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# Introduction

This document sets out a five-year research strategy for the Stroke Association. Our vision is for a world where there are fewer strokes and all those touched by stroke get the help they need. We believe in the power of research evidence to prevent stroke, save lives and enable stroke survivors to make the best recovery possible.

Twenty years ago, stroke research was largely neglected by other funding agencies. Through our early and continued investment, we have established a strong community of stroke researchers and healthcare professionals. The UK is now a world-leader in the field, second only to the USA. But there is still much to do; we want to build on what we have achieved so far.

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## Where are we now?

Over the last 20 years, the Stroke Association has awarded more than £40 million through 400 research grants, leading to many advances in stroke care. However, funding for UK stroke research lags behind other major conditions, despite the fact that stroke is the single biggest cause of adult disability.

We have occupied a leading position as a funder specialising in the development of new ideas and areas, and early phase work. Many successful, large clinical trials began as feasibility studies funded by the Stroke Association. We have worked in response mode on research funding as a way of capturing new thinking and developing new ideas.

We have nurtured a strong community of stroke researchers. This has included funding the first ever UK Professor in stroke and almost 100 research fellows.

Over the past five years, we have forged successful collaborations with other funders to raise awareness of stroke and to increase the annual spend on stroke research. These include the British Heart Foundation, Medical Research Council, Wellcome Trust, Alzheimer's Society and the Thomas Pocklington Trust.

We recognise the value that people affected by stroke bring to research and are proud of our commitment to ensure that the views of stroke survivors shape our work.



### **What we want to achieve**

Our five-year research strategy builds on our achievements. We have identified four strategic goals that will maximise the full value of our research investments, and strengthen our role as a partner with researchers, policy makers, clinicians and people affected by stroke.

As the field of stroke research matures, we want stroke to be recognised as a discipline with the same access as other major diseases - such as cancer and diabetes - to cutting edge research, to the best people and to resources. To do this, we need to make the case for greater funding levels for stroke research and to strengthen research capacity in the UK, so that we can build larger and stronger bodies of evidence to accelerate further improvements in the field. We want to maximise the use of research evidence in informing the prevention and treatment of stroke and in the support provided to stroke survivors, their families and carers.

We will work for a clear vision and a stronger consensus among key organisations about the future priorities for stroke research, ensuring that these priorities reflect expert opinion from practitioners and researchers and the views of stroke survivors. We will set our own priorities and address critical gaps in research evidence, including those that have proven hard to undertake in the past.

Fifty percent of UK stroke survivors use our Life After Stroke services, and each year 20,000 people gain support through our Helpline. We will ensure that services provided by the Stroke Association are shaped by the best research evidence. We will evaluate our services so that we can identify what works, and ensure that these lessons are fed into our services and used to promote best practice in service delivery more widely. We will ensure that research is used to deliver real improvements to the lives of stroke survivors.

# Our strategic goals



## ***Shape the research agenda***

*We are the only UK charity solely focussed on stroke research, funding 11% of the total UK spend on stroke research. We will strengthen our role as a fully engaged partner and leading voice on the future research agenda.*

- In collaboration with major funders and other key stakeholders, we will work to develop consensus on research priorities, building on existing work.
- In 2014, we will publish our research priorities, reflecting the views of national experts and stroke survivors. We will introduce 'Priority Programme Awards' for research proposals that reflect our priorities.
- We will support research that is of high quality, uses appropriate methods, and is likely to produce results that are relevant to the Stroke Association's vision.
- We also recognise the value in drawing on innovative ideas emanating from the stroke research community. In order to capture these, we will continue to provide response mode funding, alongside our priority driven funding.
- We will make the case for increased funding for stroke research, publishing new evidence showing that UK spend on stroke research continues to be disproportionately lower than the burden of stroke disease. We will raise the issue with parliamentarians, research funders and the public.
- We will work with other funders to ensure that the insights from our feasibility studies are developed into full clinical trials. We will do this by updating funders on the progress of our pilot studies and linking funders and researchers.
- We will continue to develop strategic funding collaborations that create synergy and maximise impact.
- We will continue to work with networks of stroke researchers and identify opportunities to support their work.
- We will work with the new Academic Health Science Networks – partnerships intended to accelerate the adoption and spread of innovation - to implement innovations from the Stroke Association.



## ***Develop a vibrant and diverse stroke research community***

*Research funding and research capacity need to go hand in hand. A stronger funding base for stroke research needs to be supported by increased research capacity. We will therefore strengthen our commitment to developing the next generation of research leaders.*

- We will maintain our unique funding streams: Research Training Fellowships at postgraduate and postdoctoral levels; the Princess Margaret Research Development Fellowship; and our Clinical Research Training Fellowships in collaboration with the Medical Research Council.
- From 2014, we will create Stroke Association Senior Lectureships to provide support to those at mid-senior level to help them build the capacity to deliver major research.
- We will develop a distinct Stroke Association cadre of research fellows and lecturers. We will work with them to facilitate peer exchange, professional development and external mentoring to enable them to develop their full academic potential and maximise the contribution to research.
- We will continue to work with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to develop research capacity and aim to develop funding collaborations with each country.
- Working with our European research partners, including stroke patient organisations (such as the Stroke Alliance for Europe), we will aim to develop a research strategy, generate further interest in research and help to build a critical mass of European stroke research projects.

