Spotlight call: tackling upper gastrointestinal cancers of unmet need through clinical research

In response to the questions received at the Upper GI spotlight call launch webinar, please see below some linked information sources on the CRUK website, and some written FAQs.

For questions about scheme remit or structure, see our clinical research funding scheme web page, our FAQs document.

For questions about eligible costs see linked web pages and CRUK's costs guidance.

For questions about the funding committee and review process see our clinical research committee web page.

For questions about combined clinical-academic careers, see our investigator salaries funding policy.

For questions about international collaborations: CRC can only fund the UK portion of international clinical trials – please seek funding from the lead country first. We may consider funding some translational research within an experimental medicine module led by a co-investigator outside of the UK, if it is a minority of the funding ask.

For questions about commercial involvement: We typically expect IMPs to be supplied by a commercial organisation free of charge. If this isn't possible and you may require IMP costs to be included in your application, please discuss this prior to application submission. Fees for professional services may be eligible costs in an award where appropriately justified. If you would like to explore any other kind of commercial relationship within an application, please contact us.

Questions about this spotlight call:

Which cancer types are included in the call?

- Oesophageal, gastric, pancreatic, liver (HCC and cholangiocarcinoma). For more information about CRUK's cancers of unmet need, please see here. Other cancer types are still in remit for the clinical research committee funding scheme, so you may still apply, but they will not be strategically prioritised as areas of unmet need.

What kind of research are you looking to fund through this call?

- We will only accept applications for this call that are within the usual remit of the clinical research committee. The clinical research committee's statement of intent summarises the key strategic priorities for studies entering our portfolio, and your application will be assessed for alignment to these. If you would like to submit a proposal outside of this remit, it may be better suited to a different CRUK funding committee.
- Please see the spotlight call for areas identified as gaps in our portfolio corresponding to critical clinical challenges in upper GI cancers. Please note that even if addressing a question outside of these, an application in these cancer types that can be well-justified as addressing a critical clinical need will be considered as part of the spotlight call. The importance of the proposed questions and expected future impact will be assessed by the invited expert review panel and the clinical research committee.

What is the added value of applying during the call?

- We have strong buy-in from the clinical research committee regarding the need to fund more high-quality research in this area. We have and will continue to brief the funding committee on the challenges affecting research in upper GI cancers (such as sample access, unwell populations, comorbidities etc). We will provide in-depth feedback from applications and support from the office staff to assist in development of high-quality funding applications that have good opportunity for success.

Is there ringfenced budget?

- No, awards will be funded competitively through the clinical research committee's usual budget and reviewed through their usual processes alongside proposals in other cancer types. There would be no theoretical limit to the number of upper GI cancer proposals funded (whereas ring-fencing would cap that number). We would anticipate prioritisation for funding of upper GI proposals if of equally high quality to those in other areas.

Could multiple upper GI applications be funded in the same round?

- Yes, if multiple high-quality upper GI cancer applications receive a score above the fundable bar for that round, multiple could be funded. If multiple studies targeting the same sub-population were competing, this may lead to feasibility concerns, in which case more information would be sought to inform the committee's decision. We recommend collaboratively developing funding

applications (for example using clinical study groups such as UK3CR) to gain consensus on trial population and design and minimise feasibility concerns.

How long will the call be open for?

- The spotlight call will be open for at least 3 committee meetings (November 2026, May 2027, November 2027), but exact duration will be determined by evaluation of the call against its strategic aims.

How do we know what research you've already funded in upper GI cancers?

- Please see the clinical research committee's recently funded awards.

When is the next deadline?

- Please see here for the deadlines on the web page, which is kept updated. For a summary schematic and timeline of our funding process, please see slides 33 and 34 of the upper GI funding call launch webinar presentation.

For any other questions, please contact clinicalresearch@cancer.org.uk.