

## Public Health Research Programme – Researcher-led call for proposals

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION & GUIDANCE NOTES - OUTLINE PROPOSALS

#### Introduction

The Public Health Research programme (PHR) is part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The secretariat function of the programme is managed by the NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre (NETSCC) based at the University of Southampton under a contract with the Department of Health.

#### Data Protection

We have an obligation to keep data secure and to use it appropriately. To fulfil our obligations under law and as a result of our contract with the Department of Health, we adopt various procedures to use and protect data. This will impact on how we deal with you as an applicant and your joint applicants. You should bear in mind that we will need to consider data protection issues separately on each occasion that you apply to the programme.

#### Data Security - data about you

Personal information will be held on a database in the NETSCC password-protected network that is available only to NETSCC staff. Your details and those of your joint applicants will be retained in order to facilitate the running of the PHR programme. If your application is successful at any stage of our process, your name and organisation details will appear on the PHR website. In addition, once funding has been agreed and the contract signed, your details will appear in other PHR literature as a grant holder and will be passed to the Department of Health (DH) for inclusion in their publicly available databases of research projects. Your name and those of your joint applicants will be added to our mailing list. This means that you will be sent updates on the PHR programme. We may also send you separate literature about the PHR programme and related events. If you have any questions, or if you would prefer not to receive routine and/or general communications, please contact us at: [info@phr.ac.uk](mailto:info@phr.ac.uk)

**It is important that you read these guidance notes fully before starting to complete the application form to ensure that you provide the correct information.**

There are two different application forms for commissioned calls depending on whether you are submitting an OUTLINE proposal or a FULL proposal.

This document contains information and guidance to applicants submitting an OUTLINE proposal for commissioned research only.

- Part One – Useful Information for Applicants
- Part Two – Completing your application form
- Part Three – Submitting your application

Further information is also available from the Frequently Asked Questions section on the PHR programme's website: <http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/faqs>. Applications which are not fully or correctly completed will be rejected.

## Part One – Useful Information for Applicants

### Remit

The main focus of the Public Health Research (PHR) programme's evaluation of public health interventions will be on effectiveness and cost-effectiveness. However, broader application, as well as acceptability to the target community and wider society, are also important to the impact and sustainability of public health programmes, and, where relevant, will also be investigated.

Applications to the PHR programme will include both primary research and evidence synthesis. The precise methods will need to be appropriate to the question being asked and the feasibility of the research, but we expect the primary research to include RCTs, natural experiments, cohort studies, registry/database studies and qualitative methods.

Evidence syntheses will need to use the most appropriate methods in systematic reviews, cost-effectiveness studies and modelling of long-term outcomes.

### Eligibility

The NIHR Public Health Research programme is funded by the NIHR, with contributions from the CSO in Scotland, NISCHR in Wales, and HSC R&D, Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland. Researchers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are eligible to apply for funding under this programme.

### Criteria for assessment of proposals

Proposals submitted to the PHR programme will undergo a two stage assessment process, using the criteria below. The Programme Advisory Board will apply criterion 1 and the Research Funding Board will apply criteria 2, 3 and 4.

1. Improving the health of the public:
  - a) What is the public health importance of the research proposed?
  - b) How far will the new knowledge gained help to improve the health of the public?
  - c) Will the research help to reduce inequalities in health?
2. Scientific quality of the proposal:
  - a) What is the likelihood of the study increasing our understanding of the topic area?
  - b) What is the likelihood of the study making a substantial advance in scientific understanding and knowledge?
3. Feasibility of the study:
  - a) Demonstration of the necessary skill mix, experience, project management and infrastructure for success  
*High quality studies often need a multi-disciplinary team. Applicants need to show a commitment to team working and may wish to consider a collaborative approach between several institutions. The PHR programme suggests that teams proposing randomised controlled trials include input from an experienced trials unit.*
  - b) Explanation and justification for estimated recruitment rates.  
*The PHR programme wants studies to achieve their aims. Researchers should demonstrate that they can recruit the necessary number of participants.*
  - c) Consideration of the ethical, legal and social implications of the research proposed.
4. Reasonable costs and value for money.

There are no fixed limits on the duration of projects or funding and proposals should be tailored to fully address the problem.

### **Partner collaborations**

The PHR programme expects that applicants will collaborate, where appropriate, with partner organisations, such as local government and voluntary organisations.

