

# Mental Health Award: Understanding how anxiety- and trauma-related problems develop, persist and resolve

This award will fund researchers to investigate the causal mechanisms through which brain, body and environment interact over time in the development, persistence and resolution of anxiety- and trauma-related disorders. Knowing more about these mechanisms will help us find better ways to identify these problems and intervene at an early stage.



On this page



## Call at a glance

**Career stage:** Early-career researcher, Established researcher, Leading a research programme, Mid-career researcher, Postdoctoral research

**Where your administering organisation is based:** Anywhere in the world (apart from mainland China)

**Level of funding:** Up to £4 million

**Duration of funding:** Up to 5 years

## Next deadline

Next deadline

Help

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## Disabled applicants

If you are disabled or have a long-term health condition, we can support you with your application process. Please contact us if you require this information in a different format or if we can assist you in any other way.

## About this call

Wellcome's mental health strategic aim is to drive a transformative change in our ability to intervene as early as possible in the course of anxiety, depression and psychosis, in ways that reflect the priorities and needs of people who experience these problems.

This call will fund research that advances scientific understanding of the causal mechanisms through which brain, body and environment interact over time in the development, persistence and resolution of anxiety- and trauma-related disorders.

We encourage applicants to review all the information on this page. You can also watch this webinar with our Mental Health team as they explain the call and its part in our Mental Health strategy.

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Mental health conditions in scope



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### Focus on causality

Existing evidence suggests that many factors contribute to the development, persistence and resolution of anxiety-related problems. For example:

- Genetics
- Childhood maltreatment

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- Environmental exposures such as air pollution.

However, we know much less about the biological, psychological and social causal mechanisms underpinning how and why these factors influence the trajectory of these problems over time. With this funding opportunity, we want to move beyond correlational evidence to a deeper consideration of the causal mechanisms underpinning anxiety-related problems. This mechanistic understanding will help us develop new and improved ways to predict, identify and intervene as early as possible.

**A focus on anxiety-related problems is needed because:**

- anxiety is the mental health condition that affects the greatest number of people worldwide, with an estimated 301 million people living with an anxiety-related problem.
- anxiety has the earliest onset of all mental health disorders on average, emerging earlier than other disorders such as depression or schizophrenia.
- anxiety can both precede and coexist with other diagnoses such as depression and psychosis. In addition to the severe impact it can have on people's lives on its own, it might also be a target to prevent the development of additional mental health problems.
- the neurobiology of anxiety-related problems is relatively well understood, both in humans and in animal models, meaning that the field is well placed to make new, interdisciplinary and cross-species links to enhance our understanding of causality.

Despite all this, anxiety-related problems remain under-researched and underfunded relative to other mental health problems. By improving our understanding of these problems, we will gain knowledge that can be used for translational purposes. This will help us find better ways to identify problems early on and to intervene at the most critical and earliest possible points (for example, through new therapeutic targets, new markers and new and improved early interventions).

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To be eligible to apply, applicants must address at least one of the following two priorities.

## **1. Research that considers multiple levels of explanation**

The causes and solutions of mental health problems are likely to involve a combination of biological, psychological and social factors. Integrated approaches are therefore crucial to understanding the causal mechanisms of mental health problems.

We are therefore looking to fund research that examines questions at more than one level of explanation (for example, molecular, cellular, systems, cognitive, behavioural, social, environmental or societal). This may involve using different experimental models (for example, organoid and rodent models) and human participants; however, this is not a requirement.

## **2. Research in low- and middle-income countries**

Of the more than 300 million people living with an anxiety-related problem globally, an estimated 79% (238 million) live in low- and middle-income countries. Despite this, research into anxiety-related problems in these countries has been underfunded, with less than \$2 million spent on anxiety each year, compared to over \$17 million spent on depression. Without a better understanding of how these problems develop, persist and resolve in these countries, we will not be able to progress towards our vision of a world in which no one is held back by mental health problems.

We are therefore looking to fund research within and/or across low- and middle-income countries, to better understand how different contexts may impact the trajectory of anxiety-related problems. Read the full list of low- and middle-income countries.

## **What we are looking for**

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## Research proposals must feature:

One or more evidence-based causal factor(s)	+
An appropriate research design, addressing causality	+
At least one of the two research priorities	+
Consideration of translational impact	+
Involvement of people with lived experience	+
One or more of our recommended common measures if conducting research with human participants	+

All projects must describe the relevant ethical, social and cultural implications of their proposed work.

## Examples of other elements in scope

### Research proposals can:


- Include secondary research objectives and activities exploring how anxiety-related problems precede or develop alongside depression and/or psychosis (both of strategic interest to Wellcome), but this cannot be the primary focus of the research proposal.
- Examine interactions between different causal factors.
- Explore multiple mechanisms for a single causal factor.
- Look at how anxiety-related problems develop, persist and resolve across an individual's lifespan.
- Focus on populations of any age but make the case as to how insights would ultimately have implications for early intervention.

