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FOREUM TOPIC CALL 2026

"Sleep disturbances in and impact on patients with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases"

Introduction

FOREUM is committed to supporting and advancing talented investigators in the field of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs). In line with this commitment, FOREUM is pleased to launch the **2026 FOREUM Topic Grant** focused on sleep dysregulation.

Sleep disturbances are highly prevalent and insufficiently addressed in patients with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs). Across a wide spectrum of conditions that include inflammatory arthritis, connective tissue diseases, and osteoarthritis, patients frequently report impaired sleep quality, insomnia, altered sleep architecture, and non-restorative sleep.

Importantly, these sleep disturbances are closely linked to **pain, fatigue, disease activity, and mood disorders**, forming a complex and bidirectional relationship that significantly impacts quality of life, functional capacity, and long-term outcomes. Despite their importance, sleep disorders remain **under-recognised, under-measured, and under-treated in routine rheumatology practice**, and their underlying mechanisms in RMDs are incompletely understood. Nevertheless, these issues are very important for a large group of people living with different RMDs.

This FOREUM call aims to stimulate **innovative, high-impact research** to better understand, measure, and manage sleep disturbances in RMDs, ultimately improving patient-centred outcomes.

Scope

Studies may be **clinical, epidemiological, translational, or interventional** in nature.

Proposals should:

- address a **clearly defined unmet need** related to sleep disturbances in RMDs
- generate **novel insights or actionable solutions**
- focus on **outcomes that are meaningful to patients**, including quality of life, fatigue, pain, and daily functioning

Projects are expected to go beyond descriptive work and **contribute to improved understanding, diagnosis, or management** of sleep disturbances in RMDs.

We invite scientific proposals that address one or more of the following objectives:

1. Understanding mechanisms of sleep disturbances in RMDs

- Elucidate the biological, neurological, immunological, or behavioural mechanisms linking RMDs and disrupted sleep
- Explore the interactions between **inflammation, pain pathways, and sleep regulation**
- Investigate disease-specific versus shared mechanisms across RMDs

2. Measurement and phenotyping

- Develop or validate **robust, patient-relevant tools** for assessing sleep disturbances in RMDs
- Identify clinically meaningful **sleep phenotypes or subgroups**

3. Clinical consequences and longitudinal outcomes

- Investigate the impact of sleep disturbances on:
 - Disease activity and progression
 - Fatigue, pain, mental health, and quality of life
 - Work participation and societal burden
- Assess long-term trajectories and determinants of sleep impairment in RMDs

4. Intervention and management strategies

- Evaluate **pharmacological or non-pharmacological interventions** to improve sleep
- Explore **integrated care models** addressing sleep within routine rheumatology practice
- Assess behavioural, psychological, digital, or lifestyle interventions

5. Personalised approaches

- Identify predictors of response to sleep-related interventions
- Develop **stratified or personalised management strategies**
- Address specific populations (e.g. difficult-to-treat patients, comorbid depression, elderly patients)

Expected Impact

Projects funded under this call should:

- improve understanding of **sleep disturbances as a core domain of RMDs**
- deliver **clinically meaningful insights** that can influence practice
- provide **tools, interventions, or strategies** that improve patient outcomes
- contribute to integrating sleep assessment and management into **routine rheumatology care**

Eligibility and Requirements

Multi-centre collaboration

The **FOREUM Topic Grant** aims to support collaborative research across Europe and therefore requires applications to involve centres from **at least three different countries**.

Lead centre

Each institution may act as the lead centre for only one application; however, the institution and its researchers may participate as collaborators in other applications.

The lead centre is expected to be affiliated with its national EULAR association.

Eligibility of applicants and Principal Investigators

The call is open to applicants based at institutions in EULAR member countries.

Participation of non-EULAR member countries

Centres from non-EULAR member countries may participate as project partners in exceptional cases, where they provide specific scientific expertise or added value to the project.

Centres from non-EULAR member countries will not be eligible to receive FOREUM funding.

Participation of Patient Research Partners (PRPs)

Participation of patient research partners is strongly recommended for all research projects to provide experiential knowledge, with the aim of improving the relevance, quality and validity of the research process. For more information, please read the material on EULAR | PARE patient research partners.

