



MQ Fellows Award 2024-USA

Guidance Notes for Applicants



MQ is part of the Association of Medical Research Charities



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Introduction

MQ Mental Health Research (MQ) is seeking talented researchers with **bold ideas from across the USA**, who are who are poised to make transformative advances in mental health research.

The Fellow's Award is MQ's flagship grants programme and has invested over \$37 million over the last 10 years. This call will support the best and brightest early-career scientists from across the USA investing over \$1M into researchers asking challenging questions that will contribute to transformative advances in mental health research.

Launched as MQ's flagship program, the Fellows Award has a proven track record of supporting research aligned with our current priorities. This year, we seek innovative projects tackling critical mental health challenges. We encourage applications across all research areas of mental health. MQ is particularly interested in the following highlight areas:

Children and young people: research that explores adolescent mental health treatment and prevention including but not limited to, anxiety, depression, and ADHD.

Public mental health: research that is focused on topics such as under-represented populations, the determinants of mental health, the distribution of mental illnesses across populations, community mental health, mental health within schools as well as on policy and equity issues.

Prevention and treatment: research that detects targets for intervention, tests the effectiveness of interventions, culturally validates interventions, and develops new interventions or tailors existing interventions to improve effectiveness and reach to underserved populations.

Suicide Treatment & Prevention: Research that considers novel interventions to reduce early mortality in those in mental distress. (See O'Connor et al. [2023](#))

Psychosis: Research looking at mechanisms and treatments of early psychosis

Bipolar Disorder: Research looking at the mechanisms and improved treatments of bipolar disorder

MQ seeks to fund a diverse research portfolio that reflects a bio-psycho-social approach to mental health. The 2024 MQ Fellows Awards are **open to researchers anywhere in the USA** and from **all disciplines** related to mental health research. Research can be based in the **laboratory, clinic or field** and may involve **theoretical, experimental, social science or medical humanities approaches** to the remit outlined above.

With the Fellows Award, MQ aims to support the **most promising early career scientists**, clinician-scientists and researchers working to **launch their independent research careers** in the field of mental health. Awardees will be asking questions that can bring transformational advances in mental health science, undertaking research with the potential to improve the lives of young people living with mental illness.

Awardees will also **demonstrate their commitment to leadership, interdisciplinary research, and being ambassadors for MQ**. They will join a global community of MQ supporters and friends who are championing progress across all sectors of mental health research.

What's Included in the Fellow's Awards?

MQ Fellows Awards will provide funding of up to £225,000 (GBP) (\$285,000 is an estimated equivalent based on current exchange rates which can vary.) over three years. Funds may be used for any of the following:

- Start-up funding for a specific project or transition funding for a current project
- **Salary support** (for the applicant or any research support staff e.g. research assistant)
- **Direct research costs** (e.g. research consumables, specialist equipment*)
- **Animal costs** (for the purchase, importation, housing and maintenance of animals, used in line with the [AMRC's position statement on the use of animals in research](#))
- **Travel costs** (e.g. visit to collaborators, project mentors and attending conferences)
- **Patient and public involvement costs**
- **Other costs** (e.g. high cost items or experiments e.g. gene expression, fees for external or internal services, publication costs)

(*relates to any equipment not found in a standard laboratory that is specifically required to complete this project)

The host institution, must be in the USA, must cover all indirect costs and overhead costs, such as non-specific estimated costs. Estate costs (i.e. heating/lighting), laptops and office stationery, finance and HR (personnel) costs are not eligible for funding, even if it is standard practice for your institution to charge overheads to external grants.

Eligibility

The MQ Fellows Award is designed to support early career researchers investigating questions that will ultimately improve the quality of life for people affected by mental illness. Applicants will have made an outstanding start to their research career as demonstrated by their research results and career track record to date.

We are seeking applicants who are establishing their independence through their intellectual efforts and leadership. Researchers need to be fully committed to this path and at a career stage that demonstrates this commitment.

Applicants must be early career researchers wishing to establish their independence:

- with a **PhD, DPhil, DClinPsy, MBBS, MD or equivalent**

- have accumulated **3-7 years by March 2024** through whole-time-equivalent research experience, equivalent in nature to postdoctoral research
- be able to show that this award will help to establish your independence relative to your current position

The onus to demonstrate appropriate career stage falls on the applicant. As there are many ways to make the transition to independent researcher status, successful applicants will make clear their career path and eligibility for this award, and just how they envision that the MQ Fellows Awards will help them to make meaningful contributions to advances in mental health research. Investigators who are fortunate to have other substantial funding commitments (research support in excess of £225,000/year, excluding full economic costing [fEC]/indirect costs) are asked not to apply and will not be considered eligible for the MQ Fellows Awards.

