

Loneliness & Social Isolation in Mental Health Research Network

Network Plus Project Funding Call #1: Pathways

Opening on 21st October 2019

This document contains:

1. The Call Brief
2. The Terms of Reference

Please see the separate 'Frequently Asked Questions' and 'Information for Researchers with Relevant Lived Experience' documents for further information.

CALL BRIEF

Summary

There is now substantial evidence demonstrating that loneliness and social isolation increase the risk of poor physical health, but there has been much less research on the mental health impacts of loneliness and social isolation. This UKRI-funded Loneliness and Social Isolation in Mental Health Research Network aims to address this knowledge gap by commissioning research in our 2019 funding call. We are offering funding of between £10,000 and £30,000 per project¹ to UK-based teams, and we expect to grant up to £200,000 in this funding call.

Proposed research studies should aim to answer key research questions relating to the experience of loneliness and/or social isolation in relation to mental health problems, and the pathways between them. **The deadline for applications is 5pm on Friday 31st January 2020.** Decisions on funding are expected by 1st April 2020 and projects should aim to commence by 1st June 2020 and no later than 1st August 2020.

Background

Loneliness is defined as a subjectively unpleasant sense that there is a mismatch between the number and quality of existing social relationships an individual has, and the relationships that that individual would like to have. Social isolation is defined as the objective lack of social contacts rather than how someone feels about their social life. So far, we know that compared to the general population, loneliness and social isolation is considerably higher among people with mental health problems, including those with depression, anxiety, psychosis or eating disorders. In addition, lonely people in the general population seem to be vulnerable to developing mental health problems, and this has been most clearly demonstrated for depression. Loneliness, isolation and poor social support also appear to be associated with poorer outcomes among people with established mental health problems, and again this has been most clearly demonstrated for depression. However, there is still a lot to learn about the associations between loneliness and other mental health conditions. For example, people with psychosis have high rates of loneliness, but the reasons why they become

¹ This is the cost to the Network. For Higher Education Institutions the Network will pay 80% of the full Economic Cost (see Terms of Reference and FAQs).

lonely and the impact of this on their quality of life and the course of their mental health problems are not well understood.

Public awareness of loneliness is greatest for older people, but several other groups have been identified as being at particularly high risk both of loneliness and social isolation, and of experiencing mental health problems. These include young people, students, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities and their carers, and new parents. For each of these groups, we expect there may be a set of characteristic inter-relationships between isolation, loneliness and mental health problems, with life transitions, social adversities, stigma and discrimination playing varying roles in pathways to loneliness and isolation, and to mental health problems.

The purpose of this funding call

In this first funding call we will commission high quality research that looks at **understanding what the experience of loneliness and social isolation is like** for individuals with mental health problems, and **what the nature of the relationship is between loneliness/isolation and mental health problems**. We are interested in

- Why people who are lonely and/or isolated are particularly likely to develop mental health problems, and what might increase or reduce this risk,
- How and why loneliness and/or social isolation make mental health problems worse,
- Why people who have mental health problems are more likely than others to become lonely and/or isolated, and what might increase or reduce this risk,
- What experiences of loneliness and/or isolation are like for people also experiencing mental health problems.

For this funding call we are not looking for research into interventions - this first call will be followed by a second funding call next year that will focus on interventions.

We are looking for excellent research that meets **accepted standards of evidence within the disciplines involved**. These projects are expected to lay the ground work for future larger-scale research.

Approach

We are interested in **what different subject areas can tell us** about the relationship between the experience of loneliness/social isolation and mental health problems, and how this is apparent in specific groups. We strongly encourage **interdisciplinary and cross-sector approaches that incorporate third sector, practitioner and particularly lived experience perspectives**. If you would like to discuss good practice for patient and public involvement (PPI) with one of our lived experience Co-Production Group (CoG) members, please contact m.birken@ucl.ac.uk by 30th November 2019.

We are **open to a range of methodologies**, including epidemiological studies using longitudinal datasets, neuroscience approaches, studies of psychological mechanisms, social scientific investigations, and arts-based, built-environment, philosophical, and experiential approaches. We welcome applications led by Early Career Researchers (ECRs) – see definition in FAQs. We will fund at least two projects led by researchers with relevant lived experience (across the two funding calls). We are particularly keen to fund research that investigates the experience of loneliness and/or social isolation in hard to reach groups.

