

# UK Approach to Clinical Research<sup>+</sup> during the COVID-19 Pandemic



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Research



# Overview

- Introduction to the National Institute of Health and Care Research
- Overview of NIHR's response to COVID-19
- Working with UKRI to fund research into COVID-19
- Prioritising clinical research resources to deliver COVID-19 research
- Key examples of success
- Future plans



We fund or part-fund over 10,000 front-line research delivery staff throughout the NHS

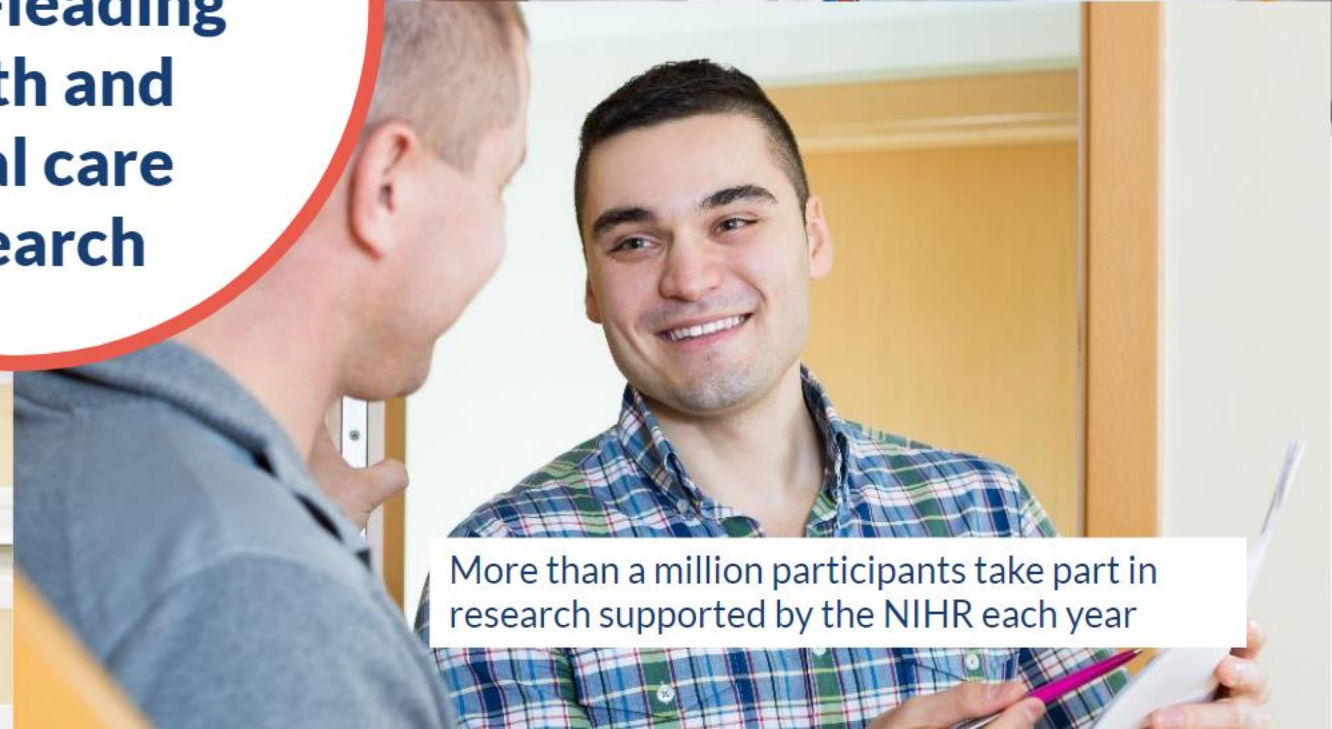


We're funding more than 1,000 active health and social care research projects

**NIHR funds,  
enables and  
delivers  
world-leading  
health and  
social care  
research**

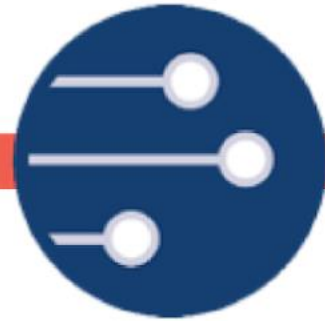


More than 2,000 researchers hold our career development awards

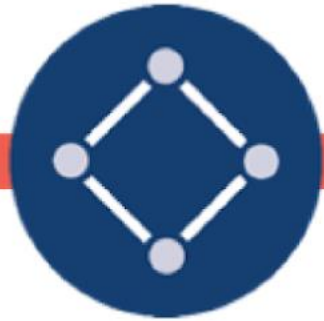


More than a million participants take part in research supported by the NIHR each year

# NIHR's mission is to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research.



**Funding high quality, timely research** that benefits the National Health Service, public health and social care



**Investing in world class expertise, facilities and a skilled delivery workforce** to translate discoveries into improved treatments and services



**Partnering with patients, service users, carers and communities** improving the relevance, quality and impact of our research