### **Public Involvement**

Public involvement is important and will be actively sought across the PHR programme. Evidence of public involvement will be sought in applications, and comments from reviewers who are members of the public will be regularly obtained.

The PHR programme recognises the importance of active involvement of members of the public in research and would like to support research projects appropriately. The PHR programme encourages applicants to consider *how* the scientific quality, feasibility or practicality of their proposal might be improved by involving members of the public. Research teams wishing to involve members of the public should include in their application: the aims of active involvement in this project; a description of the members of the public (to be) involved; a description of the methods of involvement; and an appropriate budget. Applications that involve members of the public will not, for that reason alone, be favoured over proposals that do not, but it is hoped that the involvement of members of the public will improve the quality of the application.

One Useful Resource is:

INVOLVE (<http://www.invo.org.uk>) is a National Advisory Group funded by the Department of Health, which aims to promote active public involvement in NHS, public health and social care research. INVOLVE have published a number of documents aimed at researchers seeking to involve the public in their research including:

- [Involving the public in NHS, public health, and social care research: Briefing Notes for Researchers](#)
- [Suggested guidance for grant applicants about involving the public in research](#)
- [A guide to reimbursing and paying members of the public who are actively involved in research: For researchers and research commissioners, \(who may also be people who use services\)](#)

INVOLVE also produce a useful publication aimed at members of the public wishing to get actively involved in research (other than as a study participant) [Getting Involved in Research - a Guide for Consumers](#).

### **Making an application**

Outline proposals will be accepted on an ongoing basis. There are, however, cut-off deadlines for proposals to reach the PHR offices so they can be assessed. Applications received after the stated deadline **will not be considered** in the next assessment round and will be held over for consideration in a future cycle. Please see the PHR website ([www.phr.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk)) for further information and updates on future deadlines. Applicants that are successful at the PHR Research Funding Board will be invited to develop their outline proposals into full proposals for consideration at a subsequent Board meeting.

Outline proposals which are deemed as outside the PHR programme remit will be assessed as to their suitability for other programmes managed by NETSCC and applicants will be kept informed. If an application form has been incorrectly completed, it will be rejected without further consideration.

After review by the Programme Advisory Board, lead applicants will be informed of whether or not their outline proposals have been shortlisted. The successful outline proposals will then be considered by the Research Funding Board. Proposals shortlisted by the Research Funding Board

will be given **eight weeks** to prepare a full proposal for consideration at its subsequent board meeting.

If you have queries or problems preparing your proposal please use our online FAQs which provide general advice and guidance based on previous queries we have received (<http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/faqs>).

If you have any questions not answered in the FAQs please contact:  
Public Health Research programme, NETSCC, Alpha House, Enterprise Road, University of Southampton Science Park, Chilworth, Southampton SO16 7NS. Tel: 023 8059 9697 (24 hour answer phone), Fax: 023 8059 5639, or email: [info@phr.ac.uk](mailto:info@phr.ac.uk)

## **Part Two - Completing your Electronic Application Form**

To submit an outline proposal you must complete all the relevant sections of the online form available from the PHR website [http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/fundingopportunities/researcher\\_led.asp](http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/fundingopportunities/researcher_led.asp). We recommend that, if appropriate to your proposal, you provide a flow diagram in order to help the programme understand your study design, (this should be A4 size and saved as a .pdf file; please include the project title as a heading for the flow diagram). We will also accept one A4 page of supporting references as an appendix to your proposal and any documents confirming financial support from project partners.

Please note that the PHR programme will only accept and consider the outline application form, and the documents mentioned above. Any other documents submitted will be removed and not considered in the assessment process.

On-screen help is provided by the 'Assistant', shown as a ? mark on screen, and you should refer to this for guidance on specific questions as you complete your application form.

### **Saving your form**

It is advisable to save your form soon after you begin. To do this, click the Save button, making sure that you take note of your *Save ID*, located in the top right hand corner of the screen. This is the ID number for your application and will be sent to you via email, to the email address that you provide when you first save the form. The email will include a direct URL link to access your form.

### **Giving others access to the form**

If you send a colleague the Save ID for the form they can access and make changes to your form, however only one person can access the form at any one time.

### **Exiting your form correctly**

Should you wish to exit and return to the form at any time, the Save ID will be required to re-access the form.

