

Our Strategy to 2029

Giving hope through life-changing medical research



Our vision

is a world where medical research improves health for everyone.

Our mission

is to lay the foundations for ground-breaking new discoveries and life-changing advances.

We give hope to people whose health conditions are overlooked, by supporting research in areas that are underfunded.

We invest in the brightest and best researchers, ensuring the next generation of scientists can continue to solve the biggest challenges facing human health.



Improving human health – the enduring challenge

History has shown us, time and again, that the best way to achieve better human health is through medical research.

Over the past 100 years, we have witnessed monumental advances in medical research. From the ground-breaking discovery of antibiotics in 1928 and the unravelling of DNA's structure in 1953, to the immense promise of personalised medicine and artificial intelligence, which are both transforming healthcare in the 21st century. We know that by investing in medical research now, we will see life-saving advances in the future.

While the last century has brought huge improvements in the quality and longevity of life, there are still many health conditions which impose a heavy burden on millions of people, in the UK and around the world. And in many areas of health there is a severe lack of research funding, which is holding back the scientific progress needed to change lives.

This is where we step in.

In the last five years alone, we have invested £25 million into life-changing medical research, focusing on areas that have historically been underfunded. We have injected much-needed funding into the field of eating disorders, ensuring there is scientific capacity to tackle this growing problem. We have also supported vital new research into pain conditions, which affect over a third of the UK population.

We know from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the growing epidemic of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), that new health threats will continue to appear. We have invested in the long-term future of research in these areas, supporting the careers of emerging leaders in COVID-19 research, and funding innovative training for PhD students in AMR.

But there is still much more to do.

Looking ahead, we know that nine million people in England alone will be living with a major illness by 2040 – that's 2.5 million more than in 2019, an increase of 37 per cent. The number of adults living with major disease is set to increase from almost one in six to nearly one in five by 2040.

All of this will have an enormous impact on people and their families, the NHS, other public services, and public finances.

While a small number of major illnesses will remain at the very top of the research funding agenda, there are many health conditions which won't get the attention they deserve. Millions of people, who desperately need better solutions for their health challenges, will continue to fall through the cracks.

We will use our unique position, as a broad funder of medical research, to respond to these challenges.



Put simply, our purpose is to improve health and change lives through research.

As a small, broad-based medical research funder, our remit is wide, and the need is great. This means we need to focus on funding research in ways that will have the biggest possible impact on people's lives.

Throughout the next five years, we will continue to take a targeted approach, funding research that aligns with one or more of our strategic research themes.



High need, low research investment

There are too many health conditions which continue to devastate lives. They remain difficult to diagnose and treat, due to unanswered questions about how they develop in the first place. And they are overlooked by other funders, meaning research investment is low. We will use our unique position as a broad funder of medical research to identify and fund in these areas.



Emerging research leaders

The health problems of the future will be solved by the researchers we invest in today. However, scientific careers are becoming more precarious, with early and mid-career researchers dropping out of science altogether, due to a lack of secure positions, pressures on research funding, and a financial crisis hitting the higher education sector. We will award funding during this critical period, keeping the brightest minds in science, for the benefit of us all.



Changing policy and practice

To deliver truly life-changing medical research, we need to ensure that the latest research discoveries are shared beyond the scientific press, with people who are able to influence healthcare policy and practice, as well as personal life-choices. Few funding opportunities exist for scientists to specifically ensure that policymakers and practitioners are aware of and use their research. By funding in this way, we will ensure healthcare policy and practice is based on the latest evidence.

Our strategic aims

Throughout the next five years we will...

Invest in
life-changing research



Broaden our impact
on health by
supporting others



Secure our future
for the **generations**
to come



Make every donation
go further



Invest in life-changing research





Improving the lives of children and young people

The challenge

Medical research in children and young people has historically been repurposed from studies done in adults, meaning the findings are often generalised to them. However, the health of children and young people is significantly different to that of adults.

We now know that childhood and adolescence is a period of dramatic development within the brain, causing differences in behaviour and cognition, accompanied by hormonal and physical changes which are happening at the same time.

Research into child and young people's health has not progressed at the same speed as that on adults, and the impact of this is being felt by children now, whose conditions are poorly understood and poorly treated.

Understanding the distinct biological mechanisms of childhood disease, alternative risk factors or interventions can help to improve health across the whole life course. Progress in this area is much needed.

Our response

We have already invested significantly in this area, for example through partnerships with Versus Arthritis in musculoskeletal pain and with UK Research and Innovation in chronic pain.

We have also funded new research into child cancer pain, as well as projects tackling skin disorders in adolescents and eye disorders in children, both of which can carry a lifelong burden, but where little research progress has been made.

We will continue to prioritise the health of children and young people in our research funding, so that they can lead healthier, happier lives. Our funding will focus on previously neglected areas, as well as on conditions where children are disproportionately affected.



Researcher profile

Dr Lauren Heathcote, King's College London

Survivors of childhood cancers often face a lifetime of physical and psychological health challenges, including ongoing pain. Dr Lauren Heathcote is developing and testing one of the first behavioural interventions to alleviate the impact of pain and improve wellbeing in childhood cancer survivors. This could provide a highly accessible and scalable approach to helping childhood cancer survivors cope with pain, which would, in turn, improve their quality of life.

Addressing neglected areas of mental health

The challenge

Mental health disorders account for 21% of the UK disease burden, although this figure is likely to be much higher, due to reluctance to seek medical help for these conditions. In recent years, although this number has been increasing, only 6% of the UK's health research budget was spent on mental health. As a result, many mental health conditions are neglected and poorly understood.

