policies/ if grant was formerly with the Irish Research Council (IRC)

For any questions concerning Research Ireland, SFI or IRC policies, please email researchpolicy@researchireland.ie.

11. Further Information

Further information, including a guide to submitting an application on SESAME, an FAQ document, and the application templates related to the Research Ireland Innovating in Health and Wellbeing Challenge are available on the programme webpage. For additional queries please contact: challenges@researchireland.ie