

## **#United2EndMND - The need for a single application process for UK government's new investment in MND research**

*A best value for money approach to enhance efficiency and attract industry investment*

The UK government commitment to a wholly new **£50m** of funding for motor neuron disease (MND) translational research was wholeheartedly welcomed by the MND Community in November 2021. This investment was in response to the submission of a comprehensive 5-year work plan to accelerate the search for treatments for this devastating diagnosis. Our endeavour reflects the UK government's Life Sciences Vision<sup>1</sup> and will play a vital role in its primary mission:

*Improving translational capabilities in neurodegeneration and dementia<sup>2</sup>.*

Central to achieving the full intent of this groundbreaking and innovative project is the efficient, responsive and rapid access to the assured funds in a *single application*. The proposed coordinated national infrastructure can only be realised with such a grant process for the following reasons:

- The model of a **single application** for a body of work is simple, efficient and has a proven track record (e.g. **DRI<sup>3</sup>**, **BRCs<sup>4</sup>**), versus the business as usual, multiple applications which **risks fracturing** the single united approach.
- Full **reliable** funding over the 5 years, without having to reapply repeatedly, **frees scientists to do science**, not chase endless and extremely time-consuming applications and better supports **retention of key staff**. The cash flow could be released at pre-determined time points (e.g. annually) according to the approved work-plan.
- Such large-scale funding of a body of national work **signals to industry** and the **MND community** that the **UK** is serious in its ambition to become a **leader** in the development of **novel** and **effective** treatments. It provides a coordinated vision for interaction and allows for essential relationships to be built in the knowledge of the rest of the framework to achieve the goal of accelerating the search for a cure.
- Enables **flexibility** and **continuity of delivery** of science, greatly **improving performance, responsiveness to new knowledge** and preventing delays (e.g. wait for funding cycles)

The work-plan will be **peer reviewed** and independently monitored to ensure proper delivery to plan, just as with the BRCs<sup>4</sup> and the DRI<sup>3</sup>. This oversight will need to be appropriate, such as yearly milestone reports, and designed to be effective, yet light touch, allowing our scientists to focus on treatments, not form filling. Learning from the VTF-type<sup>5</sup> approach, pioneered during the Covid-19 pandemic, decision making will be streamlined to encourage vital public and private industry collaborations.

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<sup>1</sup> UK government Life Sciences Vision - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/life-sciences-vision>

<sup>2</sup> Missions – Life Sciences - page 9 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/life-sciences-vision>

<sup>3</sup> DRI - Dementia Research Institute - <https://ukdri.ac.uk/about-us>

<sup>4</sup> BRC - Biomedical Research Centres - e.g. <http://www.maudsleybrc.nihr.ac.uk> <http://sheffieldbrc.nihr.ac.uk>

<sup>5</sup> VTF - Vaccine Task Force - page 6 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/life-sciences-vision>