Clearly the level of mental health research funding in the UK is still not meeting the scale or impact of mental illness within the population, meaning people are not getting the support they need. The reasons why people experience mental health disorders are often complex and, despite their prevalence, still not well understood. Some examples include:

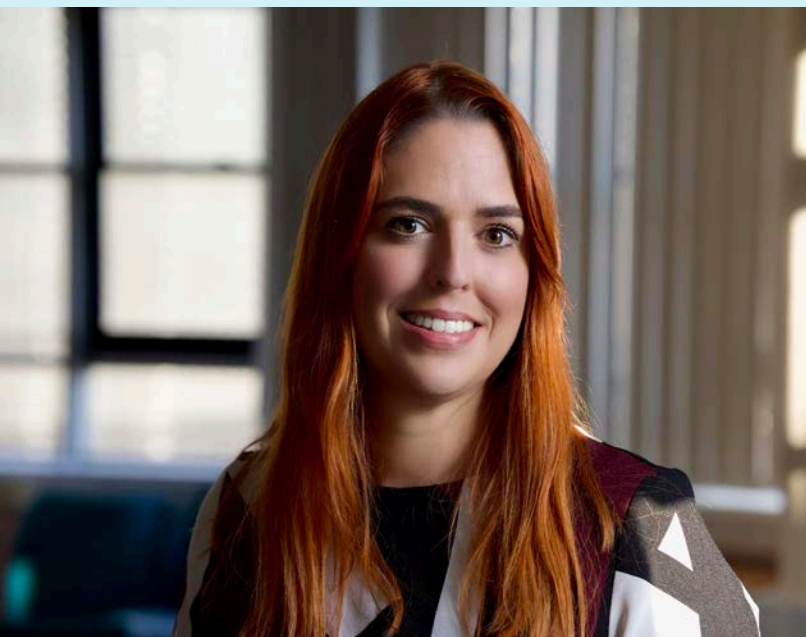
- **Eating disorders**, which affect around 1.25 million people in the UK. More young people than ever before need treatment for these devastating conditions, yet there remains a chronic lack of research funding in this area.
- **Self-harm**, with rates increasing in the UK over the past decade, particularly in young people.
- **Suicide**, which has risen steeply among young men in the last five years, yet this area receives a disproportionately small – less than one per cent – of mental health research funding.
- **Neurodevelopmental conditions with mental health co-morbidity, such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**, a condition which interferes with day-to-day functioning and is increasing steeply within the UK, with estimates suggesting it affects 5% of children and 3-4% of adults.
- **Other severe mental health conditions**, such as Tourette's syndrome, obsessive-compulsive disorder, borderline personality disorder, and trauma-related mental health.

Our response

Lots of mental health conditions remain neglected. As areas of need are identified – like the ones outlined above – we will use our agility to fund research in these areas.

We will support the brightest and best researchers who are striving to understand why these conditions develop in the first place, and what can be done to better prevent, diagnose and treat them.

Previously we have focused our efforts on eating disorders and self-harm, funding 21 projects which have advanced our understanding of these life-threatening disorders, while helping to inform larger-scale prevention and treatment studies.



Researcher profiles

Dr Dawn Branley-Bell, Northumbria University

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK saw a sharp rise in eating disorder cases, especially among teenage girls. Dr Dawn Branley-Bell wanted to understand why this was happening, so she carried out a series of online surveys, which revealed that over 30% of respondents with eating disorders were experiencing 'much worse' symptoms following lockdown restrictions.

With funding from us, Dawn uncovered eight key impacts of the pandemic, including increased social isolation and reduced access to healthcare services. Since then, Dawn has worked alongside healthcare providers to co-design better remote healthcare solutions for people with eating disorders.

Dr Rina Dutta, King's College London

More than one in 10 young people in the UK are thought to have self-harmed, and, as seen with eating disorders, rates of self-harm among young people increased dramatically during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic – especially among teenage girls.

The reasons behind self-harm are complex, and there is some evidence to suggest a link between self-harm and the impact of social media on mental health.

Thanks to our funding, Dr Rina Dutta is exploring how social media and smartphone use could influence self-harm; including excessive use and addiction, night-time use, and cyberbullying. Findings from Rina's research could help to predict self-harm episodes in young people and aid the design of more effective, targeted interventions.



Tackling the health impacts of climate change

The challenge

Climate change is a severe and continually growing threat to human health globally. We will all be affected, but children, the elderly, and people with pre-existing medical conditions, are most vulnerable. The health impacts of climate change will not affect everyone equally and will worsen already existing health inequalities.

Climate change will impact on health through heat-related illnesses, physical or mental harm from extreme weather, and food and water insecurity. Globally, changes to temperature, rainfall and humidity will influence the transmission and distribution of vector-borne diseases like malaria and these infectious diseases will occur in countries that have not been exposed in the past, including the UK.

Although the health effects of weather events are generally understood, it remains difficult to accurately estimate the scale and range of climate change-related risks to health or the measures that could be put in place to control or eliminate these impacts. That's why research in this area is so vital.

Our response

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa are among those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. So far, we have invested £2.7 million in partnerships between researchers in sub-Saharan Africa and the UK, prioritising projects that have a clear pathway to action.

Other research funders are also investing at scale in this area.

We will fill a gap in the funding landscape by giving emerging research leaders the early funding they need to win these larger grants, so that they can continue making much-needed advances for people affected by climate change.

We will continue to invest in partnerships looking at climate change in Africa and we will bring a new focus to the impacts of climate change on health in the UK.

We will continually evaluate where funding is most needed, using our unique position of agility within the UK to assess this constantly shifting threat. Research in the following areas, which are likely to impact the UK, will benefit from our investment:

- poor air quality, leading to respiratory and cardiovascular ill health;
- increased heat-related illness and vector-borne infectious disease; and
- poor mental health.



Researchers profile

Dr Cherie Part and Dr Adelaide Lusambili, Africa International University and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

Dr Cherie Part and Dr Adelaide Lusambili are studying the effects of extreme heat exposure on mothers and babies in sub-Saharan Africa.

As climate change causes temperatures to rise, millions of women and babies around the world will be exposed to extreme heat. We know this is very dangerous, but we don't know exactly how heat exposure affects pregnant women, new mothers, and infants. As a result, it is very difficult to design measures to protect them.

This project will gather crucial evidence and develop new ways to protect the health of mothers and their babies, in partnership with their local communities.

Responding to emerging health threats and research opportunities

The challenge

Our experience of COVID-19 shows how suddenly new health challenges can appear, and how we rely on medical research to protect and save lives.

Despite the emergence of a pandemic disease being predicted by the World Health Organisation (disease X was placed on their blueprint of priority diseases in 2018, representing an as-yet unknown pathogen), the speed and range of spread of COVID-19 was unexpected. The worldwide impact ensured a rapid pace of scientific discovery around the virus causing COVID-19 and its control. The likelihood of a future 'disease X' or pandemic remains high.

