Social care development awards 2023

Guidance for applicants

Awards summary

Autistica is inviting research proposals for their social care development awards 2023, which enable researchers to develop high quality research proposals to submit to the NIHR's Research for Social Care Call (RfSC). Projects will focus on important, under-researched areas of social care provision accessed by or impacting autistic adults, and will help researchers to refine and strengthen RfSC proposal ideas, plans and objectives. The awards and Autistica's partnership with NIHR aim to address the substantial lack of evidence guiding autism social care provision in England. In doing so, we aim to develop and establish social care practices that are supportive, accessible, and beneficial to autistic adults across the lifespan. We strongly encourage applicants to review Autistica's 2030 goals to leverage opportunities.

Awards funding

Autistica are funding up to 2 projects up to a total value of £20,000 (for example, this could cover 2 projects valued at £10,000 each or a smaller project valued at £5000 along with a larger project valued at £15,000). This grant funding will cover direct costs associated with research expenses, materials and dissemination of outputs, but will not cover indirect costs related to existing salaries or estates costs.

Awards duration

Proposals should plan for a programme of work spanning six months, culminating in an application to the 2023/2024 RfSC call. Applicants must provide clear justification for the staff time allocated to project activities so to demonstrate that they can develop a strong RfSC research proposal within the timeframe.

Who can apply?

Autistica are keen to encourage novel ideas from researchers from a range of backgrounds, including early career researchers who have the support of an experienced, multidisciplinary team. Additionally, the lead investigator must:

- Hold a PhD or similar qualification (applicants must have been awarded their PhD by the start of the proposed work).
- Be based at an eligible UK institution (Higher Education, Public sector, non-academic Health and/or social care facility).
- Hold continuous employment with the host organisation for the duration of the award.

Please note, while proposals will be accepted from investigators at institutions within the UK, they must develop RfSC proposals for projects based at institutions within England.

Full eligibility criteria:

Applications will only be accepted from investigators holding appointments at academic, research or clinical institutions within the United Kingdom. Investigators must be in receipt of salary funding for the duration of the grant requested. Investigators holding a permanent full- or part-time academic or research post (or equivalent) at accredited academic, medical or research institutions within the UK are eligible to apply. Eligibility must be demonstrated with a letter from your institution at the time of submitting the proposal.

Applicants who do not meet the eligibility criteria above (e.g., postdoctoral fellows) are eligible to apply only if clear documentation is provided by the host institution stating that a contract is in place throughout the duration of the proposed research.

Proposals may be submitted in partnership with companies. In circumstances where the company receives funds from the grant a clear justification must be given, as well as a statement on what the company is contributing to the project directly.

Applicants are restricted to one proposal per review cycle as Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-PI.

The bulk of the proposed research must be conducted within the UK, although it is permissible for a proportion of the proposed research be conducted as part of an international collaboration.

Project partnerships

Autistica have developed relationships with several organisations eager to work in partnership on autism and social care research projects. Where relevant, we encourage applicants to engage with these organisations and to explore the value and benefit potential partnerships could bring to their proposed projects. The organisations include:

- CareTech – The UK's largest social care provider, with autism, learning disabilities, acquired brain injury, and mental health support services.
- Community Integrated Care (CIC) – A leading social care charity, CIC provide support services across the UK in a range of settings and for a range of people, including autistic people and people with learning disabilities.
- The PDA Society – A charity providing support, information and training on pathological demand avoidance (PDA) to individuals, families and professionals. The organisation is also committed to improving outcomes for PDA individuals through engagement and involvement in high quality research.

- [The National Autistic Society (NAS)](#) – The UK's largest autism organisation, providing schools, services and training, and guiding national policy and campaigns.

Areas of interest

To highlight research priorities relating to autism and social care, Autistica held a [social care summit](#) involving autistic people, researchers, and social care professionals and commissioners. While we encourage applicants to draw from these priorities, we also recognise that there are manifold issues affecting autistic people accessing social care, and so welcome ideas where a need or issue requires greater research attention.