**Please note that you must click the 'EXIT' button on the screen before closing the window that contains the application rather than closing down your internet browser. This will ensure that you are not temporarily locked out of your form.**

### **Locked form**

If you are locked out of the form an on-screen notice will let you know how many minutes remain before the form is unlocked.

If a colleague is currently using the form you will need to wait until they have exited the form, as only one person can access it at any one time.

If you are sure that no-one else is using the form, but are still locked out, then please try the following before calling the PHR office for assistance:

1. Wait for the lock-out time to expire
2. Re-boot your computer completely, as sometimes a hidden copy of the form is created in the background
3. Instead of clicking on the weblink in your letter or email, copy the link and paste it into a new internet browser window

### **Space restrictions when entering text**

You should be aware that there are character limits set for each text box within the application form; this is to ensure that the form can print out correctly and limits depend on the amount of text inserted into each box.

We advise you to type your information directly into the form rather than cutting and pasting it. However, if you do cut and paste text into the form and exceed the character limit, an error message will appear. This states *'There is too much text to fit on printed form. It has been changed to indicate where the limit has been reached'*. A symbol '<----->' will appear within the body of text inserted to indicate the character limit for the text box.

The form counts all blank space as a part of the content of each box, so if you are short of space it will help if you delete extra carriage returns and place any bulleted lists into paragraph format. Please take particular care when removing excess text below the < ----- > symbol that you also remove carriage returns, otherwise the application alert will still note that you have too much text in the field.

### **Use of non-standard characters**

You are advised not to use any non-standard characters in your text; in particular, you may experience a technical difficulty that affects the use of '≥' and '≤'.

If you use either of these symbols you will get an error message; if you need to use either '≤' or '≥' then please replace these symbols with words (i.e. less than or equal to or greater than or equal to). You will not be able to submit the form if you have either of these symbols or any other non-alphabetical or non-numerical characters in your text.

### **Before you begin**

It is advisable to save your form soon after you begin. To do this, click save and follow the instructions, making sure that you take note of your Save ID.

Guidance on completing specific sections is provided below.

### **Research Type**

Please indicate whether the proposed study is primary research or evidence synthesis. If there are any elements of primary research, please select 'primary research'.

### **Section A: Details of Lead Applicant**

Please complete all sections and state the contribution towards the proposed project (e.g. lead applicant, principal investigator, data collection, co-ordination and project management, analysis, methodological input, consumer input). Please note that all correspondence will be addressed to the lead applicant. The lead applicant is responsible for communicating decisions from the PHR programme to members of the project team.

### **Section B: Project Details and History of the Proposed Research**

### Start Date

Please note that successful projects are expected to start within a reasonable time following a decision to fund, usually with about 6 months.

### Research Costs Requested

Applicants should note that it is in their interests to undertake a thorough, realistic and accurate costing. The PHR programme expects that costs identified should not differ between outline and full proposal stage. The Board will pay close scrutiny to increases and applicants must provide a clear and full justification for any differences. Applicants from Higher Education Institutions should enter the research grant figure as 80% of the Full Economic Cost. Applicants from other organisations (such as local government) should enter 100% of the research cost. A brief description of the research costs must be included.

**IMPORTANT: Please do not include intervention costs in this section. The Public Health Research programme will fund research costs but not intervention or other non-research costs.**

Although there is no limit to the amount of money you can ask for in one proposal, applicants **must demonstrate value for money**.

### B1. Will the research described in this proposal be supported by any other funding body?

The PHR programme will not accept applications that are currently pending with other research funding organisations (unless under shared funding arrangements). Failure to disclose accurately or fully will be considered by this programme as academic misconduct and as such treated seriously. You should also include in this section information on whether this or a similar application has been submitted to the PHR programme previously, or to any other funder including other NIHR programmes which you should name, and provide dates and outcomes of these.

---

**Please note: The Programme Advisory Board will use this section (Section C) of the form only, to assess the public health importance of the proposal. They will not see any other part of the application form. You must complete this section of the form in an anonymised format - there must not be any information that enables any individual, team or institution associated with your application to be identified.**

---

### Section C: Project Details & Justification

This section is used in the first stage of assessment of your application and it allows you to demonstrate why your chosen research area is of importance to public health. Please only provide the information requested. There must not be any information that enables any individual, team or institution associated with an application to be identified. **Your application may be rejected if such identifying information is included.** This includes any references which would enable the identification of your or your unit / team (this information is provided in other sections).

