

CoEN 2022 call for proposals: Pathfinder 6

Call Text

1. Introduction

The Network of Centres of Excellence in Neurodegeneration (CoEN) is an international initiative involving research funders in Canada (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, CIHR), Flanders (Vlaams Institute voor Biotechnologie, VIB), France (Agence Nationale de la Recherche, ANR), Germany (Deutsches Zentrum für Neurodegenerative Erkrankungen, DZNE), Italy (Ministry of Health, MoH), Republic of Ireland (Science Foundation Ireland, SFI), Slovak Republic (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, MESRS), Spain (Instituto de Salud Carlos III, ISCIII) and the UK (Medical Research Council, MRC).

Since its inception in 2010, CoEN has delivered five calls for proposals; a list of the awards made under these calls is located [here](#).

This new call for Pathfinder projects is being launched by five of the nine CoEN members:

- ANR (France)
- CIHR (Canada)
- DZNE (Germany)
- MoH (Italy)
- MRC (UK)

The call seeks to address the need for innovative research to underpin new approaches to therapeutic intervention. As before, applications will connect centres with a critical mass of resources and expertise to drive a step change in neurodegeneration research. The six agencies are contributing approximately £3.2M (equivalent to €3.6M or CA\$5.4M) to fund awards made under the call involving their national centres of excellence (CoEs). A list of eligible CoE in each country can be found [here](#).

2. Aim of the call

The call sets out to encourage the community to think “outside the box”, to stimulate **new and unconventional approaches and creative solutions** to the challenges of neurodegeneration research by undertaking **high-risk / high-payoff research**.

An aim of the CoEN initiative is to build productive links between research groups within recognised CoEs in neurodegeneration. To this end, it is expected that teams will combine the research strengths across CoEs in at least two partner countries to provide a true value-added collaborative effort that will advance our approach to neurodegeneration research. **Projects will address issues which would not readily be funded through the standard grant mechanisms of the agencies participating to CoEN**, and it is expected that in addition to collaboration across CoEs, projects may also serve to provide a platform for future collaboration with industry.

3. Call remit – Pathfinder awards

To maximise the potential for innovation, the scientific remit for Pathfinder awards is broad in scope from basic to clinical and healthcare aspects of neurodegenerative diseases. Projects may include studies to illuminate our understanding of neurodegenerative mechanisms or create technological advances to support novel diagnostic or therapeutic approaches. Projects using existing datasets to test innovative hypotheses are also welcome. Connectivity with research in related areas, such as inflammation and sensory neuroscience, or vascular and mental health is encouraged, as is outreach to experts in the fields of physical and computational science or industrial partners within the consortium or foreseen follow-up collaborations.

Within the remit of this call, neurodegeneration applies to:

- Alzheimer's disease and other dementias
- Huntington's disease
- Parkinson's disease (PD) and PD-related disorders
- Multiple sclerosis
- Motor neurone diseases
- Prion disease
- Spinocerebellar Ataxia
- Spinal Muscular Atrophy

Type of neurodegenerative disease research to be supported:

- Cutting-edge basic, translational and/or clinical studies
- Novel reductionist systems
- Innovative disease models
- Systems biology/medicine
- Proof of concept for new therapeutic approaches
- Supportive technological development for the above

Key Characteristics of Pathfinder Awards:

- Proof of principle and high-risk/high-payoff studies with clear deliverables
- Imaginative approaches to interdisciplinary and industry partnering encouraged
- Leverage of existing CoE infrastructure in neurodegeneration research
- Maximum of 24 months funding period
- Could not be funded via other schemes of CoEN partners

4. Eligibility

This call will only fund research that has the potential to move the field forward significantly. Incremental studies, embellishment of known mechanisms or biomarker identification/validation from known pathways will be ineligible.

- Applications are restricted to joint bids from investigators within identified CoEs (a list of identified CoEs and eligible institutions for partner countries is available [here](#)). Each CoE may have internal rules concerning which investigators are eligible to apply.

