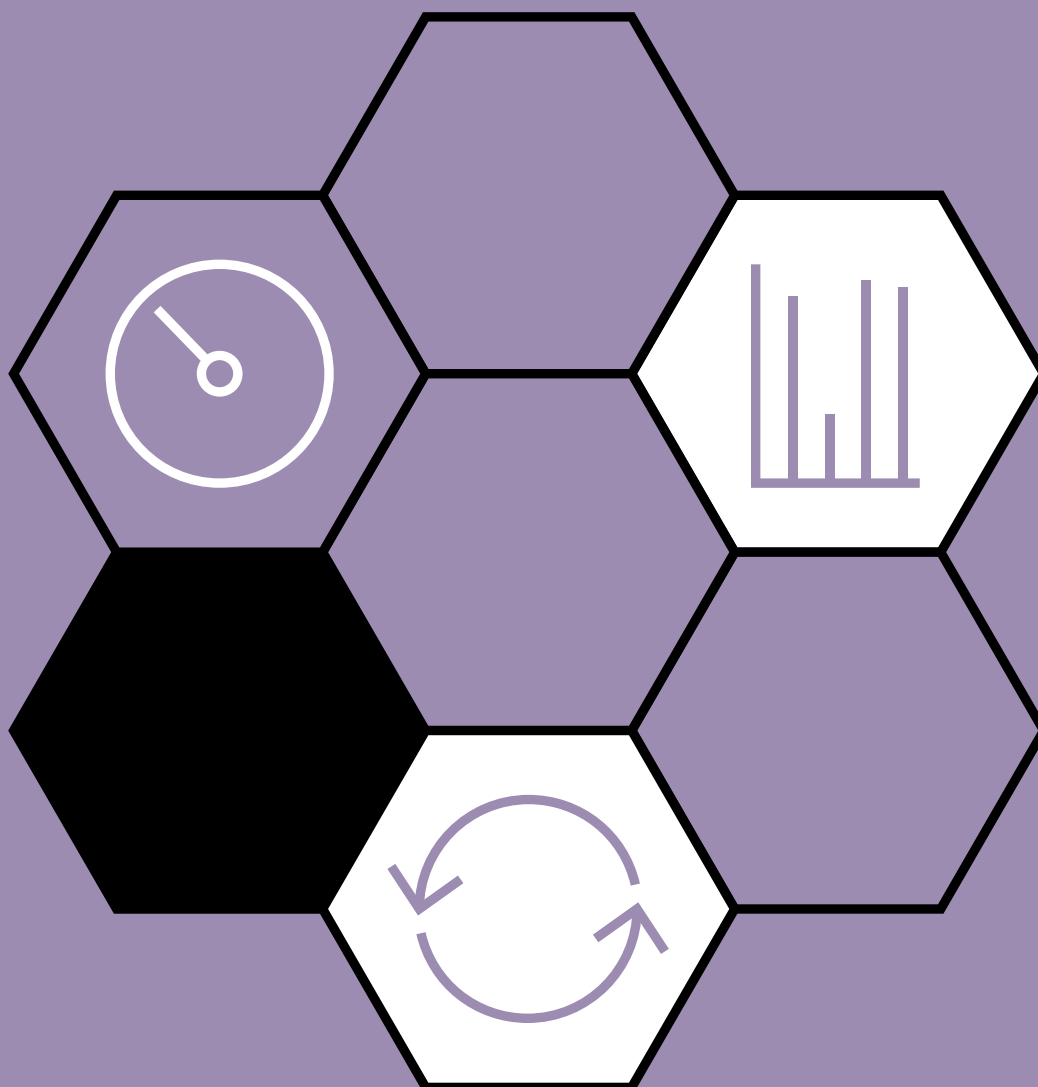


# COVID-19 Research Programme

Notes for Applicants



**Applications are currently being considered on a rolling basis.**

**All applications should be submitted via email using the COVID-19 Research Programme application form. An application form can be requested by emailing [covidresearch@health.org.uk](mailto:covidresearch@health.org.uk)**

We advise all potential applicants to familiarise themselves as early as possible with the application process.

Please ensure that you have read this **Notes for applicants** document, the **Frequently asked questions** document and the **Application form guidance** document before completing and submitting the application form.

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# The Health Foundation

**The Health Foundation is an independent charity committed to bringing about better health and health care for people in the UK.**

Our aim is a healthier population, supported by high quality health care that can be equitably accessed. We learn what works to make people's lives healthier and improve the health care system. From giving grants to those working at the front line to carrying out research and policy analysis, we shine a light on how to make successful change happen.