Eligible applicants **must**:

- make a clear case for how their proposed project is relevant to developing impactful treatments/interventions and charting pathways to improve mental health outcomes in the real world. This pathway to impact is an important element in the selection criteria
- be able to demonstrate in their submitted application that:
 - i. the proposal has been informed by the priorities of people with lived experience of mental illness. This could be done for example (but not limited to) through addressing questions identified in published research priority setting exercises or other sources of lived experience that you have engaged with.
 - ii. the project contains elements of Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) and/or co-design, as appropriate to the particular proposal. MQ defines PPI in line with the UK [NIHR Involve](#) definition as research done **with or by** members of the public rather than **to, for or about** them. We define co-design in line with the key principles outlined [here](#) and consider that, proportionately and appropriately done, PPI and co-design almost always improve research and often hasten impact.
 - iii. the proposal considers the interdisciplinary nature of mental health research
 - iv. the proposal will work towards providing robust results that will follow open research practices.
- complete and submit their application in English.

Applications may be rejected without further consideration if the submitted form is:

- in an incomplete state
- in a format other than requested
- received after the stated deadline
- or does not meet the specified remit

MQ recognises that good research takes place in supportive environments and will assess applications accordingly. The **host institution**, based in the USA, should be well recognised in the field and provide strong support for independent research whilst encouraging professional and personal development. MQ will accept applications naming either non-profit or for-profit host institutions, providing that these criteria can be met. MQ reserves the right to request additional information to assess institutional eligibility. The onus is on the institution to evidence the supportive environment and the quality of duty of care towards researchers.

Given applications will be received from the USA, all research must comply with applicable local and/or national regulations/laws and meet an equal standard established by the following UK guidance documents:

- Accord – Attributing the cost of health and social care research
- [Animals \(Scientific Procedures Act 1986\)](#)
- AMRC - [statement](#) on the use of animals in research
- [ARRIVE guidelines](#) (Animal Research: Reporting of In Vivo Experiments)
- Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers 2019
- Concordat to Support Research Integrity 2012
- Directive 2009/136/EC – Data Protection
- [European Directive 2010/63/EU](#)
- GDPR (EU) 2016/679
- Good Clinical Practice, Good Laboratory Practice
- [NC3Rs - principles of the 3Rs](#)

Applications should be accompanied by a statement of support from the Head of Department of the host institution. The reference should demonstrate why the applicant deserves a prestigious MQ Fellows Award. It should focus on the nature of the applicant's contribution to mental health research and comment on how an MQ Fellows Award would be transformational to the applicant. It should also state how the host department will support and promote the career development of the potential MQ Fellow and provide the resources needed for the awards but giving specific details.

Please ensure you familiarise yourself with, and that your institution can agree to, MQ's Standard Grant Conditions and Policies before beginning an application, as the terms and conditions associated with an award is not negotiable.

Patient and Public Involvement

MQ wants to connect our funded researchers with our supporters to build a diverse and effective mental health research community. We believe that it is important that our funding reflects the priorities of those living with mental illness and that their voice is heard throughout mental health research. We therefore ask that you demonstrate how your project impacts lived experience priorities. Your project must also include meaningful elements of PPI or co-design, and you must show the predicted impact for the lives of those with mental illness.

Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity within a broader field of mental health science is an important value for MQ. We are committed to catalysing interdisciplinary approaches to transform mental health. By this we mean projects and people at the intersection of disciplines and approaches, whose work crosses traditional boundaries between disciplines. We also mean interdisciplinary work that promotes the sharing of information and knowledge across boundaries and in so doing helps open up, improve and transform approaches to mental health.

Applicants can demonstrate their commitment to interdisciplinary work in many ways. This might be through a research question or methodologies that span two or more disciplines, or through the close involvement of a mentor with suitably complementary background or skills. It is up to applicants to show how their career and proposed research is interdisciplinary and helps create a wider field of mental health science.

Reproducibility and Open Access

Applicants must specify details of how they will ensure their results are robust (e.g. by providing a detailed sample size calculation, including blinding and randomisation procedures, incorporating replication where appropriate, pre-registering study protocols and analysis plans, posting pre-prints to generate wider pre-publication peer review, posting study data to a repository, etc.). Applicants are free to choose which approaches they consider relevant and appropriate to their research.