Timeline

- **April 17th 2023 – June 11th 2023** Seed funding application period
- **June 12th 2023 – 28th July 2023** Seed funding review period
- **7th August 2023** – Seed funding projects begin
- **TBC September 2023** – NIHR RfSC call opens for applications
- **TBC January 2024** – NIHR RfSC call closes

Application process

All applications must be made through the [Autistica Grant Platform](#) by 11:59pm, 11th June 2023. Any questions or queries can be directed to Autistica's Research and Partnerships Manager, Charlotte Featherstone, charlotte.featherstone@autistica.org.uk

These Social Care Development Awards and Autistica's NIHR partnership are made possible with generous support from CareTech Foundation

Award Scope

Background

A pressing need exists to ensure autistic adults have access to social care that is effective and supportive. Social care must be designed, developed, and adapted to meet the needs of autistic adults. A scoping report (Bradshaw et al., 2020), commissioned by Autistica, identified a need to increase both the amount and the quality of research into autism and social care. Moreover, improved social care has been identified by the autistic community as a [key research priority](#).

In seeking to address the need for better social care for autistic people, in [April 2021](#), Autistica announced the launch of a three-year partnership with the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) to fund research focused on autism and social care. Autistica will [seed fund researchers](#) to enable them to develop high quality, community informed research proposals for [NIHR's Research for Social Care call](#) for projects with a focus on autism.

The 2021 awards

In the first year of our partnership with NIHR, Autistica seed funded three projects from a total of 10 applications, these were:

Autism and addiction – Dr Sally Adams

A project that identified key issues when autistic people access drug and alcohol services

Autism and social prescribing – Dr Kerryn Husk and Charlotte Featherstone

A project that explored the potential for embedding social prescribing into social care pathways

Autism and ageing – Dr Mary Stewart

A project that identified priority areas and issues relating to older autistic people and social care

The 2022 awards

Last year, Autistica seed funded a project on **Autism and homelessness –** Dr Georgia Lockwood-Estrin

A project that aimed to develop an Autism and Homelessness toolkit and training package through stakeholder workshops

Project guidelines

Applicants will be required to demonstrate:

- How their project idea fits within scope for the NIHR RfSC call
- How they intend to engage relevant stakeholders from the autistic community, social care providers and those with expertise in social care delivery
- How the development of their idea could lead to benefits for autistic people accessing social care
- The novelty of their focus, and need for their research, within the autism and social care literature and landscape

Project timelines

Applicants should provide a justification for the research staff time allocated to project activities and demonstrate that the work can be effectively undertook within the proposed timeframe. Applicants should consider:

- How much funding is appropriate – who will be carrying out the activities and what their capacity is
- To what extent the RfSC proposal idea and evidence needs to be developed

- How developed the research team is and whether further connections need to be established for the RfSC call
- How the RfSC application will be developed in the timeframe, with consideration for the RfSC's guidelines and funding expectations
- At what point project partners should be established (prior to the seed funding proposal, as part of the seed funded project, or prior to the RfSC call)

Project activities

This funding call is to support the development of research ideas before they form the basis of a larger funding application; therefore, it is not expected that the funds would be used to run a piece of research. Instead, funds should be used to develop novel ideas, conduct community engagement, establish research priorities, foster collaborations, partnerships and multi-disciplinary teams, or similar activities.

Review process

Initially, all applications will be assessed by Autistica staff against the eligibility criteria. Those that meet the criteria will undergo expert peer review, with a final recommendation being made by Autistica's Scientific and Community Expert Review Panels. To view the reviewing criteria, please click here.

Autistica research, funding and governance process

Autistica is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC), which sets out how we conduct and fund high quality, open access research to influence changes in public health and social care, policy and future research. Autistica's mission is to enable all autistic people to live happier, healthier, longer lives.

In line with AMRC governance, Autistica only pays Directly Incurred costs, ie, costs that are directly charged to a project as money spent on research-related activities and are supported by an audit record. Autistica does not pay Directly Allocated or Indirect costs, such as resources that are shared across the organisation and/or other projects or activities (eg, a proportion of the lead investigator or shared technician's time) or non-specific costs charged across all projects for underpinning resources (eg, estates costs, shared IT and administration).