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## ***Influence health and social care policy, practice and public understanding***

*We want to use the evidence from research to challenge the status quo, build new consensus, and influence health and social care policy and practice, research funders and public understanding.*

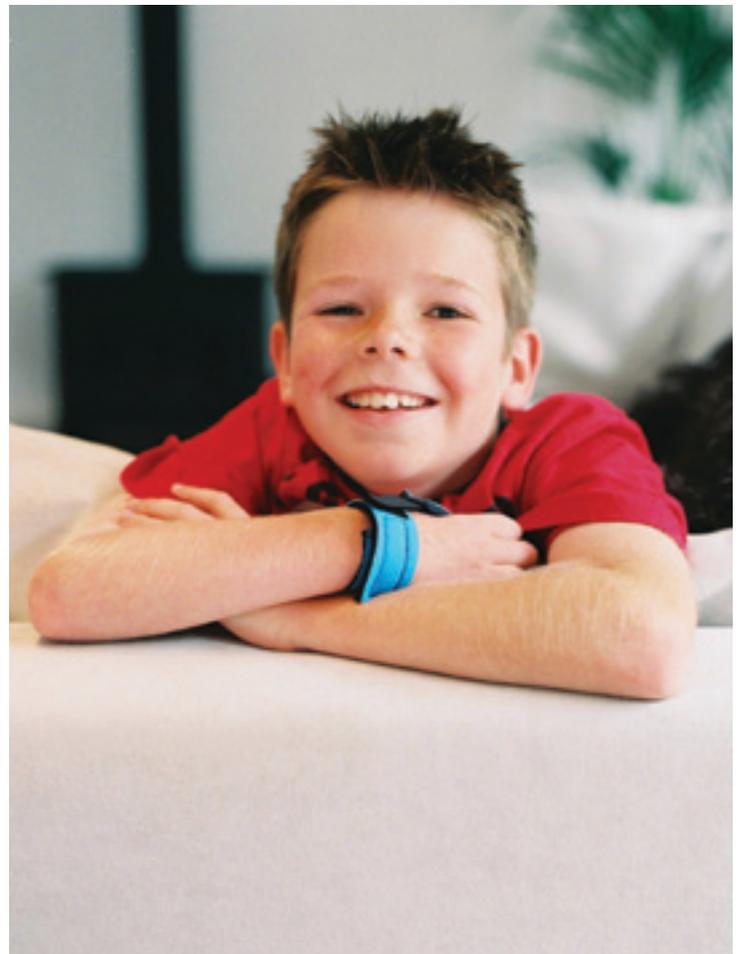
- We will create an annual programme of seminars and other fora to consider the implications of research findings. We will invite our researchers to present their findings to policy makers, clinicians, other funders and stroke survivors. Our aim is to help researchers think about how to maximise the value of their research to potential users and to alert decision makers to the potential policy and practice implications of the research.
- Getting evidence into practice remains a key issue. We will work with others to ensure that our research is fully exploited by policy makers and practitioners and ensure that every stroke patient gets high quality care, every time.
- Grant applicants will be required to explain how their results could be used, and we will work in partnership with the relevant universities to develop and implement dissemination strategies.

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## ***Learn about what works and embed it in our work***

*We want stroke survivors to benefit from widespread coverage of evidence-based services provided by the Stroke Association. The design of new and existing services will be underpinned by evidence. We will generate new evidence of what works to improve life after stroke and use that evidence to inform the design and delivery of our schemes.*

- We will commission and publish independent evaluation of our services.
- We will put research and other evidence and learning - including that from users - at the heart of our services, and ensure that evaluation findings are fed back into their design and delivery.
- We will enter into partnerships to develop the evidence to inform our services. For example, from March 2014, we will partner with Greater Manchester Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care on a five-year programme of evaluation into our Life After Stroke services.
- When designing new service models, we will draw on existing research and evaluation to ensure that they are underpinned by best evidence. Where appropriate, we will commission formal evidence reviews.



Stroke happens at any age. Our strategy aims to have the widest possible impact.

### ***Measure the impact of our research strategy***

*We want to understand the return on investment – in its broadest sense – of our research activities, investments and presence in achieving four strategic goals.*

- We will keep our strategy under review to ensure that implementation is in line with our strategic intent. In the short term, we will informally review the implementation of this strategy on an annual basis with a formal review after three years.
- In collaboration with our academic partners, we will build on the new Research Excellence Framework returns of universities, which are intended to capture impact, and produce case studies.
- We will draw upon citations of our research by professional bodies, in policy documents, in the documents of other organisations and in the media.
- We will gather and monitor research outputs from all of the research that we fund by using the 'Researchfish' online research reporting tool.

## **We are the Stroke Association**

The Stroke Association is the leading stroke charity in the UK. We believe in the power of research to save lives, prevent stroke and ensure that people make the best recovery they can after a stroke.

**We're here for you. If you'd like to know more, please get in touch.**

**Stroke Helpline:** 0303 3033 100

**Website:** [stroke.org.uk](http://stroke.org.uk)

**Email:** [info@stroke.org.uk](mailto:info@stroke.org.uk)

**From a textphone:** 18001 0303 3033 100

[Our research programme relies on voluntary donations.](#)

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[Call our Donations line on 0300 3300740, visit \[stroke.org.uk\]\(http://stroke.org.uk\)](#)

*Together we can conquer stroke*

**Find out more about our research programme**

**Email:** [research@stroke.org.uk](mailto:research@stroke.org.uk)

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