

Early action and prevention within Health and Social Care Services

Overview

Opportunity status: Open

Type: Programme

Opening date: 26 September 2025 at 1:00 pm

Closing date: 21 January 2026 at 1:00 pm

Reference ID: 2025/410

Ready to apply?

Apply for this funding opportunity through our online application form

Apply now

(https://awardsmanagement.nihr.ac.uk/s_Login.jsp?dest=/Apps/app_viewopportunity.jsp%3Fappid%3D105112%26nextlevel%3D1%26opportunityid%3D10177615)

The Health and Social Care Delivery Research (HSDR) Programme is looking to fund high quality research about early action and prevention within Health and Social Care Services.

This is a 2-stage, commissioned funding opportunity. To apply for the first stage you should submit an outline application. If invited to the second stage, you will then need to complete a full application.

Key dates

26 September 2025

Outline application opening date

21 January 2026

Outline application closing date

March 2026

Outline application shortlisting decision

Early April 2026

Full application opening date

Early June 2026

Full application closing date

December 2026

Full application funding decision

Studies within a trial or review

This funding opportunity is eligible for a SWAT/SWAR (study within a trial or study within a review), which can help significantly improve methodology of future research as well as the host study. Find out about the [benefits of SWATs/SWARs and how to include one in your application](#)

(<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/methodological-sub-studies-studies-within-trial-or-project-swat-and-studies-within-review-swar>).

Apply now

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Research specification

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) [Health and Social Care Delivery Research \(HSDR\) Programme](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/funding-programmes/health-and-social-care-delivery-research) (<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/funding-programmes/health-and-social-care-delivery-research>) invites applications in response to specific research areas. These have been identified, developed and prioritised for their importance to stakeholders including:

- Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)
- National Health Service (NHS)
- Patients and the public
- Local Government

Research priority

We are interested in funding high quality applied health and social care research to increase and improve the evidence base about early action and prevention with health and social care services.

In response to the 2014 [Nurse review of Research Councils](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/nurse-review-of-research-councils) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/nurse-review-of-research-councils>), the UK government published [areas of research interest](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest>) (ARIs). The DHSC ARIs focus on areas of strategic policy where research and innovation could facilitate a marked change in how we deal with complex health issues.

The [Health and Social Care Delivery Research \(HSDR\) Programme](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/funding-programmes/health-and-social-care-delivery-research) (<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/funding-programmes/health-and-social-care-delivery-research>) supports evaluative research aimed at improving health and social care services. This research can be primary (qualitative and/or quantitative), secondary, or evidence synthesis, with projects often involving a mixed-methods approach, focusing on the access to, organisation, and quality of care. With key emphasis being placed on understanding the experiences of patients, staff, and service users, research studies can include analyses of routine and linked data on health and social care service use, activity and outcomes.

DHSC [ARI 1](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-of-health-areas-of-research-interest/department-of-health-areas-of-research-interest) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-of-health-areas-of-research-interest/department-of-health-areas-of-research-interest>) prioritises early action to prevent poor health outcomes. The HSDR Programme is interested in funding research aligned with ARI 1. The aim is to reduce excess deaths, improve population health, decrease disparities, and ease the burden on health and social care services.

The HSDR Programme aims to invest in the region of £4 million, across a number of research studies, in relation to this funding opportunity.

Background

Improving the population's health, either by preventing illness or identifying the cause of ill health at an early stage, is a key focus to reducing health inequalities and is at the heart of the [NHS Long Term Plan](https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/) (<https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/>).

Prevention within health and social care is a broad spectrum of interventions covering a wide range of services. Primary prevention generally looks at how to stop problems from occurring in the first place, for example, through lifestyle changes or vaccination programmes. Secondary prevention focuses on early detection of disease to support timely intervention, such as screening services. Tertiary prevention looks to carefully manage chronic conditions to minimise harm and slow the progression of disease. All types of prevention are important in improving population health, and further research is required to maximise the effectiveness of these types of services and ensure equitable access.

By prioritising prevention in health and social care service delivery, the aim is to keep people active, independent, and engaged in their communities while reducing the need for medical intervention and long-term care. We are interested in funding research which investigates how to reach underserved communities to ensure that everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, has access to the support and services they need, with the aim of reducing health disparities, promoting fairness in health and social care, and improving overall well-being for all.