### C1. What is the main research question?

Please provide a short description (in one sentence) of the main research question.

### C2. Describe the intervention being evaluated.

Please provide the information requested about the intervention: what it is, the setting in which it will be delivered (for the study and, if different, when the intervention is fully developed and implemented), who will deliver it and who will provide funding.

If there are **any NHS components** (including funding and organisational support) within your proposal:

1. before continuing with your application, please refer to [http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/fags/remit\\_of\\_public\\_health.asp](http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/fags/remit_of_public_health.asp) to ensure your proposal falls within the remit of the PHR programme;

2. if you consider it to be within remit, please characterise NHS components clearly in this section to enable us to assess your application.

**C3. For the main research question, please state:**

- (1) the participants
- (2) the comparator (if relevant)
- (3) the outcomes

Please ensure that your proposal has clearly described health outcomes which support the remit of the PHR programme.

**C4. Are there any other questions the research project aims to answer?**

Please state any subsidiary questions your project seeks to answer.

**C5. Please state why the research questions are important now for improving the health of the public, and will they address inequalities in health?**

Please provide a clear explanation of the problem to be addressed and why it is important to public health. You should also include an explanation of how the research results will be used.

**C6. Summary for the non-expert**

Please provide a summary of the project to enable a non-expert reviewer to understand the following:

- How the proposal addresses the research proposed.
- How and where the research will be carried out.
- What outcomes will be used to assess the success of the research.
- What, if any, are the ethical issues involved in this study and the arrangements for handling these.
- Why this team is well placed to carry out the research.
- How the costs requested are justified.

More detail on writing for public consumption is available from the Plain English Campaign. A free guide designed specifically for the Health Sector can be found at: [www.plainenglish.co.uk/medicalguide.pdf](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/medicalguide.pdf).

---

**Please note: The second stage of the assessment process is where the study design and scientific merit are scrutinised by the Research Funding Board and referees. They will review the whole application form, mainly using the Sections D onwards of the form, in conjunction with the earlier sections. You should provide a clear explanation of your intended study.**

---

**Section D: Summary of Evidence and Project**

**D1. Please provide a summary of evidence explaining why this research is needed now**

Give reference to any relevant systematic review(s) and discuss the need for your study in the light of the(se) review(s). If you believe that no relevant previous studies have been done, give details of your search strategy for existing studies. Please give details of other studies currently underway, both nationally and internationally, which are relevant to the proposed study. Please explain why this research is needed now.

**D2. Summary of Project**

The Research Funding Board requires a clear and succinct summary of your proposed research. Please use the following headings as appropriate.

**For Primary Research proposals:**

- *Design:* Give a brief statement on the type of study design to be used

- *Setting:* State the setting(s) in which the study will occur
- *Target population:* Define the population from which the study sample will be recruited (e.g. women over 60, people with learning disability, deprived urban communities)
- *Intervention being evaluated:* Give a clear definition of the intervention to be evaluated and include a rough estimate of its cost.
- *Measurement of outcomes and duration of follow up:* Details should include justification of the use of outcome measures where a legitimate choice exists between alternatives, the proposed duration of the intervention and frequency and duration of follow up. Validated surrogate markers are acceptable, where appropriate
- *Sample size:* State the required sample size, giving details of the estimated effect size, power and/or precision employed in the calculation. A full justification of the estimated effect size must be provided
- *Planned analyses:* Please give details of the planned analyses
- *Project timetables including recruitment rate:* Indicate the anticipated duration of the study, paying particular attention to the expected recruitment rate and a justification for your estimate. Outline the main stages of the proposed project with expected durations.

**For Evidence Synthesis proposals:**

- *Methods:* Give a brief statement of the methods to be used
- *Target population and Setting:* Specify the population from the original studies to be included.
- *Intervention being evaluated:* Give a clear definition of the intervention to be evaluated and, where possible, include a rough estimate of its cost.
- *Search strategy:* Provide details of the body of existing evidence that will be covered and access arrangements (e.g. use of databases, hand-searching, communication with authors).
- *Review Process:* Explain the criteria applied to assess the quality and relevance of studies identified by the search strategy. Provide an explanation of how these will be decided if these are not yet known.
- *Expected output of research:* Outline how report conclusions will be presented: synthesis type (qualitative / quantitative) and recommendations for further research.
- *Project timetables:* indicate the anticipated duration of the study. Outline the main stages of the proposed project with expected durations.