Ethical considerations

FOREUM expects a high standard in the conduct of research it funds. For researchers this includes scientific integrity and adherence to the principles of good research practice. Patients involved in the study must be treated in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Exclusion criteria

Members of FOREUM committees and the EULAR Executive Committee are not eligible to submit or participate in applications.

Data sharing and collaboration

Applications must include confirmation that participating centres agree to collaborate on data analyses and/or provide aggregated or raw data in accordance with applicable national regulations and the requirements of their respective governing bodies. A single sentence confirming this agreement is sufficient; no additional documentation is required.

Budget

The FOREUM Topic Grant is designed to fund a range of research projects. An individual project proposal may apply for total funding of up to **600,000 EUR for a maximum duration of 3 years**, provided the expenditure is appropriately justified. Collaborating partners should have a substantial part of the budget to appropriately conduct research.

Continued financial support will be subject to the successful evaluation and approval of written mid-term and final reports by FOREUM’s relevant committees. Submitted publications can be used as part of the report.

Stage 1 – Letter of Intent (LoI)

To apply for this call, applicants must complete **Stage 1** of the application – the Letter of Intent (seven sections) - via the **AlphaFoundation** grant submission platform by **30 October 2026**.

How to apply

Click the "apply here" button to access the AlphaFoundation grant submission platform and follow the instructions in the online system. The platform will guide you through the application process and indicate the information required for each section.

What's involved?

The required structure and content of the **Stage 1 application (LoI)**, including the **word limit for each section**, are specified on the AlphaFoundation platform.

The LoI, Lay Summary and CV are requested as part of the online application on AlphaFoundation and should **not** be submitted separately to the FOREUM Office. All supporting information and documents requested for Stage 1 must also be provided through the AlphaFoundation platform.

The Stage 1 application consists of seven sections, of which **six are mandatory**, and must be completed.

- 1. Administrative Details
- 2. CV
- 3. Basic Information (including collaborating PRPs)
- 4. Lay Summary
- 5. Financing
- 6. Legal Terms
- 7. Attachments (optional)

Section 7, which allows applicants to upload additional documents, is **optional**. Applicants are **not** required to upload any additional documents in this section, and any documents uploaded there will not form part of the evaluation.

Stage 1 Review Process

Stage 1 applications (Letters of Intent) will be assessed by members of the FOREUM Scientific Committee. Applications demonstrating the highest merit will be selected on a competitive basis. The FOREUM Office will respond **by the end of November 2026** to confirm whether the proposal meets the scope, priority, and requirements of the call. Applicants whose Stage 1 proposals are selected will then be invited to submit a full application.

- Please note that applicants will **not** receive individual feedback at Stage 1 of the application process.

Stage 2 - Full Project Proposal

The number of applicants shortlisted for the second stage will be determined at the discretion of the Scientific Committee and will generally be approximately three times the number of grants available. They will then be invited to submit a full proposal on the grant submission platform.

The Stage 2 full proposal will be assessed based on the scientific excellence of the applicant, the innovation potential, impact and feasibility of the proposed project, as well as clear evidence of support and the availability of the necessary infrastructure at the host centre.

To facilitate review by patient representatives, applicants invited to submit a full proposal must also complete a lay summary. This will be requested as part of the online application on the AlphaFoundation system and does **not** need to be submitted separately to the FOREUM Office.

Full research proposals must be submitted electronically via the AlphaFoundation platform by **(date to be confirmed)**.

Evaluation and Decision



Application Instructions

Applications must be submitted through the AlphaFoundation platform.

[apply here](#)

Please select the **Topic Call** option and then select **FOREUM Topic** from the drop-down menu.

The AlphaFoundation grant submission system will guide you through the application process and specify the **word count** limit for each section.

Management of the Call

The call and approval process will be administered by the FOREUM Secretariat in collaboration with the FOREUM Scientific Committee.

Call Timeline

- Closing date for applications: **30 October 2026**
- Decisions on applications announced: End of November 2026

General Inquiries

Please contact the FOREUM Secretariat at info@foreum.org.

For questions only. Applications cannot be submitted by email.

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FOREUM is devoted to + promoting research in rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs)

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