Funding opportunity scope

[ARI 1](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-of-health-areas-of-research-interest/department-of-health-areas-of-research-interest#ari-1-early-action-to-prevent-poor-health-outcomes-1) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-of-health-areas-of-research-interest/department-of-health-areas-of-research-interest#ari-1-early-action-to-prevent-poor-health-outcomes-1>) calls for research to evaluate health and social care interventions and services which address gaps in knowledge of preventative strategies, early diagnosis techniques, and effective interventions for individuals at increased risk of long-term conditions and chronic disease. The NIHR HSDR Programme invites applications with a clear focus on prevention to address this research area. This research could be within primary, secondary, or tertiary prevention services or span all of them.

We are looking to fund research that demonstrates clear objectives of improving health or wellbeing, through care at a national level, focusing on how care is delivered or organised. The evidence generated should be timely and be of major and sustained strategic importance to the NHS and social care services, whilst recognising the needs and experience of diverse communities and their differential impact. Full details of the HSDR Programme's remit is available on the [programmes' webpages](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/hedr-remit-competitiveness-and-making-successful-application) (<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/hedr-remit-competitiveness-and-making-successful-application>).

Although not an exhaustive list, some examples of interest for evaluative research are:

- the pathway, flow, and coordination of patients through prevention services and the broader configuration of prevention services for those with long-term conditions and rehabilitation following acute care
- innovative ways of providing, commissioning, or streamlining prevention services, for example:
 - the integration of preventative approaches and initiatives within health and social care services (such as original/novel research on NHS vaccination programmes, social prescribing, smoking cessation, preventative clinics/hubs in hospital and primary care settings)
 - the effectiveness of service delivery models enabled by emerging technologies and the trade-off between administrative efficiency and patient/staff experiences
- how data can be used to proactively offer preventative support and how data can be linked across health, social care, and other systems
- models of effective systems leadership and funding mechanisms to embed prevention into the commissioning and provision of health and social care.

We are looking to fund research which has the potential to inform prevention services at a national level, and therefore local or regional evaluations are unlikely to be fundable. Similarly, evaluations focused on emerging technologies will require evidence of readiness for research on large-scale service delivery, including the published evidence base. All research should consider health and/or social care inequalities, or research focusing on how reducing inequalities can be integrated into prevention services. Alongside this, increasing access to neighbourhood health and social care services, moving care from hospitals into the community, and/or avoiding hospital admissions in

the context of prevention are of particular interest to HSDR.

Due to the HSDR Programme's recent significant investment in [Workforce Research Partnerships](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/new-research-tackle-challenges-facing-nhs-and-care-workforce) (<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/new-research-tackle-challenges-facing-nhs-and-care-workforce>), proposals focusing solely on the health and social care workforce are out of scope for this particular funding opportunity.

Applicants should take note of the existing NIHR portfolio to ensure that research proposals do not directly overlap with, but build upon and add value to, ongoing and completed research studies. In particular, applicants should also be aware that the HSDR Programme has recently closed separate research funding opportunities focused on 'Hospital at home/virtual wards: service delivery, integration, evaluating impact on health and social care' and 'Improving health and social care services for adults with multiple long-term conditions', as well as being aware of the resulting ongoing research from the NIHR/EPSRC [Systems Engineering Innovation partnerships for Multiple long-term Conditions \(SEISMIC\) Programme](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/systems-engineering-innovation-partnerships-multiple-long-term-conditions-seismic-minutes-april-2025) (<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/systems-engineering-innovation-partnerships-multiple-long-term-conditions-seismic-minutes-april-2025>) - a large-scale programme of research to consider how to better configure services for people with multiple long-term conditions.

Study design

The HSDR Programme is not prescriptive about study design, but funded evaluative studies typically employ mixed methods approaches. Study design and methodology should be appropriate to answer the proposed research questions.

Outputs

Pathways to Impact – we are focused on the impact of the research we fund. Applicants are asked to consider the timing and nature of the deliverables in your proposals; and encouraged to maximise the impact of your research by explaining how you will mobilise knowledge and ensure that it is useful and relevant to stakeholders such as:

- NHS
- local authorities
- integrated care systems
- policy makers
- public health officers

- special interest groups
- charities
- community audiences
- other stakeholders

Duration and costs

You are advised that we are custodians of public funds and value for money is one of the key criteria that peer reviewers and commissioning committee members will assess applications against.

Eligibility

There are no specific eligibility requirements or restrictions for applicants to this funding opportunity.