**Attracting, training and supporting the best researchers** to tackle complex health and social care challenges

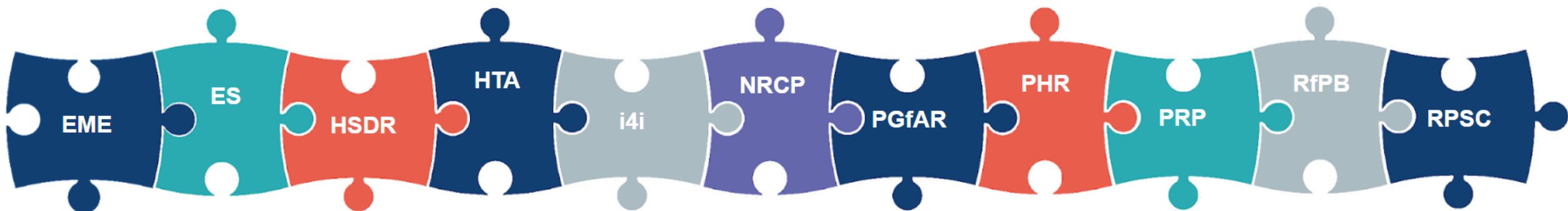


**Collaborating with other public funders, charities and industry** to shape a cohesive and globally competitive research system



**Funding applied global health research and training** to meet the needs of the poorest people in low and middle income countries

# Our research programmes



We have eleven research programmes that fund multi-disciplinary health and social care research in both clinical and non-clinical settings to meet a range of evidence priorities. We offer both commissioned (i.e. opportunities for funding in specific topics) and researcher-led funding opportunities.

Funding of large clinical trials is typically undertaken through the Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation (EME, earlier phase) and Health Technology Assessment (HTA, later phase) programmes

# NIHR response to COVID pandemic

## Our response to the pandemic



Finding new treatments



Developing vaccines and prevention



Informing policy and decision-making



Evaluating tests and diagnostics



Supporting a global response



Researching long COVID

- Supported more than **2 million** people to participate in COVID-19 studies
- Pre-existing infrastructure underpinned all areas of response
- New ways of working: **decentralised trials, remote patient monitoring**

NIHR's response to COVID-19 | NIHR

# Funding research during the COVID pandemic required a different approach to that of business as usual



## Speed

Normal programme timelines not designed to accommodate rapidly changing acute situation

Requirement to deliver impact, rapidly



## Volume of information

Usual process very robust in terms of information required

Not realistic when rapid application process is required



## Remit

Time taken by researchers to consider which funder, programme and scheme to apply to

# Working with UKRI (Medical Research Council), we developed COVID-specific funding opportunities to address research questions during the acute phase of the pandemic (1)

## COVID-19 Rapid Response Call

Launched 4 February 2020

Call 1 - Active intervention development  
(Vaccines and therapeutics)

Call 2 - Diagnosing and understanding COVID-19  
(Other key areas)

26 awards (£24.2M) made  
Including RECOVERY, PRINCIPLE, clinical development of Oxford vaccine

## Key points



**Speed** – call 1 window for applications 9 days; for call 2, 23 days



**Volume** – 271 applications received across the 2 calls



**Less information required** in the application than standard schemes



**Single entry point** for researchers working anywhere within NIHR and MRC remit



**Impact** expected within 18 months



# Working with UKRI (Medical Research Council), we developed COVID-specific funding opportunities to address research questions during the acute phase of the pandemic (2)

## COVID-19 Rolling Call

April - June 2020

Remit covering span of MRC and NIHR remits, including:

Virology, Immunity and Pathophysiology

Diagnostics

Epidemiology

Mental Health

Clinical Management

Primary, Adjunctive and Supportive Therapies

Vaccines

Health and Care Delivery

Underpinning tech

51 awards made - ~£40M

Including PHOSP, COVID-NURSE, REACH, key vaccine comparison study, social care research

## Key points



Retained **short application** and **single entry point**, and instituted **link** with **prioritisation** of NIHR clinical research resources



Applications **reviewed** when submitted



Use of college of experts and peer review as **triage** mechanism for **weekly funding panel**



**Patient and public** involvement throughout



**Impact** expected within 12 months



High **volume** - over 700 applications considered



**Highlight** notices in key topics

# The Clinical Research Network/ Research Delivery Network

- Provides research delivery staff and services in the NHS and wider health and care system in England to deliver funded research – distributes approximately £350 million in funding from DHSC via the 15 Local Clinical Research Networks (LCRNs) for NHS Support Costs to research delivery organisations (NHS trusts, primary care and non-NHS settings)
- Supports a portfolio of approx. 4000 eligible studies under 30 Specialties in the NHS and wider health and care system
- Consists of the coordinating centre and 15 LCRNs, hosted by NHS trusts across England
- Has been an essential part of UK research infrastructure which has seen huge progress since 2015, supporting a transformation in the strength of England’s research delivery system, and underpinning huge expansion of research participation.
- Throughout 24/25, the CRN is transitioning to the NIHR Research Delivery Network (RDNCC and 12 RRDNs), to build on the success of the CRN and address government priorities and drivers for change in the health and care research landscape



