

Translational Call 2026

Summary

Our [research strategy](#) highlights our ambition to accelerate the pace and precision of musculoskeletal research. We aim to fund research that is driven by the needs of people with arthritis and has the greatest potential to improve the quality of their lives. Translational research facilitates the turning of observations in the laboratory, clinic and community into interventions that directly benefit people with arthritis. To support this important area of research we have dedicated funding for translational projects that will help bridge the gap from early-stage research to being ready for commercial development. This translational funding scheme will aim to help progress the development of novel, innovative technologies towards clinical development for the benefit of people with arthritis.

Context and changes we want to see

This call is seeking to support high-quality, well-defined Proof of Concept projects that aim to develop a commercially viable technology that will address a clear unmet clinical need for people with arthritis. The funding should advance technologies along the developmental pathway leading to further investment and/or development by industry. It is expected that projects will have been developed to a stage where further validation of the technical, market or commercial concept is required to attract commercial investment.

Translational research cuts across all aspects of our [research strategy](#) and therefore applicants can submit projects which address any of our priority areas:

- Early Detection and Prevention
- Targeted Treatment
- Living Well

Applicants should make clear which area their project is addressing and how the technology would show benefit for people with arthritis.

Our Research Impact framework focuses on seven areas of research impact (listed below). We anticipate that, in delivering against the outcomes set out above, research projects will achieve impact relevant to one or more of the four areas highlighted in bold.

- Policy and Practice – our research is influencing how arthritis is treated or managed.
- **Intellectual property, products, and services** – new innovations, treatments or tools which improve patients' lives.
- New knowledge – our research has changed what we know about arthritis.
- **Patient and Public Involvement** – the benefit that patients bring to the research itself.
- **Partnerships** – new networks, partners and collaborations which extend research.
- Capacity Building – our investments are increasing the human or technical capacity to conduct research.
- **Leveraged funding** – new funding that has been awarded to continue the research we funded

Scope and Requirements

In this initiative, we seek to fund projects in the following technology areas:

- **Medical devices** - these can be any instrument, apparatus, implement, machine, appliance, implant, reagent for in vitro use, software, material or other similar or related article, intended by the manufacturer to be used, alone or in combination for a medical purpose.
- **Orthotics** - an external medical device (such as a brace or splint) for supporting, immobilizing, or treating muscles, joints, or skeletal parts which are weak, ineffective, deformed, or injured.
- **Implantable therapeutic delivery** - an implantable device or system to control the release of therapeutic agents either systemically or locally to improve its efficacy and safety by controlling the rate, time and location of drug release.
- **Diagnostics** - (in vitro diagnostic medical devices) - In vitro diagnostics (IVDs) are tests used on biological samples from the human body to detect disease conditions and infections or determine the status of a person's health.
- **Imaging technologies** - (imaging diagnostics or medical imaging) are methods, techniques and processes for imaging the human body for the purpose of diagnosis, monitoring and treatment of disease.
- **Cell therapy and regenerative medicine** - regenerative medicine is the methods, processes and treatments to replace or regenerate human cells, tissues or organs in order to restore or establish normal function. This includes cell therapies, tissue engineering, gene therapy and biomedical engineering techniques. Cell therapy is using cells or cellular material, either autologous or allogeneic, for the treatment of disease or chronic conditions to restore healthy function.
- **Novel therapeutics (small molecules or biologics)** – we would expect applications in this area to be highly focused proposals on the core Proof of Concept experiments required to show, for example, target engagement of their novel therapeutic, or to show that their target is present in human tissues.

To be eligible for this call applicants are expected to have completed all fundamental or underpinning research required to understand the basic principles of the technology and develop the concept (Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 1 and 2 where relevant). The technology should be in a position where the next required step is to show preclinical Proof of Concept (TRL 3 and beyond where relevant).

Projects must have a clear commercial route and truly address an unmet clinical need for people with arthritis. They should be milestone driven with a clear delivery plan. This scheme will not fund fundamental or discovery research projects.

Proposals demonstrating positive industry support or collaboration will be strongly encouraged. The benefits of the proposed technology over any competing products should be made clear. Applications will be expected to demonstrate that they have considered the intellectual property position, the proposed route to market and commercialisation and a strategy to navigate the relevant regulatory processes. Applicants should also show that they have engaged with their relevant Technology Transfer Office prior to application and will continue to work with them on the IP and commercial strategy throughout the development of the project.