Artificial intelligence and personalised medicine offer a route to new diagnostics and treatments, precisely targeted for individual diseases and people. These emerging technologies hold great promise for the future of human health, but we need to support the pioneering researchers who are developing them.

Our response

We are an agile funder and have always been able to respond to the needs of our times. There is no doubt new health challenges and opportunities will arise in the future, and we will remain responsive to these.

In 2021, our Emerging Leader's Prize celebrated researchers who had made wide-ranging impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic, pivoting their research towards examining viral effects on the body, its diagnosis and its spread.

We will continue to use our broad remit to respond to emerging threats in the future.

When new health threats appear, some of those disproportionately impacted are the most vulnerable people in society, such as children, women and ethnic minorities; we will continue to fund work which puts research into practice for disadvantaged groups.

Along with threats come opportunities, and where we see that our investment will make a big impact on health – for example in new diagnostics, treatments, or even ways of conducting research – we will invest funding to secure that impact.



Researcher profile

Dr Katie Doores, King's College London

Antibodies are an integral part of the body's immune response to infections and studying how they respond to different viruses is essential in vaccine development.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, research by Dr Katie Doores focused on understanding how our antibodies respond to lots of different emerging viruses, including HIV. Within weeks of the COVID-19 outbreak, Katie rapidly pivoted her work to study how our antibodies respond to COVID-19 infection.

"In collaboration with researchers around the country, my research has helped to evaluate and establish the use of lateral flow antibody testing, to help us understand severe COVID-19 disease, and monitor how people with pre-existing conditions like cancer and psoriasis respond to the vaccine," says Katie.

Thanks to our 2021 Emerging Leaders Prize, Katie set up two new research techniques in the lab to identify antibodies and vaccines that could give broad protection against multiple viruses. "Not only is this important in COVID-19, but also in ensuring we are prepared for the next global pandemic – if and when it arises," says Katie.

Strategic aim: Invest in life-changing research

By 2029, together we will...

- Invest at least £25 million in life-changing research, making around £5m available each year.
- Support research leaders of the future, through fellowships, research grants, and prizes.
- Fund the full spectrum of medical research, from laboratory science to diagnostics and treatments.
- Fund the translation of research findings into healthcare policy and practice.
- Identify areas where we can improve the skills of our funded researchers.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact that our funded researchers are making, to ensure that our supporters are getting the best value for their donations.
- Track the careers of our emerging leaders, to demonstrate the impact of our funding.



Broaden our impact on health by supporting others



The challenge

The world is changing rapidly, but many health challenges remain the same. Some have proven difficult to overcome, while others have simply never had the concerted attention they need for advances in diagnostics and treatments to be made.

Some diseases and conditions are increasing in prevalence, like eating disorders, and stroke in young people. More young people than ever before are having treatment for eating disorders and despite the misconception that strokes only happen to older people, stroke incidence among young people is rising.

We can also expect new health challenges to emerge in the future, and these can become urgent very quickly.

Our response

Whether new, intractable or overlooked, all of these health challenges can only be addressed effectively through high quality medical research. To respond in a timely manner, and to help generate the solutions that will improve people's health, our research funding systems need to be agile. We also need to be innovative in the way that we provide funding and support for researchers.

The researchers we support need funding that is flexible, and they need a funder that is responsive and supportive. Our small size as a charity, and our very broad remit, enable our agility and we are already able to be flexible and responsive. But we want to go further, as we think that this is the way to drive and support innovation.

There are around 150 health research charities in the UK which fund research. Each of them, however large or small, plays an important role in the research funding ecosystem and brings critically important patient perspectives to the medical research landscape. New medical research charities are created frequently, thanks to generous members of the public who enable researchers to tackle diseases or conditions that are close to their heart. This richness and diversity is a strength to UK science. We know that by helping small research funders who work in areas of health that are important to us, we can have an even broader impact.

In the coming five years, we will continue to foster our innovation and agility as a charity, and ensure that we have the best people, diversity of thinking and experience, an open learning culture and flexible structures to support this commitment.

We will use these strengths to find opportunities to have a wider impact than we could with our research funding alone.

We will work with others to co-fund research, create new opportunities and improve practices. Rather than being protective and parochial, we will be generous in sharing our knowledge and experience so that others can benefit.

We will support others to fund quality medical research when opportunities arise.

Case study – Agility

During COVID-19 lockdowns, the majority of research at UK universities pivoted to understanding the biology and spread of the SARS-CoV2 virus. At the Foundation, we similarly took the opportunity to quickly respond to the pandemic by supporting the UK's emerging research leaders who pivoted their work to this new virus.

By supporting scientists whose contributions would be important not only to future science, but were making an impact in the ongoing pandemic, we filled a funding gap which was apparent from the high demand and quality of applications for funding received.

Case study – Innovation

We ensure best practice in grant making through innovative practices. In recent years, we have examined and improved our grant making to low and middle-income countries to ensure equity.

As well as offering training to our researchers in developing equitable collaborations between researchers in the UK and Africa, we have overhauled our processes to enable direct payment of grants to international institutions, advance payment of grant costs for institutions that are not able to support payment in arrears, and allowed payment of indirect costs to eligible institutes.

“This is an excellent approach, that all funders would be well advised to look at, and learn from.”

Dr Michael Head, University of Southampton

Case study – Supporting others

Modernising a new charity

The Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases (GACD) brings together major international research funding agencies to address the growing burden of non-communicable disease in low- and middle-income countries and vulnerable populations in high-income countries.

We joined forces with GACD and helped it to register as a UK charity, shared our expertise and staff, and set it off on a road to governance and operational excellence.

Bringing a vision to life

Africa shoulders a disproportionate share of the world's disease burden. In 2017, an eminent Gambian research leader – Professor Sir Tumani Corrah – approached us to help set up a charity to fulfil his vision: of a world in which African scientists set the health research agendas of African countries and undertake world-class medical research – in Africa, for Africa.