Themes

We are open to any research projects that address the general purpose of this call, but are particularly interested in the following themes:

- How does loneliness and/or social isolation relate to mental health problems in high risk groups such as young people, ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities and their carers, and new parents, and seldom heard groups?
- What roles do identity and stigma play in how loneliness and/or social isolation relates to mental health problems?
- What role do individual/psychological, social and environmental factors play in the association between loneliness and/or social isolation and mental health problems?
- What role do confiding relationships play in the pathway between loneliness and/or social isolation and mental health problems?
- What can longitudinal datasets tell us about the associations between loneliness, social isolation and mental health problems in different groups?

We have been preparing for these funding calls by holding events attended by key stakeholders, including those with relevant lived experience, to identify gaps in knowledge and key priorities. You can see some of the **research questions collated from our events** here: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychiatry/loneliness-network/network-funding-call>.

If you have a research idea that is not covered by the above themes, please get in touch to discuss it with us: m.birken@ucl.ac.uk or ellie.pearce@ucl.ac.uk. We can also help you to find potential collaborators.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Loneliness and Social Isolation in Mental Health Research Network will be hosting two calls for applications for small grants to support research in specific areas, to address identified gaps in knowledge, and to improve the knowledge-base in areas of new challenge or changing policy and practice. The grants can be used to deliver a targeted piece of research or to pump-prime larger projects, for example by engaging in pilot or preliminary work to support subsequent larger grant applications. The first call is themed around **pathways between loneliness, social isolation and mental health problems**, and the second call will focus on interventions.

In this first **Pathways funding call**, grants are available up to a maximum of £30,000 (including indirect and estate costs) and grant-funded projects should be delivered within 12 months. We expect to grant up to a total of £200,000 overall in this funding call. The **deadline** for applications is 5pm on Friday 31st January 2020.

Eligibility

The Principal Investigator must hold a position in a UK University or other UK Higher Education Institution (HEI). A list of eligible independent research organisations (ROs) is available here: <https://www.ukri.org/files/funding/tcs/eligible-independent-research-organisations-pdf/>.

We **strongly encourage interdisciplinary and cross-sector approaches** that incorporate multiple academic disciplines, third sector and practitioner partners. We also **strongly encourage applicants to involve people with lived experience** of loneliness and/or social isolation and mental health problems at all stages of their intended research project, and we also strongly encourage people with relevant lived experience to make applications. The Network Co-Production Group (CoG) is available to provide suggestions if required – please contact m.birken@ucl.ac.uk by 30th November 2019 if you would like to discuss the possibility of this. You may also want to consult INVOLVE: <https://www.invo.org.uk/>

We welcome applications led by Early Career Researchers (ECRs: within eight years of the award of their PhD or equivalent professional training, or an individual who is within six years of their first academic appointment – see FAQs for more details) and will fund at least two projects led by lived experience researchers (across the two funding calls).

Awards will not be made retrospectively: this means that the work for which support is requested must not have commenced before the award is announced.

Your application to apply for these small grants will include (i) your application form and appended 1 page CVs for principal and co-applicant(s) and (ii) your budget form. All application documents can be found on our website:

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychiatry/loneliness-network/network-funding-call>. Applications will be shortlisted by a panel comprising network Co-Investigators from a number of different disciplines (see our website for Co-Investigator details: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychiatry/loneliness-network/meet-team>), members of the network Co-Production Group and independent assessors who will provide independent oversight of quality and due process.

Costs covered by the grant

All projects must be costed at 100% full economic cost (FEC). Consistent with UKRI funding guidelines, the proportion of total project costs that will be covered by the Network is dependent on the type of organisation:

- **HEIs** – the network will cover 80% of the total project cost (consistent with UKRI research funding guidelines). To put this simply, if you were to apply for £100, you would be funded £80 of that and would be expected to contribute £20 from your organisation and/or relevant partner(s). Please bear this in mind when you are costing your project. Therefore, to attain the maximum available funding of £30,000 at 80% funding, your permitted project costs at 100% FEC would be £37,500.
- **Businesses, third sector organisations, and government bodies** – the Network will cover 100% of justified costs for these types of co-applicants. Businesses and government bodies may not claim overheads or other indirect costs, whereas third sector organisations can.