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identify symptoms of anxiety-related problems.

- Study anxiety-related problems in the context of other conditions (for example, study how generalised anxiety disorder develops in the context of autism).
- Focus on under-represented and/or under-researched populations (for example, children living with intellectual disabilities, ethnic minority communities).
- Conduct comparative research (for example, compare how post-traumatic stress disorder develops in low- and/or middle-income countries as opposed to in a high-income country).
- Enrich existing datasets, including longitudinal datasets, if this is necessary to address the proposed research question(s).
- Include pilot data. Pilot data is not essential for this call although it may strengthen your application, especially at the full application stage.
- Test the causal mechanisms by which an intervention helps to resolve anxiety-related problems. We are interested in all kinds of interventions (e.g., pharmacological, non-pharmacological, digital) provided through healthcare systems or by other systems (e.g., workplaces, educational organisations), or undertaken by individuals themselves. However, the focus must be on improving mechanistic understanding of how they work, as opposed to focusing on efficacy.
- Work with one model system (for example, rodents) or with human participants only, as long as at least one of our two key research priorities is addressed.
- Design novel and ambitious projects that may involve an element of risk.

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Examples of research questions that would be in scope for this Mental Health Award 

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## What is out of scope

**Research proposals cannot:**

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evidence, or which are not identified as important by people with lived experience.

- Focus on the identification of a causal factor rather than test its underlying mechanism(s).
- Focus on evaluating the efficacy or effectiveness of an intervention rather than test the causal mechanisms by which the intervention helps to resolve anxiety-related problems.
- Focus primarily on anxiety as a risk factor (for example, for psychosis) without investigating the underlying causal mechanism(s) for anxiety-related problems.
- Focus primarily on mental health problems other than the anxiety-related problems in scope for this call (for example, by focusing on adjustment disorder or trait-level anxiety).
- Conduct exploratory or curiosity-driven mechanistic research that is not directly relevant to the call remit.
- Aim to develop new birth cohorts.

## Webinars

We have been running webinars to discuss the call and offer participants a chance to ask our Wellcome Mental Health team questions as a panel. It's a great way to hear an overview of the call and hear some questions from other potential applicants.

- Watch a recording of our 14 September webinar with details about the funding call, how to apply, eligibility and a Q&A session specifically about the call.
- Watch a recording of our 10 October webinar in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) exploring the funding call, current trends and future directions in research and practice for anxiety and trauma-related problems.

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You can apply to this call if you are a team of researchers:

- from any relevant discipline (we consider a broad range of disciplines to be relevant to mental health science, including but not limited to those listed in our mental health funding remit)
- from an eligible organisation
- based anywhere in the world (apart from mainland China).

We encourage applications from:

- diverse and interdisciplinary teams, with collaborations covering multiple areas of expertise (for example, biological, psychological and social)
- researchers at any stage of their career, including early career researchers and/or those who are new to the field of mental health science.

Although we encourage applications from diverse and interdisciplinary teams, this is not required. Each application should include the necessary team expertise and organisational support to answer the proposed research question(s). The contribution of each coapplicant (and collaborator, if applicable) to the project should be justified. Teams may want to consider involving people with lived experience of mental health problems in the project team, as lead applicants, coapplicants and/or collaborators.

When research occurs in more than one location, applications must include coapplicants based in each country where the research will take place. If the proposed research is planned to take place only in a low- or middle-income country, the lead applicant must be affiliated with an eligible organisation based in that country. For all collaborations, we expect applicants to demonstrate how they will approach ethical and equitable partnerships, including how this will be approached in partnerships between low- and middle-income country researchers and high-income country researchers.

Each application can only have one named lead applicant, who would be accountable for the delivery of grant activities, the financial management of the



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countries).

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Guidance and resources on ethical and equitable partnerships

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Lead applicant

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The lead applicant must:

- Have the experience needed to drive and lead a collaborative, large-scale research project and/or the necessary support structures in place to enable this.
- Have experience of people and research management, as appropriate for their career stage.
- Have experience of, or demonstrate commitment to, effectively leading a team that embeds lived experience expertise, as relevant to the research project.
- Have a permanent, open-ended or long-term rolling contract or the guarantee of one for the duration of the award. The contract should not be conditional on receiving this award.
- Be able to contribute at least 20% of their research time to this project.
- Be based at an eligible organisation that can sign up to our grant conditions.

You can only be listed as a 'lead applicant' on one application for this call. You can, however, be included as a coapplicant on one other application or hold other Wellcome awards. However, you must demonstrate that you have sufficient capacity for both projects if funded. See who cannot apply below for more details. Read more about lead applicant salary recovery and other costs covered.

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Coapplicants

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Each coapplicant must:

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expertise, as relevant to the research project.