- All bids must be submitted through the relevant CoE director, with the exception of Canadian and Italian applicants. For Canada, the Canadian Consortium on Neurodegeneration and Aging (CCNA) is the designated national CoE, and Canadian applicants must be a member of the CCNA in one of the following roles: a Nominated Principal Investigator, a Principal Investigator or a Co-Applicant. For Italy, to expedite the eligibility check process, it is mandatory for Italian researchers to submit a pre-eligibility check form to the Italian Ministry of Health through the IRCCS Scientific Directorate (via Workflow della Ricerca, ER Code), prior to the submission of a CoEN proposal. For DZNE, a pre-eligibility check is required through the Scientific Strategy Office.
- Only joint transnational research projects will be funded. Each proposal must involve at least two eligible CoEs from different countries.
- More than one CoE may be involved within any single country, as long as the primary cross-border criterion is met.
- Essential expertise can be included from outside the CoEs as an identified collaborator. Collaborators external to the CoEs could in principle receive funding via the lead CoE where they are providing essential expertise or resource that brings clear added value to the project. Any funding to an external collaborator must be in accordance with the standard terms and conditions of the relevant Funding Agency ([see country-specific information](#)).
- Projects with cross-disciplinary elements are encouraged and collaborators from outside the field, e.g. in the physical sciences, are encouraged, as are industry partners.
- Each project should identify a Lead Principal Applicant and one Principal Applicant from each participating country. An investigator may not be a Principal Applicant on more than one project submitted through this call.
- Previous CoEN-funded consortia may bid for funds for new science projects under this call if aligned with the scope of the call.

5. Engagement with industry

Where appropriate, applicants are encouraged to engage with industry to maximise the translational potential of the research. This could be in collaboration or partnership, either as research participants or as prospective end users of the results. Industrial partners' involvement should be in line with the terms and conditions of the relevant funders ([see country-specific information](#)).

6. Funds available

The initiative will make approximately £3.2M (equivalent to €3.6M or CA\$5.4M) available for Pathfinders awards. Projects will be up to 24 months in duration, with total combined costs across collaborating CoE of up to £350K (equivalent to €399K or CA\$595K). For proposals that involve clinical studies or animal models, proposals up to £575K (€655K or CA\$977K) will be considered. Funders may set maximal per-project budget

restrictions for funds requested from each country: see country-specific information for further details.

The funding available will **not** provide support for:

- major equipment, defined as any item over £10,000 (equivalent to €11,400 or CA\$17,000);
- the salaries of tenured investigators, although funds for research staff employed on the grant will be permitted;
- clinical trials;
- PhD studentships.

Each funding agency will fund the research component performed by researchers associated with CoEs / institutions within their respective jurisdiction, according to their standard terms and conditions.

Funding agencies' indicative contributions to this Pathfinder 4 call are as follows:

Funding Agency/Country	Funding Partner Contribution	
	Partner currency	¹ GBP (equivalent)
ANR, France	€1.00M	£0.88M
CIHR, Canada	CA\$0.67M	£0.39M
DZNE, Germany	€0.50M	£0.44M
MoH, Italy	€1.00M	£0.88M
MRC, UK	£0.60M	£0.60M

Details of allowable costs, including those which may need to be exceptionally agreed are detailed for each funding body in the [country-specific information](#).

7. Reporting

In addition to the standard guidelines of the relevant funding partners, including requirement for reporting the outcome of funded research, researchers will be required to provide a description of the project for publication on the CoEN website and an end-of-project report within six months of project completion. Given the high-risk nature of projects funded by CoEN, the reports should include negative and well as positive results/outcomes.

8. How to apply

Applicants must use the CoEN application form which can be found [here](#). All applications must be submitted in **PDF** format by the Lead Principal Applicant to coen@mrc.ukri.org by 16:00 (GMT) on **Friday 9th December 2022**.

Any applications received after this point will be ineligible for the competition.

All applications **must** be accompanied by letters of support from the respective Director of **each** CoE included in the proposal who **must verify the eligibility of researchers**

¹ Based on MRC standard currency exchange rates as of June 2022: Canadian Dollars £1 = CA\$1.7, Euros £1 = €1.14

from their respective CoE and **outline what contributions the applicant(s) make to the centre** ([see also country-specific information](#)).

Applicants should notify their CoEN funding partner of their involvement in a proposal (see contact details below).

Where an industrial partner will be included as a collaborator, applicants **must** contact their CoEN funding partner to discuss terms of inclusion. Industry partnerships would be required to comply with the terms and conditions of the relevant CoEN funding organisation.