Application guidance

Please read the following guidance to help you complete your application:

- [domestic outline funding application guidance](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/application-support/guidance/domestic-programmes-outline-application-guidance) (https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/application-support/guidance/domestic-programmes-outline-application-guidance): this lists the fields that appear in the awards management system and explains what information you need to include for each one
- HSDR programme application guidance: see the information below for specific requirements our HSDR programme looks for in applications
- [HSDR programme page](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/funding-programmes/health-and-social-care-delivery-research) (https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/funding-programmes/health-and-social-care-delivery-research): details about the programme remit
- [funding assessment criteria](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/application-support/domestic-funding-programmes-assessment-criteria) (https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/application-support/domestic-funding-programmes-assessment-criteria)
- [research inclusion guidance](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/who-we-are/research-inclusion/funding-application-guidance) (https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/who-we-are/research-inclusion/funding-application-guidance): it is important that you fully consider inclusion throughout the whole

research life cycle

- [finance guidance for applicants](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/application-support/guidance/finance-guidance-for-applicants) (<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-funding/application-support/guidance/finance-guidance-for-applicants>)

Research plan

Write a maximum of 5 A4 pages for your research plan. When reviewing applications, we will not consider any additional information over this 5 page limit.

Background and rationale

There are different types of needs your research could address under our HSDR programme. Your research may address one or a few needs; it does not have to address all. Read each need for information on what to include in your application:

Research needs

Health or care need

If your proposed research shows the benefits of improving health for the public, patients or carers, please state the benefits and explain how they will have an impact. Benefits include potentially preventing avoidable mortality and morbidity, improving quality of life, and preventing diseases. Research in this area is likely to identify new ways of working that enhance opportunities for health promotion or quality and safety of care. Benefits may also arise from improving the acceptability and effectiveness of care, cost effectiveness to the NHS (health and social care), better targeting of services, or equity of access to care.

Expressed need

If someone from the health and care management community has expressed a need for research in a particular area, you should show the evidence for this and how it relates to the wider NHS (health and social care). You should also consider why patients and the service will want to act on the outcomes of your research.

Sustained interest and intent

Show that the issue or area you are researching will have sustained interest in the future. The results of your research must remain highly relevant and important to the needs of the NHS in the future. If your research addresses an NIHR area of ongoing need, you should reference this fact in your proposal (under this heading).

Capacity to generate new knowledge

If you have identified a knowledge gap where new research is needed which cannot be addressed by any existing research, you should describe this in your application.

Generalisable findings and prospects for change

Research in this area is likely to produce generalisable or transferable findings which are valuable to the health and care management community. In your application, describe how health and care organisations are likely to be able to use your findings in their decision-making in ways that bring about change and improvement.

Building on existing work

Your research might contribute to building a coherent body of knowledge in the area. You should show how your research builds on, but does not duplicate, previous research.

What is the problem being addressed?

You must clearly identify the health and care need your research meets or contributes to. Please outline the anticipated value or contribution your study will provide.

Review of existing evidence. How does the existing literature support your proposal? For some commissioned funding opportunities, we will have already reviewed existing evidence to inform the research specification. Please ensure you meet the requirements in the research specification.

Aims and objectives

Please summarise the research question(s) and key aims and objectives.

HSDR funds research projects, not programmes of work or ongoing work. You must have clearly defined research questions, and aims and objectives, and describe how the planned methodology is likely to achieve these objectives.

Methodology/plan

Include the below detail in your methodology and plan:

Project design and methods

Summarise your project plan plus any additional points required to support statements made in the previous sections. Include any key references required to justify them, for example, the use of particular outcome measures or methods of analysis.

For HSDR funding opportunities there are no fixed limits on the duration of projects, funding amount, or the number of co-applicants.

Design

Clearly summarise the type of study design you will be using. For example, primary research; controlled trial; evidence synthesis; or systematic review. Include methods, proposed sample size, and analysis methods, and explain why you have chosen the proposed methodology.

Studies within a trial, project or review

We encourage you to embed methodological sub-studies (up to a maximum funding of £30,000) into your research. See our [methodological sub-studies page](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/methodological-sub-studies-studies-within-trial-or-project-swat-and-studies-within-review-swar) (<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/methodological-sub-studies-studies-within-trial-or-project-swat-and-studies-within-review-swar>) for more information.

Timeline and milestones

Project timetables including recruitment rate

Indicate the anticipated duration of the study. Where relevant, pay particular attention to the expected recruitment rate and justify your estimate. Outline the main stages of your proposed project including regulatory steps; team recruitment; participant recruitment; data collection, access, linkage, analysis; and knowledge mobilisation. Include the expected duration of each.