We recognised the importance of this vision and helped to create the Africa Research Excellence Fund (AREF), a UK-registered charity to support a community of health researchers across Africa to become experts capable of tackling African health challenges.

We acted as the Trustee of the charity and guided it as it developed its grant-making systems in the UK and Africa, demonstrated impact and more recently, reached sufficient maturity to transition to independence. It is now a fully independent charity and is in the process of registering a partner charity in the Gambia and fully transitioning its operations to Africa.

Strategic aim: Broaden our impact on health by supporting others

By 2029, together we will...

Be a more agile and innovative funder

- Ensure that our grant schemes and grant-making processes respond rapidly to the changing health and research funding environment.
- Use our experience in equitable grant-making to maintain and share best practice.
- Publicise when our grant-making practices can inform others.

Support others to fund excellent, impactful research

- Use our expertise to support other emerging or small research funding charities working in areas of health that are important to us.
- Explore the feasibility of providing a research grant management service to support other health research charities.
- Consider providing other research management and governance services to support other funders.
- Share our expertise by acting as trustees of small, emerging or linked charities.



Secure our future **for the generations to come**



The challenge

While medical research has improved countless lives around the world, millions of people still suffer with health conditions that are overlooked and underfunded.

There are immediate challenges, such as climate change, which threaten the health of all of us. And new threats will continue to arise. There will always be a need for high quality, high impact medical research.

To face these challenges – and overcome them – we are determined to continue finding and funding the best medical research and researchers long into the future.

Becoming a more sustainable organisation is essential to our mission: of giving hope to our generation, to our children's generation, and to the generations to come.

The scale of the problem

Over many decades, major threats to human health, such as smallpox, polio and tetanus, have been eliminated or controlled thanks to medical research. But as these threats have waned, other challenges have arisen in their place, such as HIV, Ebola, obesity, mental ill health, and, COVID-19. Some long-standing diseases that modern medicine had brought under control, such as tuberculosis, are resurging due to increasing drug resistance.

We can expect these health threats to continue to shift and change as new diseases arise, more infections become resistant to existing treatments, and the changing climate brings new health challenges. And that is why we need to be in a position to keep funding innovative medical research long into the future.

Many of the socio-economic factors that determine health quality such as poverty, low educational attainment, relative deprivation and lack of access to sanitation, can take a turn for the worse even in countries with adequate resources. The changing climate will impact on many of these factors, especially in those countries that are already vulnerable.

And it is not only the environment in which people live that impacts their health. It is their genetics too and the early life environment in which they develop.

The life choices people subsequently make influence their immediate and long-term health. While governments can make changes that protect health, the modern world can make many of these healthy decisions harder to take or put them out of reach for many people.

Medical research is providing solutions to these complex problems. Protective interventions, like health screening and immunisation programmes, arise from large-scale medical research. Clinical interventions at an individual level, for example diagnostics, prescribing drugs, treatments and therapies, and educational interventions aimed at improving health, such as smoking cessation, are also the product of medical research.

As scientists learn to manage and control the long-standing health threats, new ones keep on coming. We know that mental ill health is increasing, and scientists believe that it will get worse if the climate continues to make countries less liveable. We know that there are inequalities in health even here in the UK, that these disparities are widening, and that they need to be eliminated. We also know that new technologies such as AI offer great hope for the future, and we need the scientists of today to work out how to harness their potential in healthcare settings.

With so much that we cannot predict, we can be sure that medical research is – and will remain – key to improving health outcomes for everyone.

Our response

Medical research is the proven, long-term answer to these health challenges. But research is expensive; it needs long-term commitment and financial security.

Charitable giving by the UK public is changing, reflecting a period of financial challenge during which many supporters are less able to donate as often or as much as they have in the past. We currently rely on investment returns to fund much of our research, but we are choosing to spend down these assets on more research for better health now – and so our investment income stream will diminish.

We need to find ways to replace this income, so that we can keep funding research long into the future.

We will embark on a new fundraising strategy, aiming to raise £3 million in voluntary income by the end of 2029. To achieve this transformational growth, we will:

- Reach and engage more people with our work, through expanded marketing campaigns and increased digital maturity.
- Implement a philanthropy programme to develop relationships and partnerships with Trusts and Foundations, philanthropists and companies who understand the power of research to change lives.
- Maintain the momentum of our legacy marketing programme to ensure its ongoing appeal to individuals interested in advancing human health.
- Engage with people who understand the importance of science, encouraging their support for the future of human health.
- Maximise other, non-voluntary income streams and opportunities.

“The Foundation’s commitment to discovery science not only offers solutions to immediate research questions, but also advances the whole frontier of biomedical sciences. Through our support, we are playing our part in helping to make a better world.”

Caroline and Mike Howes, who are leaving a gift in their Will to the Foundation

Strategic aim: Secure our future, for the generations to come

By 2029, together we will...

Reach and engage more people with our work

- Increase brand awareness, by running targeted, paid social media advertising alongside broader mass-market campaigns.
- Reach much greater 'digital maturity', by engaging more people online and better understanding our audiences.
- Harness a portfolio of innovative sponsorship opportunities, to raise our profile and grow our supporter base.
- Publish regular 'real life' stories, featuring people affected by diseases and conditions we tackle, as well as impact case studies, related to research we fund.
- Increase our efficiency and enhance our comms activities, by harnessing generative AI tools.
- Explore other opportunities to engage with and involve more people in our work, as they arise.

Increase our fundraising capability and our voluntary income to £3 million per annum

- Persuade more charitable Trusts and Foundations of the importance of medical research for delivering their missions.
- Build relationships with philanthropists who have an interest in science to encourage them to make a significant gift to medical research and become Major Donors.
- Develop mutually beneficial partnerships with companies who have a commercial interest in working with us.
- Regularly refresh the legacy marketing programme to ensure our offering remains attractive to individuals wishing to commit substantial funds for the future of human health.
- Develop an Individual Giving programme to support more research.
- Constantly review the effectiveness of our new fundraising activities and use the learnings to adapt activity where necessary.



Make every donation
go further



The challenge

Medical research is very expensive – but it can change the world. It's the long-term solution to improved health for all, but it takes concerted effort over many years.

Some data suggests that on average it takes 17 years to progress an initial research idea into a change in healthcare practice.