We make links between the knowledge we gain from working with those delivering health and health care and our research and analysis. Our aspiration is to create a virtuous circle, using what we know works on the ground to inform effective policymaking and vice versa.

We believe good health and health care are key to a flourishing society. Through sharing what we learn, collaborating with others and building people's skills and knowledge, we aim to make a difference and contribute to a healthier population. Further details about the organisation can be found at [www.health.org.uk](http://www.health.org.uk).

For more information visit:  
[www.health.org.uk](http://www.health.org.uk)



# COVID-19 Research Programme in brief

1

## 1.1 Overview

This call will support research which seeks to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in two discrete areas, which align with the Foundation's strategic priorities and expertise. We believe this call complements the existing research funding landscape. We hope to fund research which is highly applied and has direct relevance to policy and practice.

We wish to prioritise funding for UK-focused research projects exploring:

1

How **health and social care service delivery** has changed in light of COVID-19.

2

The impact of COVID-19 on **health inequalities and the wider determinants of health**.

The Health Foundation's COVID-19 Research Programme will provide funding for projects with a duration of **up to 12 months** (including start-up time) and a budget of around **£100,000 to £200,000** (per project). There are no deadlines for applications. We anticipate the call being open until September. We reserve the right to close the call early should we receive a high volume of applications. Applicants will receive a funding decision within 20–25 working days of receipt of their application. As a funder, we are committed to inclusion, and would encourage applicants who think they may have barriers to applying to contact us to discuss their concerns.

Our priority is to fund standalone projects; however, we may consider co-funding projects or providing additional funding for an existing research project to incorporate relevant COVID-19 related work in to its programme of activities. Please contact us to discuss this prior to submitting an application.

**If applicants wish to apply for additional funding for an existing project they should ensure:**

The research finishes within 12 months from when Health Foundation funding begins

They fully justify why the project needs combined/additional funding, and why our Health Foundation funding is needed

They provide written confirmation that the other funding body is happy with a co-funding model when applying to us.

Applicants must be able to demonstrate that they will produce tangible outputs by the end of the project (ie within 12 months), with direct relevance to policy and/or practice. We want the findings of this research to inform policy and/or service delivery decisions about the future of health and care services, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Applicants should read this **Notes for applicants** document, as well as the **Frequently asked questions** document, the **Application form guidance** document and the application form itself, before submitting an application.



Priority areas for this call

2



This call is designed to support short-term applied research projects which address important questions relating to one of the following priority areas:

1

How **health and social care service delivery** has changed in light of COVID-19.

2

The impact of COVID-19 on **health inequalities and the wider determinants of health.**

This call is seeking to fund research which is highly applied, where there is a clear pathway for the findings to be translated in to action. The outbreak has had a significant impact on the ways in which data can currently be collected (eg focus groups, interviews). We encourage researchers to be creative, inclusive and pragmatic when selecting the research methods for their projects.

Applicants are encouraged to make use of all appropriate data sources, including the new NHSX data sharing service which was set up to support policymakers, commissioners, planners and researchers involved in efforts against COVID-19. We strongly encourage applications that use qualitative or mixed methods research approaches.

A detailed description of each of the priority areas is given below.

## 2.1 Health and social care service delivery

# 1

We are keen to support health services research which explores the impact of COVID-19 on one or more of the following:

- service and pathway changes
- cultural and behavioural changes
- resilience and learning.

We welcome applications concerned with health care, social care and the interface between health and social care. We welcome applications which examine these issues in any of the four UK nations, or look for lessons by comparing their experiences. We strongly encourage applicants to apply an inequalities lens to their research where appropriate.

Examples of questions applicants might seek to answer through their research are detailed below.

### 2.2 Service and pathway changes

- What changes in practices, pathways, workforce models and services (within or across organisations) are happening in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK? What has the impact of these changes been for patients and service users, staff, and health and care organisations? What can we learn from these changes to strengthen and support service delivery in the longer term? Which changes may offer longer-term benefits if retained, and what ongoing support might be needed to sustain these?
- What are we learning from the current situation about the rapid implementation and adoption of service changes and technologies? How successful have they been, and what lessons are there for how we can support innovation and the spread of innovation better in future?