Study management

Clinical Trials Unit involvement

Clinical Trials Units are regarded as an important component of many trial applications. They can advise and participate throughout the process from initial idea development through to project delivery and reporting. However, they may not be essential for all types of studies. If you feel this is the case, please justify the reasons in your application.

If you are looking for a Clinical Trial Unit to collaborate with in your application, you can find all UK-registered units on the [UKCRC CTU Network website](https://ukcrc-ctu.org.uk/industry-collaborations-find-a-ctu/) (<https://ukcrc-ctu.org.uk/industry-collaborations-find-a-ctu/>).

Please note that we will check all proposals recommended for funding which involve a clinical trial. We check potential overlaps using [WHO trials](https://trialsearch.who.int/) (<https://trialsearch.who.int/>) before we communicate any funding decision. Consequently, a funding recommendation may not be taken forward if a major overlap is identified at this stage. It is therefore important that you highlight any potential overlaps before your application is considered by the funding committee.

UK Biobank

[UK Biobank](https://www.ukbiobank.ac.uk/) (<https://www.ukbiobank.ac.uk/>) is a major national health resource, and a registered charity in its own right. It holds a health research database and aims to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of a wide range of serious and life-threatening illnesses.

We encourage you to consider whether Biobank may be able to provide suitable data for your study. We do not want to discourage you from establishing new participants and data where this is necessary to address your research question. Our aim is to avoid applications looking to set up Biobank-like cohorts where the use of Biobank would prevent wasteful duplication of Biobank-like activities.

Reasonable costs and value for money

The HSDR Programme accepts that some variance in costs is likely to occur between the outline and full applications. We will carefully scrutinise all full application costs and any variance from the outline application. All costs need to be fully justified by the applicants to reassure that the study offers good value for money for the NHS and social care services.

Uploads

Please add the following to the 'Uploads' section of your application.

Flow diagram (mandatory)

Upload a flow diagram on a single side of A4. The diagram should illustrate the study design and the flow of participants, if appropriate. If your project consists of more than one work package, consider a diagram that conveys the sequence and timing of research packages as well as how the work packages are linked. For qualitative work it may be appropriate to set out your theoretical framework. You must give full consideration to research inclusion and working with people and communities.

References (mandatory)

Upload 1 single-side A4 page PDF document of references.

Application process

Find out how to apply for this funding opportunity and what you need to do to get your application ready.

How to apply

When you are ready to apply, you will need to [log in to our application system to apply](https://awardsmanagement.nihr.ac.uk/s_Login.jsp?dest=/Apps/app_viewopportunity.jsp%3Fappid%3D105112%26nextlevel%3D1%26opportunityid%3D10174399) (https://awardsmanagement.nihr.ac.uk/s_Login.jsp?dest=/Apps/app_viewopportunity.jsp%3Fappid%3D105112%26nextlevel%3D1%26opportunityid%3D10174399). This funding opportunity is on our new awards management system and you will need to create a new account to apply.

The closing date is 21 January 2026 at 1pm. Applications received after 1pm on the closing date will not be considered.

Please read all guidance detailed in the 'application guidance' section of this funding opportunity.

Download application form template

You can download a Word document template of the application form below. Please use this template as a guide only, to help you prepare your application. For example, to see how many characters are accepted in each section and to see how information in the form is laid out. Please do not try to use this as an application form; it cannot be submitted as an application. You must submit your application online via our Awards Management System.

(/media/24286/download/)

domestic-outline-application-form-template.docx

DOCX

Last updated: 27 November 2024

Download document (27.86 KB)

Research inclusion and reasonable adjustments

At NIHR we are committed to [creating a diverse and inclusive culture](/about-us/who-we-are/research-inclusion) (/about-us/who-we-are/research-inclusion). We encourage applications from people from all backgrounds and communities bringing diverse skills and experiences. If you need any reasonable adjustments throughout the application process, please contact the programme team via the information in the Contact Details tab.

Research Support Service

Got a research idea and not sure how to turn it into a funding application? The NIHR Research Support Service (RSS) supports researchers in England to apply for funding, and to develop and deliver clinical and applied health, social care and public health research post award. [Find out how the RSS can help you](/support-and-services/research-support-service) (/support-and-services/research-support-service).

Contact Details

- For help with your application contact hsdrinfo@nihr.ac.uk (mailto:hsdrinfo@nihr.ac.uk).
- For more information about the funding programme, visit the [HSDR page](/node/62886) (/node/62886).

- For help developing your application, if in England, contact the [Research Support Service](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/support/research-support-service/) (<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/support/research-support-service/>).