Please bear in mind that the budgets within proposals may have to be signed off by the host institution's administrative department. Please allow sufficient time for these additional processes. **Any late applications will be rejected.**

The case for support must not exceed 6 sides of A4 (Point 10 Verdana) and should cover the following:

- the scientific rationale for the proposed study. The gaps in existing knowledge/barriers to progress should be identified and a justification on how the proposed approach is new and unconventional compared to existing studies should be clearly stated, including ethical considerations.
- the objectives, explaining their potential to move the field forward significantly;
- the justification for the collaboration including the role of each investigator and co-investigator for each partner; the added value and unique opportunity in addressing the issues identified that the collaboration will provide;
- an overview of the methodology to be used, identifying what is innovative;
- the expected outcomes and deliverables, including their health and socioeconomic impacts, and, if relevant, any plan for future collaboration with industry.
- A project plan that is realistic for the two-year funding period is essential.

Total costs for the proposal should be briefly justified. In addition, a breakdown of the costs of research to be undertaken in each participating partner country is required. In these breakdowns, costs should be presented in the host country's currency and in Pounds Sterling (GBP) according to the following exchange rates: Canadian Dollars £1 = CA\$1.7 and Euros £1 = €1.14. Costs should be calculated according to the relevant funding partner's standard terms and conditions.

All research undertaken must comply with the host funders' terms and conditions with regard to:

- Ethics and research governance
- Data preservation and sharing
- Intellectual property

Release of funds for successful applications will be dependent on satisfactory compliance with such terms and conditions.

A written project agreement ("consortium agreement") covering issues of liability, confidentiality, intellectual property and publication must be concluded by all project partners across the different research organizations. Researchers have the responsibility to ensure that such agreements are formulated with appropriate project-specific content.

A copy of the fully executed agreement, signed by all project partners, must be submitted to the funding partner overseeing the project **no later than 6 months** from the project start date, and funders may suspend funding if this condition is not met.

The Lead Principal Applicant will assume responsibility for ensuring other members of the team are appropriately informed and will coordinate any necessary communication between the team and the funding partners.

Canadian applicants will be required to submit an abbreviated application through CIHR's electronic portal, [ResearchNet](#). Please contact the Canadian contact listed below for detailed information.

9. Evaluation process and criteria

The full applications will be assessed by an international scientific review panel which will score and rank applications using the assessment and scoring criteria outlined [here](#).

Applications will be assessed against criteria for importance, scientific quality, ethics and governance, and value for money, within the specific context of the aims of the initiative of driving innovation, building productive partnerships and addressing barriers to progress.

As well as scientific innovation and excellence, the Panel will be looking for true collaboration and partnership working above and beyond that already taking place. Applicants should highlight why, in the absence of the requested collaboration and funding, the planned research could not be undertaken to the required quality level or timescale.

Funds will be allocated to proposals considered to be in the fundable range starting at the highest ranking until the funding from relevant partners for components of the collaboration is exhausted.

Funding decisions will be taken in March 2023. The decisions of the CoEN funding agencies will be final.

10. Compliance

Project partners must ensure that they comply with the applicable laws, regulations and policies of their respective funding agencies.

11. Personal data protection

Personal data collected during the whole extent of the call (such as applicants' names, contact information and other) will be processed in accordance with the current UK data protection legislation. Further information on this can be found on UKRI website (<https://www.ukri.org/about-us/privacy-notice/>).

Each funding agency will comply to their current data protection legislation, to ensure data protection for project scientists, staff and any human research subjects.

12. Timeline

Launch of call	25th October 2022
Closing date for submissions	16:00 (GMT) on Friday 9th December 2022 Applications will not be accepted after this time
Panel Meeting	March 2023
Notification of decisions	March/April 2023
Funding take up dates	June/July 2023

13. Contacts and further guidance

General enquiries:

Secretariat of the CoEN Oversight Group

COEN@mrc.ukri.org

Country Specific Inquiries:

Country	National Contact	Funding organisation contact details
Canada	CIHR Support	Canadian Institutes of Health Research Telephone: 613-954-1968 Toll Free: 1-888-603-4178 support-soutien@cihr-irsc.gc.ca
France	Dr Sheyla Mejia Scientific Coordinator	French National Research Agency (ANR) + 33 (0) 1 78 09 80 14 CoEN_ANR@anr.fr
Germany	Dr Sarah Jewell Head, Scientific Strategy Office	Deutsches Zentrum für Neurodegenerative Erkrankungen e.V. (DZNE) +49 228 43302-370 sarah.jewell@dzne.de
Italy	Dr Gaetano Guglielmi, Deputy General Director Chiara Ciccarelli, International Relations Officer	Ministry of Health (MoH) g.guglielmi@sanita.it c.ciccarelli@sanita.it
UK	Dr Jo Latimer, Head of Neurosciences and Mental Health	Medical Research Council COEN@mrc.ukri.org