# 1

## 2.3 Cultural and behavioural changes

- What changes in culture, behaviour and norms are we seeing in the health and care system in response to the pandemic, and what can we learn from them? For example, for health care and social care workers, this could include changes such as less hierarchical cultures, more distributed decision making, more agility or weaker professional boundaries.
- What changes are we seeing in how service users and local communities are engaging with services during the pandemic? What has the impact been and what are the lessons for service design and delivery beyond the current pandemic?

## 2.4 Resilience and learning

- What factors are supporting organisational resilience (the ability to adapt safely to pressures and changes in order to sustain required operations) as providers respond to the current pandemic? How can we learn from this to ensure health and care organisations can be as resilient as possible in future?
- How have organisations and teams been innovating and learning during this period, including identifying and adopting innovations from organisations and teams elsewhere? To what extent is this happening, and in which organisations? What factors have supported this activity?
- How have changes in skill mix and the rapid creation of new roles and teams been managed by providers and regulators? What has their impact been and what lessons are there for care quality and staff experience in future?

## 2.5 Health inequalities and the wider determinants of health

# 2

We are keen to support research which explores the impact of COVID-19 on existing and emerging inequalities in health outcomes and the wider determinants of health. Specifically, we are looking for research which informs ongoing policy development and the response within the next 12 months by:

- identifying the unequal impacts of COVID-19 and policy responses to the pandemic on health outcomes and the determinants of health across different groups in society
- highlighting priority areas for policy action to prevent long-term negative outcomes becoming entrenched, both where these widen existing inequalities and for emergent areas
- making sure the impacts of COVID-19 are better understood.

We encourage proposals investigating the impact of COVID-19 on different population groups. These groups may be defined by protected characteristics (eg age, sex, race or ethnicity and disability) or other characteristics such as social class, income or the presence of caring responsibilities.

We would welcome proposals that look at how multiple inequalities and risk factors combine or interact. We encourage proposals investigating the impact on those facing multiple extreme vulnerabilities (eg homelessness and substance abuse).

We strongly encourage applications that take a systems approach and seek to understand the multiple and interacting factors at play to determine risk and outcomes in different groups.

Priority area

# 2

While research must be relevant to the UK context, projects may include appropriate and meaningful international comparisons. We would welcome proposals that consider the impact of COVID-19 on/in different local areas or regions across the UK, either with a specific local focus or by making comparisons across the four nations.

Examples of questions applicants might seek to answer through their research are:

How have young people (aged 12–24) been affected by the measures to date and what may COVID-19 mean for their long-term social and economic outcomes?

- What are the social, cultural, economic or political factors that may account for disparities in health outcomes for groups particularly affected by COVID-19, such as people from ethnic minorities?
- How far does the impact of COVID-19 risk creating new inequalities, entrench existing inequalities or reduce them?

We have included some clarification of key terms in the Appendix.



## Criteria and eligibility

3

### 3.1 Who can apply?

The programme is an open award programme, available to suitable qualified and experienced research teams based in the UK.

Project teams will need to demonstrate that they have strong research and analytical skills relevant to the project; adequate systems of information and/or research governance; and experience in project management and delivery.

We would encourage applications from multidisciplinary teams combining expertise from a broad range of disciplines, including (but not limited to) public/population health, economics, geography, anthropology, sociology and other social sciences.

We strongly encourage applications involving patients, publics and people with lived experience.

Researchers who are currently in receipt of a Health Foundation award should contact their Grant Manager in the first instance to discuss varying their existing award, instead of applying for funding via this call. If a variation to their existing award is not appropriate, applicants will need to demonstrate within their application that they have the capacity to work on both projects within the agreed timescales.

### 3.2 Selection criteria

**When selecting proposals to fund, we will look for evidence of the following:**

Strong alignment with the priority areas of this call.

Addressing a pressing COVID-19 related knowledge gap, with findings that will be relevant to policy/service delivery decisions.

A strong, robust research methodology that is feasible and well-planned.

A researcher or team with the right strengths, expertise and credibility to deliver the research.

Value for money.



### 3.3 What we will not fund

**The COVID-19 Research Programme will not support:**

Research which does not address one of the two priority areas.

The cost of product or technology development as a sole purpose the project.

Costs where a core component of the project is supporting professional and personal development.

Basic scientific or epidemiological research on the causes of disease, including biomedical or genomic research.

Research focusing on biomedical or genetic factors as determinants of health inequalities.

Clinical or drug efficacy research, including clinical trials.