**Section E: Team Expertise**

Outline the particular contribution each member of the team will make towards the project. The team should be multidisciplinary and include all relevant expertise to enable delivery of the proposed research. You are advised to consider appointing a study manager (for small studies this might be one of your co-applicants, rather than a dedicated post) – a generic job description is available here: [http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/fundingopportunities/pdfs/studymgr\\_genJD.pdf](http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/fundingopportunities/pdfs/studymgr_genJD.pdf). The PHR programme also suggests that teams proposing randomised controlled trials should include input from an experienced trials unit. The Research Funding Board welcomes information on your or your team's wider research activities. We are particularly keen to hear about how your previous or current work will fit with this application

**Section F: Details of Co-applicants**

Complete personal details for all co-applicants (other than the lead applicant who has been identified in Section A) and state their contribution towards the proposed project (e.g. data collection, co-ordination and project management, analysis, methodological input, consumer input). Please note you are limited to a maximum of 12 co-applicants at this stage. If you are invited to submit a full proposal you will be given the opportunity to increase the size of your team. Do not include collaborators (individuals who will contribute to the research but do not have responsibility

for its management) in this section. You will have the opportunity to include them, if your proposal is shortlisted, at the full proposal stage.

### **Section G: Partner Organisations**

The Research Funding Board expects that applicants will work, where appropriate, with the relevant partnership organisations. Please state which partner organisations you intend to work with and indicate the level of progress in developing this collaboration, specifying what role any partner(s) will have in the proposed research. Please supply as much detail as you can.

### **Section H: Other Key Information**

**H1.** Please provide full details on any patents (or other exploitable results) that may arise from the research.

**H2.** Please declare any interests that you or any of your other applicants might have. This includes, but is not limited to, any facts that, should they come to light at a future date, would embarrass either the programme or the individual who withheld the fact (e.g. if a member of the team holds a patent or has a financial interest within the research area).

### **Section I: Details of Suggested Referees**

If your outline proposal is shortlisted by the Research Funding Board and you are invited to submit a full proposal, it will be subject to external review. You should provide details of three expert referees who will be able to provide an independent assessment of your proposal. Please note that the referees may not be from your host institution, or those of your co-applicants. You can nominate experts based outside the UK. Referees suggested will only be contacted if your proposal is shortlisted and developed into a full proposal.

**You must complete the tick box at the bottom of the page to confirm that the experts listed have agreed to this nomination.**

### **Section J: Monitoring Information**

If you are using a Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) we need the requested information, If not please leave this section blank. The CTU will be aware of this requirement and is able to supply information for your use.

### **FLOW DIAGRAM**

As part of your submission, if appropriate to your study, we recommend that you provide a flow diagram as this will help the programme to understand the study design. (This should be a single side of A4 as a .pdf file, please include the project title as a heading for the flow diagram) This should illustrate the study design and the flow of participants. Applicants should also describe complex interventions and controls as accurately and fully as possible within their diagram. If proposing a RCT, we advise you refer to the CONSORT statement and website for guidance ([www.consort-statement.org](http://www.consort-statement.org)). The .pdf file should be submitted along with your application form (details are provided below in Part 3 of this document).

## **Part 3 – Submitting Your Application**

The PHR programme requires your application form and any supporting documents to reach our offices before the deadline stated on our website in order to process your application.

Please note that we cannot grant any time extensions beyond this deadline and that any additional documents to those listed at the beginning of Section 2 will not be seen by the Board. Please ensure that before you submit your application, you have completed the necessary fields and saved a version of your form.

***NIHR Public Health Research Programme Researcher-led call***

---

Confirmation of receipt: You will receive an automated email confirming receipt of your application. If for any reason you are concerned that your submission has not reached us, please contact a member of the team at [info@phr.ac.uk](mailto:info@phr.ac.uk) or on 023 8059 9697 (24 hour answer phone).

If, after carefully reading all these instructions, you still have difficulties completing your application, please visit the PHR programme website ([www.phr.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk)) which contains a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and answers. If your particular query or problem is not addressed, please telephone 023 8059 9697 and leave a message or email [info@phr.ac.uk](mailto:info@phr.ac.uk). A member of the team will contact you as soon as they are able to.