



Research Funding Strategy

1. Context

The Dunhill Medical Trust has a long history of funding some of the best of the UK's academic and clinical research into understanding the mechanisms of ageing and treating age-related diseases and frailty, as well as supporting community-based organisations which are working to enhance the lives of those who find they need extra support in later life. In working with these two communities, we are uniquely placed to bring them together to inform and influence the collective understanding of “what works”.

In 2015, the Government's “Key Issues for UK Parliament” underlined this need: “*Vastly improved life expectancy, one of the great triumphs of the last century, looks set to be one of great challenges of this one. Between 2015 and 2020, over a period when the general population is expected to rise 3%, the numbers aged over 65 are expected to increase by 12% (1.1 million); the numbers aged over 85 by 18% (300,000); and the number of centenarians by 40% (7,000)*”. This was further reinforced by the Government's Grand Challenges mission to ensure that people can enjoy at least 5 extra healthy, independent years of life by 2035, while narrowing the gap between the experience of the richest and poorest. In 2016, the World Health Organisation's strategy on Health and Ageing emphasised the points that many existing systems are better designed to cure single acute conditions and continue to manage health issues in disconnected and fragmented ways, lacking coordination across care providers, settings and time and that certain problems which are more likely to afflict older people and negatively impact their daily lives (although are not necessarily life-limiting) are often overlooked.

“Aligning health systems to the needs of older populations: as people age, their health needs tend to become more chronic and complex. Health systems and services that address these multidimensional needs in an integrated way have been shown to be more effective than services that simply react to specific diseases independently. Yet this results in health care and other services that not only fail to adequately meet the needs of older people but also lead to significant and avoidable costs, both for older people and for the health system. Where services do exist, there are frequently barriers that limit older people's access to them, such as lack of transport, unaffordability and ageism in health care delivery”.

“Problems that matter for older people, such as pressure ulcers, chronic pain and difficulties with hearing, seeing, walking or performing daily or social activities, are often overlooked by

[Key issues for UK Parliament 2015](#)

[Grand Challenges](#)

[WHO Global strategy on ageing and health 2016-20](#)

health professionals. In primary health care, the clinical focus still generally remains on detection and treatment of diseases; because these problems are not framed as diseases, health care providers may not be aware how to deal with them, and frequently lack guidance or training in recognizing and managing impairments and geriatric syndromes”.

And in 2020 the global COVID-19 pandemic brought all of these issues into sharp focus. We plan to play our part in helping our communities and networks to address them.

2. Our aims

In summary, we invest in those who have great ideas and methods for improving the health and well-being of older people and in making the connections which can help them to flourish.

We are committed to applying our resources to inspiring and enabling academic researchers (from across the disciplinary range) and health and social care professionals to apply their knowledge and skills to:

- improving the quality of life, functional capacity and well-being for older people now, or creation of the context of change in the future;
- preventing, delaying or reducing future health and social care requirements;
- informing and influencing the collective understanding of “what works”.

We will do so by ...

- Working with the research community to identify the important, but perhaps less well-funded, areas of research and direct our attention and resources to ensure that they receive the focus and support that they need.
- Backing well-designed research which is imaginative, novel and acknowledges that the complexity of the issues involved often need a multi-disciplinary approach if it is to have real and positive impact on the lives of older people.
- Providing support to encourage leading investigators from all relevant disciplines to undertake work on ageing.
- Providing support to institutions which can demonstrate leadership in and a long-term commitment to ageing-related research.

Our Grant-making Policy, which sets out our principles for the assessment of applications and the criteria for evaluation (including peer review), is available on our website.

- Providing support that delivers excellence in doctoral researcher training in ageing-related research.
- Providing support for post-doctoral academics and research-active health and social care professionals so that trained PhD level investigators in ageing are not lost to other disciplines.
- Convening networking events and organising meetings of specialists of varied disciplines and professions to scope the future of and priorities for ageing-related research and foster the collaborations that will tackle the challenges of delivering our strategic goals to improve health in later life.
- Providing funding to support clear pathways to impact and engagement with community-led organisations.

3. Our focus for the plan period 2021/22–2025/26

During the five years to 2020, we invested over £25M in the cause of understanding the mechanisms of ageing and improving the health and social care of older people. In common with all organisations, our resources are not infinite. We derive our funding from our endowment which is largely invested in the world markets. It is our intention to maintain our grants distribution at c. £5M pa throughout this plan period, but we must retain the flexibility to protect our ability to support our charitable mission into the future and will therefore need to react accordingly if to continue with this level of distribution is judged to put the value of the endowment in the long term at risk.

We will prioritise the following themes for this plan period, making periodic focused calls for proposals in one or more of these themes in order to provide greater clarity for applicants and improve our ability to apply sufficient resources to make practical impact.

We will support high quality research proposals within the following themes:

- improving our understanding of the underlying mechanisms of ageing and age-related disease;
- targeting the social determinants of healthy life expectancy;
- improving the quality of life for older people, in particular:
 - in developing and delivering suitable living environments;

Call details and deadlines may be found on our website.

- addressing issues of age-related vision, hearing and oral health;
- having the potential to prevent, delay or reduce future health and social care requirements, in particular, improve the ability to maintain functional independence for older adults.

We will be supporting a smaller number of larger community programmes, focusing in particular those which create age-friendly living environments, connect older people to the wider community and enable them to stay in their own homes for longer. In doing so, we will also continue to support targeted initiatives arising from our Older People’s Care Improvement Initiative. We will support those organisations and programmes to engage more closely with the research base by providing co-funding and networking opportunities.

4. Our principles

A number of key principles underpin all that we do, and we expect to see this reflected in our award-holders’ work and the organisations in which they carry it out.

- **Involvement and engagement.** We expect older people’s views to be considered, where appropriate, and, at a minimum, for the researchers we support to be actively involved in public engagement activities. No matter how “cutting edge” or complex the research, the ultimate beneficiary can offer unique and valuable insights in its design, implementation, communication, future prioritisation or evaluation.
- **Making connections; convening networks.** We know we can promote innovation and contribute to making a real difference by connecting researchers from different disciplines with each other and with those working in professional practice and the community.
- **Multi-disciplinarity.** Many of the problems we are trying to understand and address require examination from a variety of perspectives and the input of multiple stakeholders if they are to work and lead to practical benefit. Good and effective collaboration does not come without challenges but is essential if multi-dimensional problems are to be solved.
- **Equality and diversity.** It is important to access and nurture the best talent and equality and diversity are integral to driving innovation and opportunity and excellence in research. We prefer to work with organisations and teams which are committed to nurturing equal and diverse cultures.
- **Flexibility.** While we have set out our overall strategic framework and will plan the deployment of our resources around our published priorities, from time to time, issues will arise which require an agile and speedy response.

5. Our ways of working

We strive to be a collaborative, transparent, learning organisation. We aim to systematically collect and share the outcomes of our grant recipients' work and make it openly available, as well as ensuring that our staff and trustees are well-equipped to support the work of our grant-holders.

We will do so by...

- Ensuring that our stakeholders are aware of the support we provide – both financial and non-financial – and providing fora to enable them to share their stories, ideas and learning with others.
- Investing in practical and helpful use of technology so that our staff and other stakeholders can access what they need from us – anytime and anywhere.
- Respecting our legacy of prudent, yet visionary, stewardship. We will ensure that we continue to develop this legacy, keeping our governance procedures up-to-date and proportionate, our operational procedures effective, efficient, helpful and flexible and make imaginative and appropriate use of our endowment.
- Where appropriate, we will join forces with other organisations, which share our vision and values, to provide greater support for our stakeholders and greater reach and impact.