We have shown that we can make a difference to the understanding of health conditions with even small sums, by looking very carefully at the strengths and gaps in UK science at a given point in time, by identifying the most pressing research questions, and by investing carefully in those people and projects that show the most promise.

Sometimes, however, we need to need to invest at scale and spend significant sums if we are to change health for the better.

Our partners and supporters understand the impact of these small – and large – investments. They are persuaded by our vision for better health and trust us to deliver the science that will improve lives. We take this trust seriously and recognise that their contributions have been keenly earned and willingly entrusted, whatever the size. The science that we support would not be possible without them. We value this trust and we are committed to ensuring that we deliver the best that we can on behalf of our supporters. We need to make every penny go as far as it can. Every second and every decision counts, if we are to improve health at the pace that is needed.

Our response

To fund the best research, with the greatest chance of having an impact on health, we must operate to the highest professional standards and expect the same from those we work with – whether that is the research leaders of the future or the firms and individuals that provide us with professional services.

We must be operationally efficient and effective.

And we must control any risks to our grant-making and our other operations – our HR, finances, governance, fundraising and communications and our general operations. AI is still in its infancy, but we can see how it is developing at pace and is going to rapidly change the workplace as well as healthcare practice. We will ensure that we harness the positive opportunities it generates. We pride ourselves on being a learning organisation, not just in terms of the science that we support but also in the way that we run our business.

We will continue to look constantly for business improvement opportunities, new technologies, new ways of working and better decision making in order to use our supporters and donors' gifts and time well.

We do only one thing: we fund medical research. And we do it well.



Researcher profiles: making small and large investments

Dr James Peters, **Imperial College London**

In 2020 Dr James Peters was awarded a small Enhancing Research Award to complement and extend his existing MRC Fellowship, focusing on identifying molecular pathways that play a causal role in coronary artery disease. In 2023 James published his findings in a prestigious academic journal, showing how genetic factors influence the levels of proteins in the blood which are related to inflammation and disease in over 15,000 people. This is one of the biggest studies to-date which looks at these specific proteins in inflammatory disease. By investing a small, carefully targeted amount of funding, our understanding of coronary artery disease is now much stronger.

Professor John McLauchlan, **MRC University of Glasgow Centre for Virus Research**

Thanks to gifts in Wills from Effie Millar Munro and Alfred Tartellin, we were able to provide £2 million in funding for HCV Research UK, led by Professor John McLauchlan. Established to address critical gaps in our understanding of the hepatitis C virus (HCV), it is now one of the largest HCV research cohorts in the world, providing vital information about the longer-term impact of the virus to researchers, patients, the NHS, and the pharmaceutical industry.

Case study



Robert Colvile sadly lost his wife Andrea to autoimmune hepatitis in 2019. He partnered with us to support much-needed research in this area, because – as the MRC’s charity – he believes our grant programmes ‘are the absolute gold standard’. In Robert’s view, the research we funded, in Andrea’s memory, are ‘the research proposals that the best people in the field felt had the best chance of saving lives.’

“One of the things I’ve come to realise is just how much medical research matters,” says Robert.

“I really hope that this research has a lasting effect, that the mechanism they discover helps people with autoimmune hepatitis. That would itself be transformative. But I also think we should be doing an awful lot more of this [medical research].”



Strategic aim:
Make every donation go further

By 2029, together we will ...

Improve the cost effectiveness of our support functions

- Nurture our contacts with the individuals and organisations providing pro bono services so that we maintain or increase the level of support.
- Secure the best value from new suppliers by rigorously considering a combination of price, quality of service and the reputation of the provider.
- Secure the best value from our existing suppliers by reviewing contracts regularly and rigorously against the changing competitor landscape and our changing requirements.
- Continue to refine our processes, making use of internal audit to identify opportunities for improvement.

Take advantage of existing and new technology to increase our efficiency

- Digitise our HR processes to reduce the costs of employing staff.
- Monitor the finance technology landscape for opportunities to reduce manual tasks.
- Explore using generative AI in our communications work.
- Take advantage of developments in the software technology to improve efficiencies.

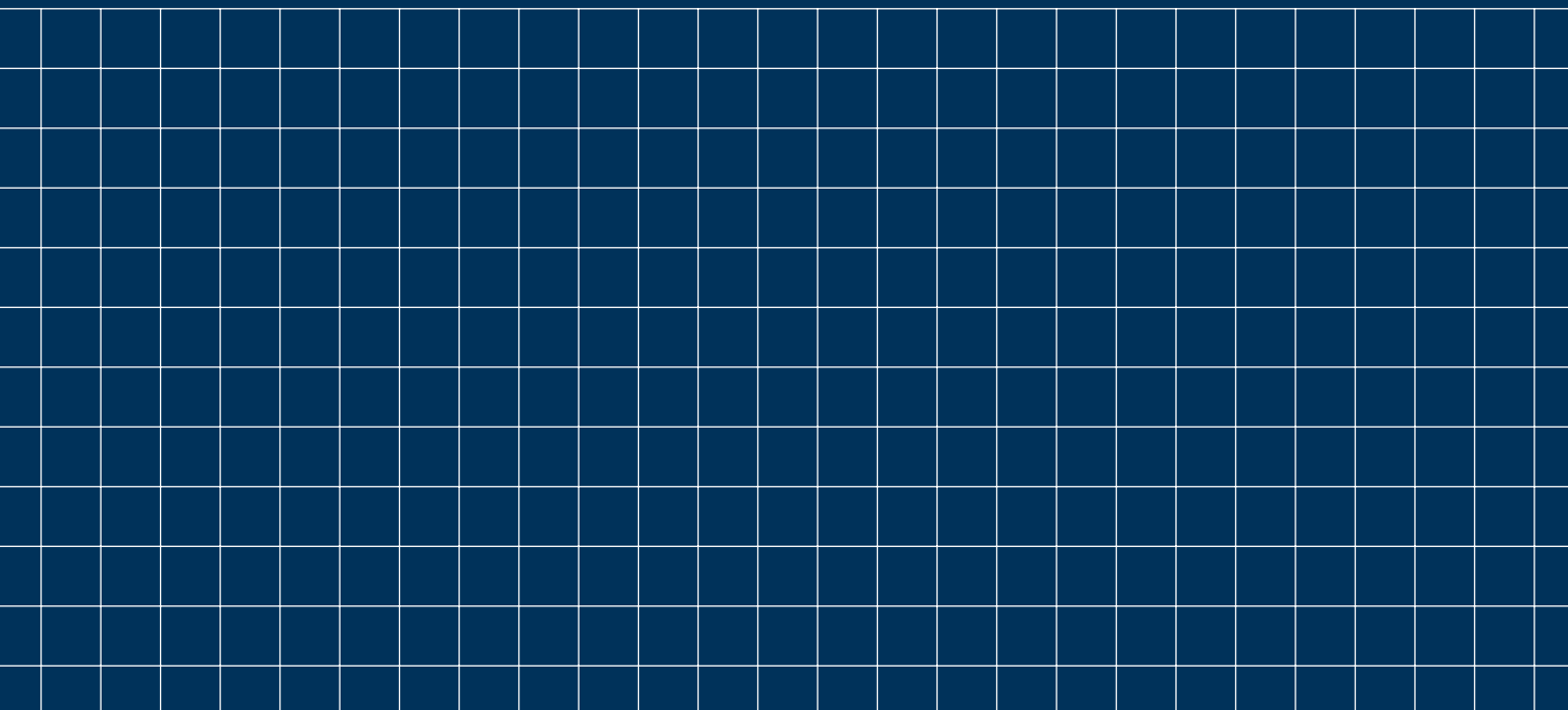
Embed even more effective decision-making