Applications must clearly show which costs will be incurred by UK HEIs and which will be incurred by partners in business, the third sector, or government bodies. We have provided a Budget Form which should help you to calculate the relevant costs for the project and this is available on our website: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychiatry/loneliness-network/network-funding-call>.

You may want to consult this UKRI factsheet explaining their funding structure: <https://www.ukri.org/files/legacy/documents/fecfaq-pdf/>

Your institution should treat this application in the same way it treats all research council (UKRI) applications in terms of costings. We expect the academic institution where the funding would be held to advise applicants on how to cover the 20% of total cost not covered by the Network.

Funding may be sought to cover the **direct expenses** incurred in planning, developing, and conducting, the research, and disseminating findings to key stakeholders, including:

- Investigator's time (i.e. the costs of principal and co-applicants working directly on a project).
- Short-term consultancy or salary costs for expert staff, or short periods of research assistance (include VAT unless consultant is VAT exempt);
- Lived experience involvement costs;
- Research expenses, including participant reimbursement, transcription;
- Small equipment, facility use, and data/software purchases (i.e. less than £10,000);
- Travel (for example to interview research participants, or for co-applicant meetings) and subsistence costs (other than alcoholic drinks);
- Meeting and workshop costs (other than alcoholic drinks) if directly related to the research project;
- Other consumables, unless excluded below, including the purchase of datasets, photocopies, printing costs, microfilm charges, and any other minor items that will be used up during the course of the project;
- A final dissemination event specific to this study, not costing more than £2,000, accompanied by a lay report delivered as a blog.

Overhead and other indirect costs may be claimed by HEIs and third sector organisations only.

Items not eligible for funding

The following items are not eligible for funding under this call:

- Student stipends or course fees;
- Computer hardware including laptops, electronic notebooks, digital cameras, digital recorders etc;
- Books and other permanent resources;
- Publication costs – the UKRI provides the following guidance: article processing charges (APCs) and other publication charges relating to peer-reviewed research articles and conference proceedings cannot be included in research grant proposals. The payment of APCs and other publication charges related to UKRI-funded research are supported through UKRI open access block grants, which are provided to eligible research organisations and will therefore be covered for publications arising from projects funded in this call. For further information see the open access information: <https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/open-access/open-access-policy/>
- Conference costs (attendance fees or travel to conferences, or conference organisation) NB: but see note above about allowable costs for a dissemination event.

Ethics and Data Management

Note that all research involving human participants must comply with all relevant legislation and we require that all relevant ethics committee approvals, risk assessments, and regulatory requirements (including the General Data Protection Regulation; GDPR) are met for all grants funded through the network plus activities. These approvals must be confirmed before any funds can be released. Applications for ethics approval should be submitted as soon as possible after notification of funding, to avoid delays in starting the project. For some project proposals ethics approval may already have been granted.

Any research conducted or funded as part of network plus activities is required to be compliant with the following:

- (a) Safeguarding the anonymity of participants in recorded and reported data:** Participants' data should be recorded using a coded identifier that is only matched to their identity via a separate file that is separately password protected and encrypted. Study protocols should recognise the risk of participants being identified through readers triangulating information and should include strategies to prevent this.
- (b) Ensuring freedom to refuse consent and securing informed consent:** Data should be collected purely on the basis of having received informed consent when engaging with humans. Limits to confidentiality should be clearly stated and reporting obligations explained. Participants must have multiple opportunities to withdraw consent throughout any arising research processes. If participants choose to withdraw from the research, all of that person's data must be deleted.
- (c) Lone working:** Any situation where a researcher is likely to be left alone with participants must be avoided, wherever possible. Where this is not possible for practical reasons, a safety and lone working protocol must be used which ensures the safety of involved staff members and participants.

Scoring system used by assessors

Proposals will be assessed according to the following criteria, scored on a scale from 0-6.

- **Originality and potential contribution to knowledge:** Are the question(s) important, novel and likely to lead to significant new understanding, funding and/or impacts?
- **Research quality:** Is there a feasible plan for conducting research that will answer the research question posed? Have ethical and data management considerations been adequately addressed?
- **Value for money:** Are the funds requested essential for the work and justified by the importance and potential of the questions, project objectives relative to Network objectives and areas of thematic interest?
- **Evidence of active lived experience involvement** and engagement during project development.
- **Outputs, dissemination, and impact**, including development of the research workforce.
- **Cross-disciplinarity** (including cross-sector collaboration).

