COVID-19 and Stroke Grant Award
Guidance for Applicants

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This document is intended to be used in conjunction with the Conditions of Award to assist the completion of the Stroke Association COVID-19 and Stroke Grant Award application form.

If you have any questions, please email research@stroke.org.uk and we will get back to you as soon as we can.

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Stroke Association COVID-19 and Stroke Grant Award
The Stroke Association is the only medical charity working exclusively for stroke illness. The Stroke Association supports research directly related to stroke illness and stroke related illness.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 at the end of 2019, there were reports emerging from China of patients with the disease also experiencing neurological complications including stroke. At first these cases seemed to be isolated and rare, however as the virus spread there were more reports of stroke in patients with COVID-19.

Initial findings from the CoroNerve collaborative, a UK-wide study of the neurological features of COVID-19, showed that in just a three-week period there were 153 reports of neurological complications in COVID-19 patients with 53 of these being ischaemic stroke. However, we do not know if there is a causal link or what the increase in stroke risk may be.

It is known that some viruses are able to cross into the brain and cause damage, therefore the findings from COVID-19 aren't completely unexpected; however, how the SARS-CoV-2 virus can cause damage to the brain is still unknown. Furthermore, we do not know which patients are particularly at risk of neurological complications, how we may be able to detect this, and how these strokes could be prevented.

This call is focused on funding research addressing these questions to understand the potential causal links and mechanisms between COVID-19 and stroke.

Award amount and duration
These awards are for up to **£60,000** over a period of up to 12 months. In the application form you are asked to provide a proposed start and end date and project duration. The adjudication process of applications will be completed and awards made by the end of December 2020. We request that awards start within 6 months of the Stroke Association informing the applicant of the final decision.

Launch of funding call: **Monday 24th August**
Deadline for applications: 5pm on **Monday 19th October**

Scope of the funding call
This call is focused on supporting any primary or secondary research that advances our understanding of the causal links and potential mechanisms between COVID-19 and stroke. It is anticipated that the findings from this call will lead to larger scale grants from national funders.

We welcome grant proposals in data analyses, epidemiological analyses, systematic reviews, basic laboratory science or early developmental/proof of concept studies. We are not expecting to fund new cohort or clinical studies through this funding scheme.

Research eligible for this call will be focused one of the following areas:
- Basic, pre-clinical and early-stage research to understand the underlying mechanisms of COVID-19 and how it is causing stroke.
- Increasing understanding of what makes some people with COVID-19 more susceptible to stroke.
- Links between COVID-19 and the subtype of stroke, and mechanisms involved.
- Looking for biomarkers or other ways to detect potential stroke risk in COVID-19 patients.
- How strokes could be prevented in COVID-19 patients.
- Whether there is a need for the acute stroke treatment in COVID-19 patients to be different to the standard of care for strokes unrelated to COVID-19.

Research that is not eligible for funding in this call:
- Association and causal links between stroke survivors having poorer recovery from COVID-19 infection.
- Management of stroke survivors who contract or who have recovered from COVID-19.
- Changes required to the stroke-care pathway as a result of the pandemic.

There are several large collaborative COVID-19 research studies that are providing infrastructure or platforms to investigate the virus and the longer-term outcomes for patients. We would welcome research that addresses research questions within the scope of this call that build upon these platforms. Please have agreement and support from the lead PI and data custodians of the collaborative study prior to submission of your grant.

Animal Research

Although projects involving the use of laboratory animals are eligible, we strongly encourage applications to consider the inclusion of animal research due to the budget envelope of this scheme. Please see the [Stroke Association's Position Statement on Research Involving Animals](#).

We request anyone planning on including animal research in their application to discuss their proposed project with the Stroke Association Research Team prior to completion of their application form.

Applicants should also refer to the NC3Rs website for further information and guidance on the responsible and ethical use of animals in research.