Applicants must ensure that they have understood the scope and requirements of the call before submitting an application. Applications out of scope will be rejected at the validation stage and will not be considered in the review process. **If you have any questions about this call document,**

eligibility or would like to discuss your research proposal with the office please email awards@versusarthritis.org

Research Involvement

Applications should involve people with arthritis in the development of the outlined work as well as plans for continued collaboration with them in the oversight, delivery and dissemination of the proposed research. More information and guidance can be found in our PPIE Hub: [Support to involve, engage, and recruit people with arthritis in research](#)

Proposals must demonstrate careful consideration of appropriate representation and diversity (ethnicity, socioeconomic, gender, age) as relevant to the aims of the proposal.

We will not fund research that does not conform to the principles of the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs), or that do not account for genetic, sexual, immune and microbiome diversity in animal models.

Data and sample resources

Where relevant, we require researchers to make use of established, pre-existent cohorts, collections, bioresources and registries. We require researchers proposing to make use of human tissue to consider whether existing resources would meet their needs and to justify why any new collection is necessary.

Who can apply

Versus Arthritis research awards may only be held in universities, hospitals or recognised academic research institutes in the UK. Any academic, clinician or allied health care professional at an eligible UK institution can apply. The lead applicant must be based at an eligible UK institution. Individuals who are employed by, or whose salary derives from, a commercial organisation are not eligible to apply for a Versus Arthritis award but may be included as a co-applicant. At least one applicant must have a tenured position within the lead institute, but this does not need to be the lead applicant.

Applications with industrial partners are encouraged. Applicants with proposals that include part-funding from a third party (including industry) are allowable, but applicants should contact us to discuss their application as early as possible and will be subject to appropriate multi-party contracting arrangements around the award. International collaborators and people with lived experience may also be included as co-applicants.

There is no requirement that projects have previously received Versus Arthritis funding, however previous holders of MedTech awards from the charity can apply to this scheme providing their project fits the scope of this call.

What you can apply for

Grants of up to £250,000 for a duration of up to 24 months will be awarded to successful applicants who can demonstrate a clear commercial solution to a musculoskeletal clinical need.

Applicants can apply for costs for salaries, expenses and small items of essential equipment. This scheme will fund reasonable costs associated with carrying out a pilot clinical or feasibility study however later stage or large clinical trials will not be funded.

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Salary costs for a part-time project manager to assist with the delivery of the project can be included. Reasonable consultancy costs (including for regulatory advice) will be eligible for funding, however applicants are strongly advised to contact the charity to discuss these proposed costs before submitting their application.

Applicants who intend to outsource any of their project to be undertaken by a third party should discuss this with us in advance of their proposal being submitted.

Further details of permissible costs can be found on our [website](#)

How to apply

Applications to this scheme will be via a two-stage process, with an initial outline application stage which will undergo panel review. Those who are successful at this stage will be invited to submit a full application.

All applications for Versus Arthritis funding must be received through our online grant management system [Grant Tracker](#).

Applicants must carefully read the call document, application form and guidance documentation before starting an application.

Please ensure that the most appropriate language is being used in each section of the form and that the correct sections are completed.

Please allow time for management of appropriate reviewers and signatories to access the Grant Tracker system and provide their approvals.

How will applications be assessed?

Full applications will be reviewed by our translational funding panel which will include people with lived experience of arthritis. Applicants will have the opportunity to provide a rebuttal to their panel reviews ahead of the funding panel meeting, where final recommendations for funding will be made.

Full applications will be reviewed and assessed on the following criteria:

- Importance and potential impact
- Scientific quality and scope
- Novelty and innovation
- Involvement
- Research design and delivery
- Feasibility
- Value for money

We plan to invest £1M in this funding scheme and aim to support around 5 projects.

Award Management

It is expected that all awards will provide brief quarterly reports for monitoring as well as a more detailed annual report.

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During the award applicants may be invited to meetings with Versus Arthritis to discuss their research findings and/or asked to contribute written summaries.

Timelines

Call Open	3 September 2025
Deadline for outline applications	16:00 Wednesday 15 October 2025
Outline application panel review	Mid December 2025
Invitation to submit full application	By 7 January 2026
Full application deadline	16:00 Wednesday 4 March 2026
Full application panel review and notification of awards	June 2026
Project start date	From August 2026 at earliest

Contact details

For all enquiries, please contact awards@versusarthritis.org