The assessors will follow the 6-point scoring system used by UKRI for each proposal:

| Score | Description |
|-------|--|
| 6 | The proposal is outstanding in terms of its potential research merit |
| 5 | The proposal is excellent in terms of its potential research merit |
| 4 | The proposal is important as it has considerable potential merit |
| 3 | The proposal has significant potential research merit but is not of a consistently high quality |
| 2 | The proposal will add to understanding and is worthy of support but is of lesser quality or urgency than more highly rated proposals. Such proposals are unlikely to have a significant influence on the development of the research area. |
| 1 | The proposal is flawed in its research approach, or is repetitious of other work, or otherwise judged not worth pursuing; or which, though possibly having sound objectives, appears seriously defective in its methodology. |
| 0 | Not able to assess (including due to falling outside of the remit of the call). |

Award Conditions

To enhance the dissemination of research findings funded by this call, successful applicants will be expected to:

- Work with the Network to communicate their research plans, progress and findings in a form that is accessible to service users/ people with lived experience, including through engaging with the Network CoG by presenting research plans and results at meetings and considering feedback from the CoG in carrying out and reporting the research.
- Provide financial and activity updates at intervals specified by the Network.
- Present a summary of their findings at a **Network workshop** after completion of the project period.
- Write a **final report** of 3,000-4,000 words within 6 months of the end of the project detailing the key findings of the project, the impact/expected impact of the research for the knowledge-base, policy and practice, and lessons learned. The report should be formatted for an academic journal. Where research findings have already been published in a peer-reviewed journal within this timeframe a copy of the published article will also be acceptable

as a final report. If you feel that this is not the format for the type of research project that you are planning (for example, if the project relates to audio-visual output) we can discuss this at the time of awarding funding.

- Write a **blog disseminating findings** to the general public, for example for inclusion on the Network's website.
- Where applicable, grant holders should formally deposit data generated by the research project with a responsible data repository (e.g. the UK Data Service) and provide metadata for resource discovery to the UK Data Service and to the Network within three months of the end of their grants. This will maximise the utility of the data and help progress research in this area.
- Report to the Funder via whatever means are required (e.g. ResearchFish) for as long as required and potentially after the end of the project period.
- Acknowledge the support of the Network in any talks, outputs, etc., and in any presentations and documents.
- Project money must be spent between 1st June 2020 and 1st June 2021.

Decisions on funding are expected by 1st April 2020. Projects should aim to have commenced by 1st June 2020 and no later than 1st August 2020. Please note that you need to discuss how to proceed if your funding application is successful with your contracts department as soon as possible: as part of the application form we ask for confirmation that, if awarded the grant, you would accept the terms set out in the standard contract template on our website (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychiatry/loneliness-network/network-funding-call>).

Applications should be sent to: ellie.pearce@ucl.ac.uk with the email header '*Pathways Funding Application – [Surname of Principal/Lead Applicant]*'. Please ensure you attach copies of (i) your application form (with appended CVs for principal and co-applicants) and (ii) your budget form, with file names as per the table below. Forms can be downloaded from our website:

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychiatry/loneliness-network/network-funding-call>

The deadline for applications is **5pm on Friday 31st January 2020**. We recommend requesting a read receipt when you send your application, as proof of submission.

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Email title: | 'Pathways Funding Application – [Surname of Principal/Lead Applicant]' |
| Attached Document 1: | 'Application_PathwaysFundingCall_[Surname of Principal/Lead Applicant]' |
| Attached Document 2: | 'Budget_PathwaysFundingCall_[Surname of Principal/Lead Applicant]' |

CONTACTS

If you have any queries regarding this call or would like to discuss your application, please email: m.birken@ucl.ac.uk or ellie.pearce@ucl.ac.uk.

If you would like to consult our CoG members for their advice on lived experience involvement and engagement in the project, including their potential paid involvement as a co-applicant researcher or consultant in the study, please contact them via Mary as above. We strongly recommend that if interested in this valuable resource you contact them as soon as possible, and **not later than 30 November 2019**, to give them time to consider the proposal in detail.