It is mandatory to complete all of the questions on the Research Involving Animals page if your proposal involves animals. Applications may be referred to the [NC3Rs](#) for review. Where animal work is sub-contracted, these questions must be completed by the organisation conducting the animal studies. Please note, we will also ask peer reviewers who will assess your application if there is appropriate justification for the use and number of animals.

If you are in doubt, please contact the [Stroke Association Research Team](#).

Eligibility

- Primary organisation:
  Stroke Association Awards must be carried out at Universities, NHS Trusts, Statutory Social Care Organisations or other Research Institutions within Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
  Your application's primary organisation should be the place where the award will be held. Usually, this refers to the organisation which holds the Lead applicant's employment contract and will administer invoicing for the award.

- The Lead applicant must be a senior researcher holding a PhD (or equivalent) with a track record of managing grants, delivering research studies, and a strong record of producing research outputs. Peer reviewers will judge the expertise and suitability of the applicant and co-applicant team.

- The salary of the Lead applicant has to be guaranteed for the duration of the proposed programme. Therefore, the Lead applicant's salary cannot be requested in the budget. The salaries (whole or in part) of Senior Academic Researchers/Collaborators are not supported by these grants. This may be waived only in exceptional circumstances. For this funding call masters students, PhD studentships, and clinical fellowships are not eligible to be included in the budget.

- Applications will not be accepted from investigators (whether applicants, sponsors or collaborators) who have an overdue report from a previous project funded by the Stroke Association at the time of submission (i.e. the deadline date). Applicants should consult with any sponsors and collaborators involved in their application to ensure that they have submitted their reports; otherwise the application will be rejected.

- You will be asked to give details of whether you have involved your local Research Design Service (RDS) in the development of the research proposal, including details of any discussions you have had with the RDS, improvements to the proposal as a result of the advice offered and their ongoing involvement in the project.

  Please note: involvement of a RDS (or equivalent) is **recommended for all** applications.

Guidance for detailing your proposed research

The outline of your research should not exceed 3500 words. There is a separate section for references. We ask that you upload a Gantt chart, and there is a non-mandatory section for additional figure/document uploads.

The following areas should all be incorporated, but not necessarily in the order listed below.

1. **The need for the study and how the research question is relevant to the scope of this call**
   - What are the principle research questions the study will address?
   - Why is the study needed?
   - Evidence from the medical literature should be provided, including discussion of the need for the study in light of any previous studies that have been completed.
   - Are there any other studies that are currently underway (both nationally and internationally) which are relevant to the proposed study?
   - How will the results of this study be used?

2. **Description of the research, its design and methods in the context of previous research/preliminary findings**

   Please detail how this project has been shaped and influenced by previous research. Please include any relevant data from preliminary or previous studies and a description of how this provides supportive evidence that your proposed study is needed.

   Please provide as much detail as possible concerning the methodology of the proposed research, including referencing supporting literature. This should include:
   - Proposed research design
   - Sample size
   - Bias protection

- Proposed outcome measures

3. Open Access Publishing

The Stroke Association seeks to ensure that the outputs of the research it funds are freely available to its staff and supporters. Applicants should outline plans for all peer-reviewed research papers arising from the Award should be 'Open Access'. Open access publication costs should be specified in the Application budget. All researchers should deposit published research papers in the UK PubMed Central database within 12 months of publication.

Award holders can publish a wide range of outputs (from standard research articles to data sets, from new insights to confirmatory or negative results) through [AMRC Open Research](#). The Charity expects that Award holders will publish either via a traditional publication or through AMRC Open Research.

4. Data sharing

The Stroke Association is committed to ensuring that the outputs of the research we fund, including research data, are managed and used in ways that maximise benefit to people affected by stroke. Making research data widely available to the research community in a timely and responsible manner ensures that these data can be verified, built upon and used to advance knowledge and its application to generate improvements in health.

All researchers should to consider at the research proposal stage how they will manage and share the data they will generate. Therefore, we require applicants provide a data management and sharing plan as part of their application. Award holders and the Host Institution should maximise the availability of research data derived from the Award with as few restrictions as possible.