- Ensure that our governance structure remains agile and supports our development.
- Ensure effective risk management informs and supports our decision-making, ensuring our assets and reputation remains protected while we embrace new opportunities.
- Introduce strategy screens so that every decision is taken through a strategy lens.

Foundation-stones

To deliver on this ambitious strategy, we need to have solid foundations in place.

These ‘foundation-stones’ – **Our people; Our partnerships; Our professional standards;** and **Our commitment to planetary health** – support everything we do. They reflect our strong organisational culture and our beliefs about what matters in the workplace and the world.



Our foundation-stones

Foundation-stone



Our people

We know that we need to work with the very best people, from as diverse backgrounds as possible, to represent different experiences and bring diversity of thought to all that we do. We are committed to working towards full equality of opportunity and embedding inclusion throughout our work.

'Our people' includes researchers we fund, study participants, the scientists who review applications for funding, our Board of Trustees and its specialist advisory committees, our employees and our supporters, the people that use research results to change healthcare policy and practice, and the people who will use the research findings to change their lives and life choices.

We value each and every one of these people, who can help us to deliver on our vision of a world where research improves health for everyone.

Our researchers

We want our funded researchers to be the research leaders of the future, changing science and health long into the future. We are not simply a research funder; we will offer our researchers opportunities to develop their skills and careers. This will happen through a programme of support and development opportunities including mentoring, further funding opportunities, networking and access to development events, and training.

We are committed to embracing diversity, attracting the best from the widest pool possible, and drawing on the skills of all people when funding research. We will continue to monitor the equality and diversity of our funding processes and funded researchers, and as members of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Science coalition, to learn from models of best practice in this area. We have already made steps forward in ensuring equality of our funding processes in the UK and internationally, and through training programmes in equitable collaborations.



Foundation-stone: Our people – our researchers

By 2029, together we will...

- Support a research culture that promotes and values equity, diversity and inclusion through:
 - Monitoring applicants to our research funding calls to understand our contribution to equality, diversity and inclusion within the research ecosystem
 - Disseminating our research funding calls through networks reaching under represented groups
 - Ensuring our Expert Review Panels represent diversity within science
 - Require all grant applicants to justify how the sex/gender dimension of their research has been accounted for in their experimental design
- Learn and deploy best EDI practices from others.

Our experts

Our trustees, committee and panel members are volunteers who generously provide their time and expertise to lead and support our work. In joining the Board, our trustees take on legal responsibility for the charity and ensure it fulfils its charitable objects. They bring a wide range of professional expertise and perspectives. Alongside senior leaders in finance, investment management, fundraising, communications and ethics, our Board is constituted by senior leaders in medical research, including two who are nominated by the MRC. We greatly value their leadership, objective insight and advice, and the challenge they bring to our work.

Our Board is supported by a strong committee structure, which bring specialist expertise and focus on different areas of our work. Our Investment Committee is constituted with independent investment management experts who ensure we can gain maximum benefit from our investment portfolio. Our Expert Review Panels draw on a range of specialist medical research expertise appropriate to each funding call, ensuring our funding is awarded to the best applicants in that field with the most promising research possibilities.

Foundation-stone: Our people – our experts

By 2029, together we will...

- Maintain appropriate turnover within the Board and committees to ensure fresh perspectives and challenges are brought to our decision-making, while maintaining continuity and strong leadership and an appropriate range of skills and specialist expertise.
- Use our unique connection with the MRC to ensure the best scientific advisors on our Expert Review Panels.
- Ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion is at the forefront of our discussions and decision-making across all of our business.



Our employees

We value our employees' contributions greatly. They work hard, we expect a lot from them, and we support them to be and give their best. In exchange for deep personal commitments to our mission, we recognise our employees' achievements, reward them well for their contributions, and enable them to balance their work and home lives appropriately. We are supportive, responsive and kind to our employees and they are dedicated, involved and ambitious. We are all deeply proud of what we do. We aim to be a good employer.

Foundation-stone: Our people – our employees

By 2029, together we will...

- Recruit and retain exceptional people to deliver our strategy to the highest professional standards.
- Ensure that each can contribute to the best of their abilities in a meaningful role that links clearly to our mission and that no one is inhibited from making their contribution; we will embed an inclusive, positive and fair culture where opportunities are open to all.
- Support the physical, mental and financial health of our employees.
- Provide learning and development opportunities to support all of our people to thrive in their roles and careers, paying particular attention to our early-career employees – they are the future of medical research funding and we want to ensure that our standards are carried forward into the future and into other research funding organisations.
- Enhance the professional skills of our managers who are key to developing our people to their full potential and delivering our business.
- Develop our internal and sector leadership skills.
- Ensure our pay and reward remain fair and competitive.
- Ensure that all our staff feel close to the mission by having opportunities to observe and interact with our researchers.
- Ensure that our jobs, welcoming to all and that we have embedded diversity of thinking and experience at all levels of the organisation.