Proposals which are solely or mainly service developments or needs assessments.

Research focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on individuals' health behaviours, such as diet, physical activity, or alcohol and tobacco consumption.







# Governance, audience and dissemination approach

# 4

## 4.1 Audience

We anticipate the key audience for the findings of the research funded under this call being broad. It could include senior officials in government departments responsible for key areas of health, economic and social policy (DHSC, DWP, DfE, HM Treasury and MHCLG), public health agencies (Public Health England, Public Health Wales, NHS Health Scotland, the Public Health Agency), clinical commissioners, NHS Trusts and Health Boards, national and local policy communities, academic research communities and leaders at the front line of care delivery. The audiences for your research findings – and how you wish to engage with them – should be clearly stated in your application.

## 4.2 Dissemination

We expect research funded through this programme to be widely disseminated, especially through leading peer reviewed journals and conferences. We would also encourage researchers to consider innovative methods of dissemination where appropriate. The mandatory, formal output from each project will be an end of grant report.

Applicants will be required to submit a brief dissemination plan as part of their application. The Health Foundation may work with grant holders to develop and iterate this into a detailed knowledge mobilisation plan as their award progresses.

We urge applicants to read the **Joint statement on sharing research data and findings relevant to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak** and adhere to its principles. We encourage applicants to publish on pre-print servers and in open access journals. The Health Foundation supports open access publication. We ask that applicants do not include the cost of open access publishing in their proposals but to contact us directly when they wish to publish in an open access journal.

Where appropriate, we will explore ways to synthesise and disseminate learning across the research programme, to leverage greater impact. This may involve publishing blogs and think pieces. It may involve hosting virtual events for grant holders, to share knowledge, insights and experiences with each other.

### 4.3 Research governance and management

The chosen grant holders will have demonstrated as part of the assessment process that they have governance procedures that are consistent with the Health Foundation's expectations. Applications will be subject to rigorous review. Recommendations for funding will be made by a panel of experts and final funding decisions will be ratified by the Health Foundation. The grant holders will be responsible for obtaining all ethical approvals required for the project. Projects will be expected to meet organisational and legal information governance requirements. This will be assessed during the application process.

Award agreements will be drafted, agreed and signed rapidly to enable research to start as soon as possible. A draft Health Foundation award agreement is available on the **programme webpage** and applicants are expected to ensure they and the administering organisation are content with the agreement prior to applying for funding.

Progress of the projects will be monitored through regular update meetings between the Health Foundation Research Manager and the lead of the external research teams. A group of Health Foundation staff will form a Quality Assurance group to monitor the progress of the individual projects and the portfolio of awards made through this programme.

### 4.4 The budget

We anticipate funding projects with budgets in the range of **£100,000 to £200,000** for up to **12 months** (including start-up phase).

Please note that as a charity we will fund only the full directly incurred costs of the research. **We do not fund overheads.** Furthermore, the research will be supported as a charitable grant and, as such, is not liable for VAT.



# Application and selection process

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Please read all documentation available on the **programme webpage** before applying. This includes a draft award agreement. Please check that the organisation responsible for administering the funds is able to sign up to the conditions detailed in the agreement **before** you apply for funding. Any queries should be sent to **covidresearch@health.org.uk**.

To assist in preparing your application, a list of responses to frequently asked questions has been prepared and is available for download. Further details of the application process are provided below.

As a funder, we are committed to inclusion, and would encourage applicants who think they may have barriers to applying to contact us to discuss their concerns.

## 5.1 How to apply

Application forms can be obtained by **covidresearch@health.org.uk**.

Applicants must submit a completed application form and related documents in a single PDF file. You will also be required to submit a detailed budget using the Excel budget template spreadsheet, alongside your application form. All proposals should be sent to **covidresearch@health.org.uk**

There is no deadline for submission of applications, and we aim to provide you with a funding decision within 20–25 working days. Subject to the volume of applications received, we reserve the right to close the call at any time. Please see the **programme webpage** for more details.

### Applications will be reviewed by senior staff at the Health Foundation against the following criteria:

**Scope:** the extent to which the application aligns with the priority areas.

**Rationale:** the importance of the COVID-19 related knowledge gap the application addresses.

**Research plan:** is the methodology robust, feasible and appropriate?

**Impact:** will the findings be relevant to policy and/or service delivery decisions?

**Research team:** does the team have the right strengths, expertise and credibility to deliver the research?

**Value for money:** is the budget appropriate for a project of this kind?

Proposals rated most highly against the above criteria will go through to the next stage of assessment.

