CALL FOR Letters of Intent

Multiple Sclerosis Research

Neuroscience and Mental Health Institute,
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, University of Alberta
University Hospital Foundation

Purpose

Recognizing the devastating impact of Multiple Sclerosis (MS) on individual Albertans, Canadians and people worldwide, the University of Alberta and the University Hospital Foundation have come together to raise funds to accelerate research in MS. The program will support research that will significantly advance our understanding and treatment of MS, including research anywhere in the continuum from basic high impact discovery to translational work of direct relevance to the clinic.

This program will fund 1 to 2 high impact research projects from a total funding envelope of approximately $4M. Proposals will be selected via peer review. As a first step, this is a call to University of Alberta researchers for letters of intent (LOIs) to apply for funding as detailed below.

The deadline for receipt of LOIs is October 15, 2021.

Overview

Alberta is fortunate to have a rich and dynamic research culture underpinning the MS research landscape. This landscape is defined by excellence in fundamental science, imaging, and a commitment to innovative clinical care. To accelerate finding the cause and cure for MS, a province-wide endeavor to implement a precision health approach to coupling research with care for people affected by MS has been developed. Several themes are included in precision health, including the use of ‘big data’ derived from our emerging electronic health record (ConnectCare) in conjunction with artificial intelligence, established genomic platforms, and world class imaging capabilities that allow analyses of basic molecules through to cells and ultimately to the whole human organism. Each of these strengths is grounded in an interdisciplinary approach that enables the creation and advancement of knowledge around MS that will lead to prevention and improved outcomes for people with MS.

The vision for MS is one defined by finding the cause of MS, bolstered by robust diagnostic tools together with developing and implementing preventative and reparative treatments for MS. To realize these aspirations, it is imperative to speed the pursuit of research coupled with training the next generation of MS scientists and care providers such that the derived benefits are delivered to the clinic in an expedient and effective manner for all people with MS.

University of Alberta faculty members are asked to submit LOIs to highlight their proposals to undertake high impact MS research. These LOIs may expand on existing and promising approaches or develop new, as-yet untested ideas. LOIs will be judged on scientific excellence, track record of the team and relevance to persons with MS. After review of the submitted LOIs by an arms-length adjudication committee, successful applications will be asked to submit a full application which will also undergo peer
review. 1 to 2 proposals will be chosen and used to develop a targeted fundraising strategy that can be presented to the philanthropic community.

Part B: Scope of the Award

I. Eligibility

- Multidisciplinary teams are encouraged to apply.
- The Principal Investigator must hold a full-time academic appointment at the University of Alberta and be a member of the NMHI. To apply for NMHI membership, please contact nmhicoms@ualberta.ca.
- The Principal Investigator should have a demonstrated track record in MS research.

II. Research Themes

Multidisciplinary approaches to address three primary research focus areas are encouraged. A proposal may address one or more of the following priority areas:

- Understanding the disease process in terms of MS causes and associated disease mechanisms; this theme encompasses current strengths in neuroscience, immunology, experimental imaging (PET, MRI) as well as associated areas such as behavioral (pain) expertise;
- Discovering or identifying new treatment approaches for MS: enhanced neuroimaging (MRI, PET), innovative biomarker discovery and novel therapy development;
- Precision health for MS through research: establishment of a rigorous and flexible database encompassing all consented MS people followed in the Northern Alberta MS Clinic that includes demographic, clinical, imaging, laboratory, and treatment data and is amenable to contemporary artificial intelligence applications. The goal would be to yield optimized guides to best care practices and better outcomes.

III. Funding

A total of $4M will be available to fund high impact MS research. The exact allocation of the funding will be determined once the full applications are evaluated. Possible scenarios include 2 proposals funded at $2M each or 1 proposal at $4M.

Part C: Application Details

I. Writing the LOI

Letters of Intent should not exceed 2 pages in length excluding references, tables and figures (1-2 additional pages allowed for tables and figures; no limit on references). Language should be accessible to the educated layperson. The LOIs should include the following information:

- Name/affiliation of Principal Investigator and Co-Investigators
- Project Title/Research Theme(s)
- Background that demonstrates research excellence of the team and commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity
- Research proposal demonstrating innovation and the potential to significantly improve/impact the lives of MS patients
• High level outline of: budget, timelines, milestones. Funding requests should be for $2M to $4M over 2-5 years. Budgets amounts should be proportionate to the number of research themes addressed.

In addition, applicants should submit a:
• Lay summary and title (0.5 page)
• List of at least 5 Canadian and/or international reviewers that have the expertise to review the application. If required, please indicate non-preferred reviewer(s) along with reason.

II. Review of LOIs
LOIs will be judged on scientific excellence, track record of the team and relevance to persons with MS by an arms-length adjudication committee.

III. Application Deadline and Submission

The deadline for receipt of LOIs is October 15, 2021. Letters of Intent should be submitted electronically as a single PDF to: nmhicoms@ualberta.ca

If you have any questions related to the LOI, please contact nmhicoms@ualberta.ca