# NIHR's Clinical Research Network (now Research Delivery Network) developed a prioritisation process to ensure resources were directed towards highest priority clinical research studies—Urgent Public Health Designation

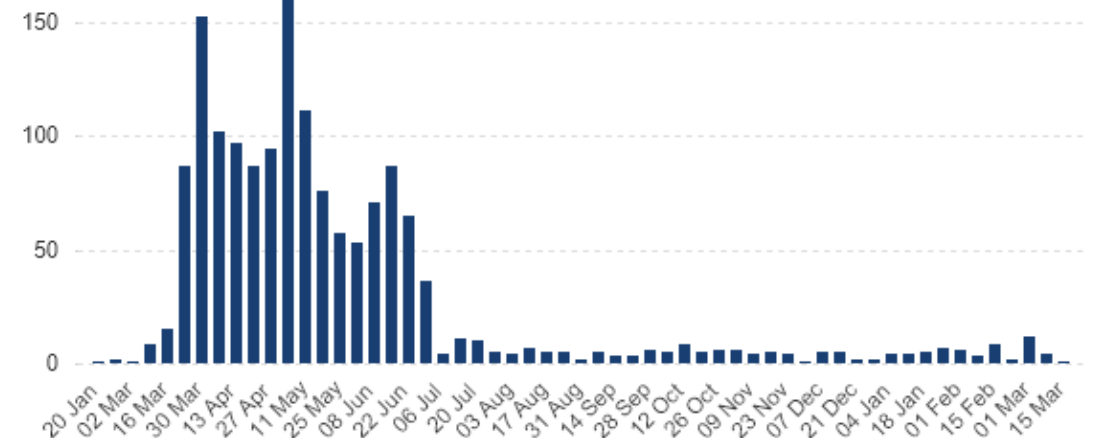
The NIHR CRN (currently transitioning to RDN) provides infrastructure (research support staff and services) in the NHS and wider health and care system in England to deliver funded research, across all conditions and settings

## The UPH 4-Step Process



## No. Applications Received by Week

\* Google Form launched 26 March 2020

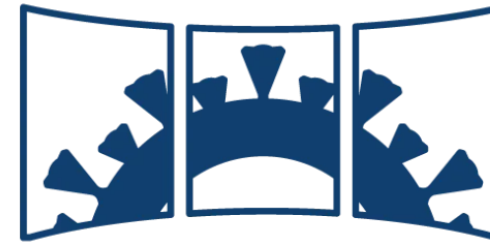


# World-leading, streamlined COVID-19 trials



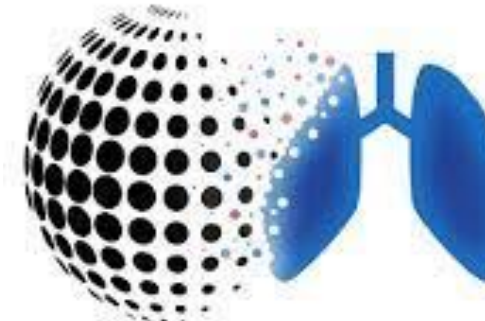
# RECOVERY

Randomised Evaluation of COVID-19 Therapy



## PANORAMIC

Platform Adaptive trial of NOvel antiViRals for eArly treatMent of COVID-19 In the Community



## REMAP-CAP

Randomized, Embedded, Multifactorial Adaptive Platform trial for Community-Acquired Pneumonia

# UK COVID-19 treatment study saved 1 million lives

- Starting in March 2020, the RECOVERY study was funded to evaluate repurposed treatments for patients hospitalised with COVID-19.
- UK Clinical Research Network enabled recruitment of 47,000 patients across 175 UK hospitals.
- NHS was immediately authorised to use dexamethasone from June 2020.
- Provided a model for future platform studies.



# Embedding the learning from the COVID-19 pandemic

Developing a cross-UK research funders framework for research for pandemic preparedness and response including

- Commissioning inter-pandemic research
- “Hibernated” studies
- Rapid evaluation and evidence synthesis
- Study prioritisation plans
- Public and patient involvement
- Flexible capability to respond

Independent report

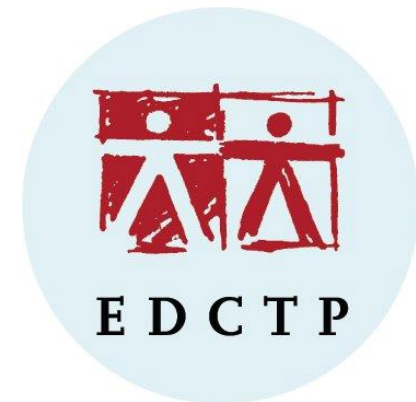
**Commercial clinical trials in the UK: the Lord O’Shaughnessy review - final report**

Updated 26 May 2023

Policy paper

**The Future of Clinical Research Delivery: 2022 to 2025 implementation plan**

Published 30 June 2022





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