MQ supports the principle that research materials should be published as openly as possible so that results from research can be reproduced and replicated (Reproducibility and Replicability in Science [The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine](#)). This will ensure the robustness of the evidence generated by MQ-funded activity, and serve to increase the likelihood that this evidence will ultimately transform mental health.

Applicants should take into account the needs of their specific project (e.g. protecting patient anonymity) in the way they make data available, and make data sharing part of their informed consent procedure.

They should also ensure they follow [FAIR principles](#). We encourage the use of institutional repositories for this reason.

We encourage applicants to consider the Registered Reports format offered by many journals. In brief, in this format the study rationale and methods are reviewed prior to data collection. If the submission passes peer review, the journal offers in-principle acceptance, which virtually guarantees final publication regardless of the results. For more details on Registered Reports see [here](#).

MQ encourages any research we fund to be openly disseminated so that others may learn from and build upon this vital research. To facilitate this, the research we support should be freely available to our supporters and to the global mental health research community through open access publication of the main outputs of the research as peer-reviewed research articles, and we strongly support the unrestricted access of these papers and the accompanying data.

Application Process

MQ Fellows Awards follow a 3-stage application process:

Stage 1: Expression of Interest

Applicants are required to complete and submit a **Stage 1 Expression of Interest application form**. This should be submitted by the **deadline of Friday 10th May 2024 at 13:00 BST (GMT +1)**.

The Stage 1 Expression of Interest is comprised of an EOI Application form that can be downloaded from the website [here](#).

Guidance

- The Lead Applicant must be the Principal Investigator (the “Fellow”) who will lead the research and be responsible for delivering the project.
- You will need to include your ORCID ID, if you do not currently have one, please register [here](#).
- You will need to add your 5 most relevant publications for this application.
- As part of the Expression of Interest, you must provide a summary of your project in no more than 500 words. This should be detailed enough so that the Panel and Reviewers can assess the feasibility and scientific merit of your proposed project. Applicants shortlisted to the Stage 2 will have the opportunity to provide further details on the project design. Please note that your abstract may be sent to potential peer reviewers so do not include confidential or commercially sensitive data.
- In section 4, you are required to provide details of how people with lived experience of mental illness would benefit from this research, and/or have contributed to the conception and design of this research (see **Patient and Public Involvement** sections above). You could describe how they

have been/will be involved in the design, planning or management of this research project, and any ongoing role, or what sources you consulted in designing your research question. Please note we do not consider the recruitment of patients taking part in a study alone as “patient and public involvement in research”.

- Finances - We do not require a full breakdown of costs at the Expression of Interest stage of the application process, however, you are required to give a reasonable estimate of costs, in GBP only, under the following headings:
 - Salaries
 - Research expenses
 - Animals*
 - PPI costs
 - Other (including travel, open access costs)
 - Nb. MQ does not fund overheads/indirect costs but will pay for costs directly incurred with the research project. .

*If the project is to involve [animals](#), then you can request reasonable costs for the purchase and maintenance of the animals. Clear justification is required on the animal model, species and numbers required. The project plan must also adhere to the principles of the UK [NC3Rs](#) (replacement, reduction and refinement) and applicants are encouraged to use the [Experimental Design Assistant](#) (EDA) to assist with their project design and statistical analysis. You must comply with our animal research funding policy, which details countries that are considered to have suitable controls on laboratory animal welfare. If your country is not on the pre-approved list, please contact us in advance of your submission, otherwise your application will be automatically rejected.

- Ethics Approval - You must ensure that your application considers good practices of data, clinical and laboratory research. If your project involves patient information, human volunteers or tissue samples, or animals, you should state within the project description that all necessary licenses, ethics and regulatory approvals have either been granted, have been applied for, or will be applied for or is not required. You are not required to provide copies of ethics approval statements or regulatory approval documents at the expression of interest stage.

How your application will be assessed

Stage 1 Expressions of Interest are reviewed by the MQ Research Team to ensure that they comply with the basic eligibility criteria of:

- relevance to the thematic focus
- relevance to intervention / prevention
- informed by priorities of people with lived experience of mental illness

Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria stated in the call, or clearly fall outside the remit on non-scientific grounds, will be rejected at this stage of the process.

On successful checking, applications are then sent to the MQ Fellows Award Panel to be assessed on:

- **The applicant:** whether they are at an appropriate career stage and establishing independence, has a demonstrable commitment to mental health research, and would receive substantial benefit from the award
- **The project:** whether it is important to the field of mental health, its contribution to the thematic focus, it has the potential to transform the field, its scientific merit and its interdisciplinarity
- **The environment:** suitability of the institution and department
- **PPI or co-design elements:** how you intend to involve those with lived experience of mental illness meaningfully in your research
- **The pathway to impact:** how this research responds to the priorities of those with lived experience of mental illness and how it will benefit them

Stage 2: Full Application - Invited Proposal

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to participate in Stage 2 of the process, which is the submission of a full application with a detailed scientific proposal including how PPI has been considered in the design of the project, along with a full budget.