- Have a guarantee of space from their administering organisation for the duration of their commitment to the project, but do not need to have a permanent, open-ended or long-term rolling contract.
- Be able to contribute at least 20% of their research time to the project.
- Be based at an eligible organisation that can sign up to our grant conditions.

Coapplicants can be based at the same or different organisations as other applicants, including in different countries. They can also be at any career stage and/or come from any relevant discipline. You must justify the added value of their contribution to the team. Read more about coapplicant salary recovery and other costs covered.

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#### Collaborators



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#### The team



- The team should include all the necessary expertise and technical skills to deliver the proposed research, including lived experience expertise and/or the skills needed to effectively involve and collaborate with people with lived experience.
- The team will be expected to actively foster a diverse, inclusive and supportive research environment within the team and across represented organisations.
- Team size should be appropriate for the proposed research. Teams can involve a minimum of two applicants, including the lead applicant, and will usually be no more than eight people (not including collaborators), unless in exceptional circumstances where a strong case must be made for requiring a larger team.
- Applications must include applicants based in each country where the research will take place.

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#### Time spent away from research



The organisation can be a:

- higher education institution
- research institute
- non-academic healthcare organisation
- not-for-profit or non-governmental research organisation
- commercial organisation (please note that you are not eligible for this call if your company is not established and/or does not have working capital).

### **Collaboration agreements**

If your application involves a collaboration or partnership between multiple organisations, the partners must enter into a suitable collaboration agreement, including provisions that cover:

- confidentiality
- publication rights
- access to background intellectual property
- ownership of foreground intellectual property
- arrangements for the protection, management and exploitation of foreground intellectual property.

Please note that the lead applicant's administering organisation is required under our grant conditions to own all the foreground intellectual property arising from the project and to take the lead in any commercialisation activity. For guidance, applicants are advised to read Wellcome's intellectual property policy.

We expect organisations based in the UK to meet the responsibilities required by the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, managers and institutions.

- guarantee that the space and resources you need have been agreed upon and will be made available to you from the start date through to the end date of your award.
- explain how your research fits with the strategic aims of the organisation.
- give you, and any staff employed on the grant, at least 10 days a year (pro rata if part-time) to undertake training and continuing professional development in line with the Concordat. This should include the responsible conduct of research, research leadership, people management, diversity and inclusion, and the promotion of a healthy research culture.
- provide a system of induction, embedding and planning for you when you join the organisation and/or start the award.
- provide you with the status and benefits of other staff at a similar career level.

If your administering organisation is a core-funded research organisation (for example if your organisation receives funding for its core facilities such as communications, governance, senior management salaries), a Mental Health Award from Wellcome should not replace or lead to your organisation receiving less from the core funds on those activities.

## **Who cannot apply**

### **Submitting multiple applications to this call**

You cannot apply to this call if you intend to carry out activities that involve the transfer of grant funds into mainland China.

You can only be an applicant on a maximum of two applications to this funding call (irrespective of your career stage):

- You can be a lead applicant on one application and a coapplicant on another.

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## Other Wellcome awards

Find out what other Wellcome awards you can be a part of depending on your role.

The awards should be for different research projects, with no overlap.

## Assessment criteria

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Full assessment criteria and weightings to be used at full application stage [+](#)

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## What we offer

This award includes funding for:

- Projects of any duration up to 5 years
  - Applicants should ask for the duration of funding that is appropriate for their project.
  - If your proposal is likely to exceed the proposed duration of funding, please contact us. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accommodate projects longer than 5 years (for example, to accommodate follow-up or early translational work).
  - Once award letters are administered, awardees will have up to 12 months from the date of the award letter to start the grant.
- Projects of any budget up to £4 million.

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This award includes:



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## How to apply

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Writing your preliminary application



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Stages of application



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## Key dates

You must submit your application by 17:00 (BST/GMT) on the deadline day. We don't accept late applications.

14 November 2023

Preliminary application deadline

December 2023

Shortlisting

5 March 2024

Full application deadline

21-23 May 2024

Interviews

June 2024

Decision

## Useful documents


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- Research involving human participants policy >
  - Use of animals in research policy >
  - Wellcome Lived Experience information PDF 214.3 KB >
  - Watch our webinar with the Mental Health team exploring this funding call and Wellcome's Mental Health strategy. >

## Contact us

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If you have a question about eligibility, what we offer or about completing the application form, contact our funding information advisors:

 Send us a message

 (0)20 7611 5757

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We do not answer questions on the competitiveness of proposals.

However, if you are unclear about whether your proposed idea would be in scope for this call, you can send a very brief summary of your idea (no more than 200 words) to [mentalhealth@wellcome.org](mailto:mentalhealth@wellcome.org) and include the title of the call ('Understanding how anxiety- and trauma-related problems develop, persist and resolve') in the subject line by **Tuesday 7 November 2023**. Based on the information provided, we will aim to reply to your email within one week, with an 'in scope' or 'out of scope' response.

Please note that this is not a requirement and will not impact your likelihood of being funded.