5. Difficulties that can be foreseen and plans for mitigation

Please detail any potential issues that may affect the project and cause the start to be delayed, or affect the smooth progress of the research (e.g. access to data) should be outlined in as much detail as possible. Please outline any mitigation to address such issues.

6. Team expertise

Applicants should outline the particular contribution each member of the research team will make towards the project. The team should include all the relevant expertise that will enable delivery of the proposed study.

7. Plans to manage and deliver the research study

Please detail this. You may refer to a visual aid e.g. a Gantt Chart, but we require specific detail.

8. Collaboration with NHS research organisations

Support in developing studies is available from University Research Support Services, NIHR Research Design Services, UKCRC Registered Clinical Trials Units and the relevant research design and support services in the devolved nations (Scotland – CSO; Wales – Health and Care Research Wales Support and Delivery Centre; Northern Ireland – HSC R&D Division). When preparing their proposal, applicants are encouraged to seek support from these organisations.

9. Pathways to impact

It is a requirement that all applicants demonstrate a pathway from their research outputs to the benefit of people affected by stroke.

Impact can occur in a number of ways, for example, changes in clinical practice, development of new products, new companies and job creation, skills development, changes in public services and policy. A clearly thought through and acceptable statement on pathways to impact should:
- be project-specific and not generalised;
- be flexible and focus on potential outcomes.

Applicants should:
- outline plans to identify and actively engage, and disseminate findings to relevant users and stake holders of your research.
- articulate a clear understanding of the context and needs of users and consider ways the research findings can meet these needs.
- describe how findings will it be taken up/adopted in policy and/or practice, including challenges that may be encountered, and proposed approach(es) to mitigate these.
- outline how you will ensure the sustainability of any intervention beyond the life of this grant,
- outline the planning and management of associated activities including timing, personnel, skills, budget, deliverables and feasibility.

Top Tips for articulating potential impact (adapted from UKRI):
- Draft the pathways to impact very early in your preparation, so that it informs the design of your research. For example, this may include understanding the needs of key stakeholders and challenges and barriers to adoption., or developing how an intervention can be sustainable beyond the grant.
- Remember to consider and include project specific costs relating to proposed impact activities e.g. engagement workshops, publication costs, etc.

Patient and Public Involvement

We expect that all applicants will have involved people affected by stroke in the planning and development stages of their funding application, and will continue to do so should their application be successful. This involvement should be meaningful, and people affected by stroke should have a real opportunity to contribute to your research.

In the application you will be asked how you have involved public and/or patients in this research and/or the application, how you will involve public and/or patients in this research going forward, what the impacts and benefits will be for them (short and/or longer term) and how you plan to disseminate this work to them.

We are able to offer you advice or answer questions you may have about involvement. If you would like us to contact people affected by stroke to gain feedback on your proposal we can help, however please beware that we will not support any request made to us less than four weeks prior to the application deadline.

You can find out more about how we can help you to involve people affected by stroke in your work [here](#).

Details of support requested

In the main budget table of the application form we would like you to include all the funding you are requesting from the Stroke Association. You will also be required to fully justify all the funding you are requesting.

Please note that if your application is successful, the funding provided will be the figure that you have requested (unless this is queried by the panel). After the Award Acceptance form is signed, the amount awarded will not be increased if there are errors in your calculations so please ensure that the total amount requested is correct.

If you have financial support from other sources, the nature and tenure of the support should be disclosed in either the project proposal section of the application form, or in the justification textbox underneath the budget table.

Support may be sought for the following items:
- Salaries of research workers and technical assistants. Salaries should be calculated with assistance from your institution's finance team to ensure that they are in line with your institution's policy/based on National payscales or recognised local pay models. We do not require a breakdown (i.e: take home

salary, National Insurance, pension contribution) – only the total figure per year per staff member, but please include the salary grade in the job role title section.