## 5.2 External review panel

Applications rated most highly will then be reviewed by a panel of experts. This panel will include academic researchers and staff from other relevant research organisations.

**Each application will be assessed against the following criteria:**

**Quality and technical merit of the research plan and team:** is this good research?

**The broader policy issues that the project is seeking to address:** is the research relevant to pressing concerns in policy/practice?

**The wider funding landscape and emerging research priorities:** does this proposal address emerging research priorities? Does it duplicate any recently funded work?

**The balance of the programme portfolio:** does this proposal complement the strategic priorities of the Health Foundation? Does it complement other work we have funded via this call?

To support panel members who are reviewing applications which seek to study inequalities experienced by particular groups of people (e.g. related to their ethnicity, sexuality or disability) as a significant component of the research, we have provided them with a list of questions to consider.

These questions are not intended to be a checklist, but rather to help reviewers identify any potential red flags in applications.

- How were people from the groups being studied involved in shaping the research proposal and questions the research is aiming to address?
- What is the nature of their involvement in the project i.e. as a part of the research team, part of an advisory panel, as a paid consultant, or as a collaborator?
- Are there plans to involve people from the groups being studied in the interpretation of findings?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the application and its proposed methods in relation to the group of people they are proposing to study? Have they considered relevant inequality issues (eg: race as a social construct, the impact of poverty or deprivation)?
- To what extent does the application address or contribute to our understanding of the historical injustices or marginalisation the group of study have experienced?
- Could the research design exacerbate or help take steps to minimise the historical injustices or marginalisation the group of study have experienced?
- Do the applicants explain their sampling approaches or how data categories will be established and analysed?
- Do applicants who seek to use quantitative methods understand and acknowledge the limitations and weaknesses of the data-sets they propose to use?
- Does the applicant indicate they aim to contextualise their findings within the appropriate historical, sociocultural or political contexts?
- Is there potential for the study findings to be used to stereotype or stigmatise the groups being studied? If so, what plans do the applicants have to mitigate these risks?

The panel will make funding recommendations to the Directors of the Health Foundation, who will formally review and ratify the panel's recommendations. Please note that the final decision to fund an application formally lies with the Foundation's Directors.

Decisions should be communicated within 25 working days of your application being received. Projects are expected to begin as soon as possible after the award agreement has been signed by both parties.

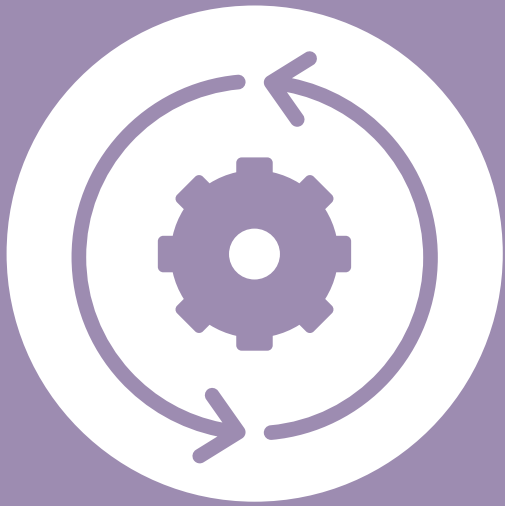


Further information

6



If you have queries about the application process which have not been answered in this document or in our **Frequently asked questions** document, please email **[covidresearch@health.org.uk](mailto:covidresearch@health.org.uk)** in the first instance. We will endeavour to reply within five working days.



# Appendix

7

The **wider (or social) determinants of health** refer to the social, cultural, political, economic, commercial and environmental factors that shape the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These include but are not limited to our early years, education and employment opportunities; our housing; our social networks; and where we live and the extent to which it facilitates exercise, a good diet and social connection.

**Health outcomes** relate to objective and subjective measures of physical and mental health, including those not directly resulting from COVID-19 infection, such as outcomes for pre-existing conditions.

The **impact of COVID-19** is a broad term covering:

- the direct impacts of the virus, such as the consequences of infection
- impacts resulting directly from the UK and devolved governments' measures in response to the virus, such as the consequences of economic measures (eg Universal Credit claims) and sociocultural measures (eg social distancing)
- impacts resulting from the varied implementation of these measures (eg employer-specific implementation of furloughing).

**The Health Foundation**

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