Foundation-stone



Our partnerships

There is much to do to improve human health, and there are many charities who share a similar vision. Solutions to the health challenges of today and tomorrow cannot come from us alone or be generated in silos. To have the greatest possible impact, we seek out and nurture strong and supportive partnerships with other research funders.

In the past 10 years we have worked in partnership with Asthma + Lung UK, UK Research and Innovation/MRC, National Institute for Health and Care Research, and Versus Arthritis. These partnerships have delivered a combined total of £9 million in funding in areas of health that are important to us, our supporters and our partners. This is more than would have been invested if we had approached this research funding alone.

As well as allowing us to fund research in important, underfunded areas, these partnerships have brought in additional expertise, perspectives of people with lived experience of the conditions, and helped us to reach new communities of researchers. We value and nurture our existing partnerships. We are always open to new and innovative partnerships that will help to improve human health.

Foundation-stone: Our partnerships

By 2029, together we will...

- Sustain and develop our relationship with our founder, the MRC, and continue to co-fund research where together we can have greater impact.
- Nurture our existing co-funding partnerships with other research funders.
- Develop new partnerships and co-fund whenever a partner will bring something new that will improve the research that we support, including: patient and public involvement and engagement, increased investment and increased reach to the research community.

In partnership with Versus Arthritis, we are funding research to improve the lives of young people living with musculoskeletal pain.





Foundation-stone



Our professional standards

We recognise the importance of maintaining not only our own reputation but that of our founder, the MRC. That is why we operate to the highest standards throughout our work, ensuring we can fulfil our charitable objects to the very best of our ability.

We ensure the appropriate controls are in place to protect our assets, and that our Board and its committees are supported in making informed decisions to deliver our work. We ensure we are always informed of changes in regulatory reporting requirements, adapting and refining our processes in line with developing best practice.

We apply the same high professional standards to all our supporting operations, including our finance and investment management, and HR policies and practices. We ensure that our fundraising initiatives adhere to and comply with all relevant fundraising regulations.

We recognise the value of being a good employer and know that the science that we support benefits from being managed and supported by excellent research managers, as well as finance and science communications experts.

For our supporters' investment in science to stand the best chance of having a positive impact on health, while controlling its negative impact on the planet, the research needs to be rigorously assessed, monitored, and its longer-term outputs and impact evaluated. By adhering to the highest standards of grant-making, our partners and supporters can know that today, tomorrow and long into the future their effort, grants and gifts will contribute to the best science.

We will continue to fund to the highest possible standards.

Our science peer review process is managed in collaboration with scientific input and expertise from the MRC, and our membership of the AMRC demonstrates the highest quality of peer review. We continuously strive to review and use best practice in all our funding processes.

We aim to be early adopters of best practice in research and other management disciplines. We recognise that as a small funder it is generally more efficient to keep an eye on the best practice of others and adopt and adapt, rather than developing our own from scratch. However, sometimes we need to take the lead, developing best practice ourselves and then ensuring that others can learn from it.

“Our assessment of ... practices demonstrated that the Foundation’s governance is of a very high standard – particularly when considering the size of the organisation.”

Jonathan Orchard, Sayer Vincent (Internal Audit – Review of Governance, July 2019)

Foundation-stone: Our professional standards

By 2029, together we will...

- Continuously evaluate our grant-making practices within different research priority areas to ensure they remain relevant and demonstrate best practice.
- Publish the steps that we have taken to change our grant making practices so that they are more equitable and ensure that others can learn from the changes that we have made.
- Evaluate and share the outcomes and impact of our innovative PhD training programme in antimicrobial resistance research.
- Commission our next five-yearly external governance review ensuring our compliance with the Charity Governance Code.

Foundation-stone



Our commitment to planetary health

Science and research have clearly shown that climate change is a real and rapidly growing threat to human health, currently estimated to cause 250,000 additional deaths per year between 2030 and 2050 (World Health Organization). The changing climate will impact on all of us but especially those that are already most vulnerable.

The changing climate was clear to see in 2023, when we first started thinking about our strategy for the next five years – the devastating super flood that submerged one third of Pakistan, the worst drought in four decades in the horn of Africa, frequent floods and storm damage closer to home all over the UK, drought and crop failures in Europe and Africa, as well as countless other examples across the world.

This is a disaster for human health. The one single thing that the Medical Research Foundation exists to improve and protect.