Deadline for invited applications is 10 August 2024 at 13:00 BST (GMT+1)

Applications must have the support of your Head of Department and be approved by grants or finance officer before the deadline.

These applications will be externally peer reviewed in accordance with the UK [Association of Medical Research Charities \(AMRC\)](#) principles of peer review. A lay summary and the proposed PPI elements will also be reviewed by lay reviewers.

During this stage, applicants are asked to suggest scientific mentor(s) for their project, who can be from any field, and whose research is pertinent to the proposed project. In addition, and once funded, the MQ Research Team will work closely with successful applicants to identify one or more additional suitable mentors, drawn from both applicant and MQ suggestions.

Stage 2 Invited Proposals will be further reviewed, scored and ranked by the MQ Fellows Award Panel and external reviewers. Shortlisted applicants successful at this stage will be invited to participate in Stage 3, and attend an interview.

Stage 3: Invited Interview

Interviews will be conducted by the MQ Fellows Award Panel, representatives with lived experience of mental illness.

Finalists will be interviewed by the MQ Fellows Award Panel the week commencing 30 October 2024. Interviews will be conducted virtually.

By submitting a Stage 2 Invited Proposal form, applicants verify their ability to participate in the interview process as scheduled, and should they be made an offer of funding, be able to accept the offer of funding and the terms and conditions associated with the Award.

Final decisions for the MQ Fellows Awards will be made by the MQ Fellows Award Panel, on the basis of applicant's Stage 2 Invited Proposal form, external review, and interview.

Please note that MQ retains the right to invite additional reviewers to participate as needed in any stage of our application process.

Code of Conduct – Conflicts of Interest

MQ's Board of Trustees, the MQ Fellows Award Panel and all external reviewers (including lay reviewers) are required to abide by MQ's code of conduct and conflict of interest policy issued to them on joining the funding panel, which is designed to protect and preserve the integrity of our Advisers and our processes.

Part of this code states that **panel members may not discuss any aspect of the deliberations or recommendations of the panel with applicants, or those outside of the MQ Fellows Award Panel. Applicants should not contact any panel member** to discuss their application.

Requests for information on any aspect of an application, or on decisions, should be directed to MQ at grants@mqmentalhealth.org.

The MQ Community

The MQ Fellows Award provides a unique opportunity to join MQ as we grow. We aim to build global networks and support amongst the mental health research community with enthusiastic and committed

investigators in all areas of mental health science. In accepting the MQ Fellows Award, Awardees will embrace opportunities to interact with MQ, our advisers and other stakeholders. MQ Fellows will be welcomed as ambassadors for MQ at scientific meetings, events and fundraising opportunities

Mentoring, Leadership and Training

MQ is developing a global community of trained and engaged MQ mental health mentors – including senior researchers from a range of disciplines - who will help to support the Awardee’s career development and facilitate training opportunities. Applicants will be invited to nominate a mentor(s) at an early stage of the process. MQ will then work with successful applicants to identify one or more mentors, drawn from both applicant and MQ suggestions.

MQ is also developing a programme of training, leadership, networking and career development opportunities to offer Fellows throughout the course of their Award.

Accepting an Award

By applying for a MQ Fellows Award, applicants and their research institution must be able to accept the terms and conditions set out within our grant award. These terms and conditions are not negotiable except in the rare situation that a clause conflicts with local or national law. Applicants must ensure that their Heads of Department and relevant grant/finance officer at their institution have reviewed the contract in detail before an application is submitted. If an institution is unable to agree to the terms of the grant contract when an offer is made, the offer will be withdrawn and the funding offered to another applicant.

Monitoring

MQ Fellows will be required to submit annual scientific progress reports, which will be reviewed by the MQ research team and members of the Research Committee as appropriate. Fellows will also be required to undertake an annual Researchfish submission.

Finances

Payment of the grant will be made biannually in arrears, based on actual expenditure. MQ claim forms must be completed every six months, and be submitted along with a breakdown of expenditure.

Contact us

Please see our [website](#) for further details regarding the MQ Fellows Awards and how to apply. Applicants are encouraged to contact MQ if they have any enquiries:

Website: <http://www.mqmentalhealth.org/>

Email: grants@mqmentalhealth.org