- Please account for inflation and salary increases in the costings in the application form. Salary increases need to be in line with the host institution policy. We are not able to increase the award amount over the course of the award from what is requested in your original budget.
- Equipment to be used exclusively in the research award.
- Consumables that are specific to the research award should be itemised and costed individually over the duration of the award.
- There is no maximum limit for imaging costs. However, you will have to justify your request and ensure that costings are in line with institutional and national practices.
- Travel expenses which are integral to the award. Please ensure these are costed appropriately.
- Expenses of attendance at meetings and conferences must be justified as part of a necessary expenditure to deliver this work.
- Open access publishing costs may be incorporated into the budget.
- Patient and Public Involvement: you should ensure you budget for all involvement activities you plan to hold as part of this research; such as venue hire, catering and travel expenses. We recommend using [INVOLVE's involvement cost calculator](#) to help put together an appropriate budget for PPI.

Support may <u>not</u> be sought for the following items:
- The salaries (whole or in part) of the Lead Applicant/Principal Investigator and other Senior Academic Staff are <u>not</u> supported by these awards. This may be waived only in exceptional circumstances.
- Stipends and tuition fees for studentships. For this funding call masters, PhD studentships, and clinical fellowships are <u>not</u> eligible to be included in the budget.
- The Stroke Association considers the Apprenticeship Levy as an indirect cost of research, therefore we will <u>not</u> pay this.

Application checklist
- You are required to submit your application online, via our award management system, before the deadline (**5pm Monday 19th October 2020**): https://strokeassociation.flexigrant.com
- We will <u>not</u> accept paper/Word/PDF copies of the application form.
- The **Head of Department** and the **Finance/Research Administration Officer** from your primary organisation, must provide their approval of your application in order to allow you to submit the application. This is done by you inviting them

to your application form via the 'Participants' tab in the system and them typing their details into the corresponding declaration page. This acts as their signature. If your application is funded, wet copies of their signatures will be required. Please see in the **Eligibility** section above defining 'primary organisation'.

- You are not required to have the necessary ethical approval at the time of application. If successful, ethical approval for your study will have to be gained before you can begin your award. You are required to send us a copy of the ethical approval when it is gained.

Adjudication procedure

What happens to your application?

Once your application is received by the Stroke Association Research Department, the application will be read to ensure that it is eligible and that all of the mandatory questions have been answered appropriately.

For this funding scheme the application will be adjudicated by a COVID-19 and stroke Research Awards Panel. The panel will consist of international and UK experts from relevant fields as well as members of our Stroke Voices in Research group (made up of people affected by stroke). The panel will review applications and recommend the awards that should be funded based on the highest quality proposals.

The plain English section of your application will be shared with people affected by stroke for review, however they may also request access to the whole application.

In the instance that a larger number of applications are received than can be discussed at the panel meeting, a triage stage involving a sub-set of panel members may be conducted.

Stroke Association Standards of Adjudication

The Stroke Association is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC), and meets all membership criteria. The research awards adjudication process aligns to AMRC guidelines, and the Stroke Association holds an AMRC Certificate of Best Practice in Medical and Health Research Peer Review.

Confidentiality

When you submit an application, the Stroke Association will use the information provided on the form to process the application, which may involve revealing details of the application to peer reviewers outside the Stroke Association. All personal data will

be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), for more information please see the Stroke Association's [privacy policy](#).

If your award is funded, then details of the award may be used for dissemination and will be made publicly available.

All reviewers and Research Awards Pool members must sign and abide by our Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest Policy.

When will you hear the outcome of your application?
The Research Awards Panel will make a recommendation for which application(s) should receive funding at a panel meeting in November 2020. Successful applications then need to be signed off by the Stroke Association's Board of Trustees. You will be informed of the outcome in December 2020.

Feedback
All applications will receive anonymised peer reviewer comments. Applications shortlisted and therefore discussed at the panel meeting, will also receive a summary of the panel's deliberations.

The Stroke Association is fully committed to ensuring that the process by which applications are adjudicated and funding decisions are made is as fair and transparent as possible. We will not enter into any discussion or debate over applications that are unsuccessful. The application process is reviewed after each round. Where improvement has been identified, changes are made and implemented before the next round of applications commence.