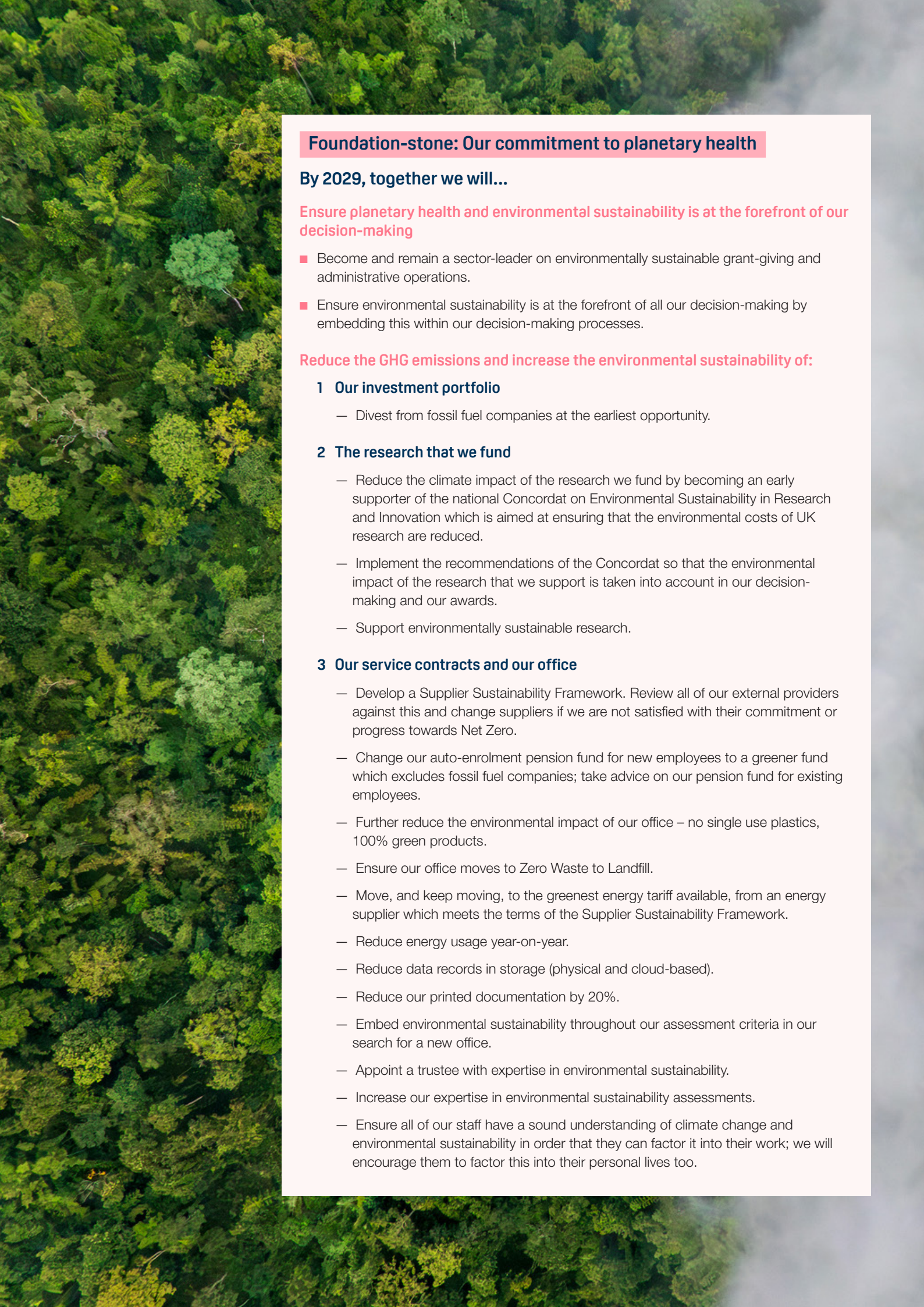
As a charity whose very mission is to improve human health, we cannot sit back and watch as the planet's health declines, and we cannot make matters worse by our own actions.

In addition to focusing our research funding on the impact of climate change on health, we have already taken steps to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and increase the environmental sustainability of our work. We will now escalate the pace and impact of our actions aiming to reach Net Zero in our own activities as soon as possible and influencing the activities of others that we work with and fund, or who provide services to us.

We want to lead the way. We want to show what is possible even for a small organisation. We approach this huge global challenge with humility. We know our impact will be small but this will not diminish our commitment because we believe that every action counts. We know that we may not get it right each time, but we have the will to keep learning and getting better. We know that we need to protect planetary health if we are to deliver on our vision of a world with better health.

“The climate crisis is a health crisis, driving more severe and unpredictable weather events, fuelling disease outbreaks, and contributing to higher rates of noncommunicable diseases.”

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director General of the World Health Organization



Foundation-stone: Our commitment to planetary health

By 2029, together we will...

Ensure planetary health and environmental sustainability is at the forefront of our decision-making

- Become and remain a sector-leader on environmentally sustainable grant-giving and administrative operations.
- Ensure environmental sustainability is at the forefront of all our decision-making by embedding this within our decision-making processes.

Reduce the GHG emissions and increase the environmental sustainability of:

1 Our investment portfolio

- Divest from fossil fuel companies at the earliest opportunity.

2 The research that we fund

- Reduce the climate impact of the research we fund by becoming an early supporter of the national Concordat on Environmental Sustainability in Research and Innovation which is aimed at ensuring that the environmental costs of UK research are reduced.
- Implement the recommendations of the Concordat so that the environmental impact of the research that we support is taken into account in our decision-making and our awards.
- Support environmentally sustainable research.

3 Our service contracts and our office

- Develop a Supplier Sustainability Framework. Review all of our external providers against this and change suppliers if we are not satisfied with their commitment or progress towards Net Zero.
- Change our auto-enrolment pension fund for new employees to a greener fund which excludes fossil fuel companies; take advice on our pension fund for existing employees.
- Further reduce the environmental impact of our office – no single use plastics, 100% green products.
- Ensure our office moves to Zero Waste to Landfill.
- Move, and keep moving, to the greenest energy tariff available, from an energy supplier which meets the terms of the Supplier Sustainability Framework.
- Reduce energy usage year-on-year.
- Reduce data records in storage (physical and cloud-based).
- Reduce our printed documentation by 20%.
- Embed environmental sustainability throughout our assessment criteria in our search for a new office.
- Appoint a trustee with expertise in environmental sustainability.
- Increase our expertise in environmental sustainability assessments.
- Ensure all of our staff have a sound understanding of climate change and environmental sustainability in order that they can factor it into their work; we will encourage them to factor this into their personal lives too.



Play your part

Change the future for people with overlooked and underfunded health conditions.

Thanks to our supporters, the research we've funded over the years has changed lives. But to improve health for everyone, much more research needs to be done.

We've all experienced a health problem in our lives. For some, it is long-lasting and life-altering, for others it can be severe and life-threatening.

Those of us living with overlooked and underfunded conditions can be left feeling isolated and uncertain of our future. And we know that health conditions don't just affect the person experiencing it, but their family and loved ones too.

There are many health conditions which don't get the attention they deserve. This amounts to millions of people – in desperate need of better solutions for their health challenges – who will continue to fall through the cracks.

Medical research can provide the solutions.

Act now and you can make a difference to people's lives, both now and long into the future.

There are many ways you can get involved – like signing up to our supporter e-newsletter, making a donation, hosting a research bake-off, or taking on a challenge event.

From volunteering to fundraising or pledging a gift in your Will, we can all support the research that will improve health for everyone. Join our community and start making a difference today.

Your support can make life-changing medical research happen.

Visit our website to find out how you can support us:
www.medicalresearchfoundation.org.uk



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