



Irish Cancer Society Research

Irish Cancer Society Underserved Communities in Cancer Research PhD Scholarship Programme 2024

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1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

The objective of the Irish Cancer Society Underserved Communities in Cancer Research PhD Scholarship Programme 2024 is to offer excellent graduates the opportunity to undertake postgraduate training in cancer research, with a focus on research that generates evidence to improve cancer pathways, outcomes and supports for marginalised and underserved communities in Ireland.

This call will be open to graduates of any relevant background (e.g., nursing, psychology, dietetics, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, genetic counselling, radiology, biomedical, life science, dentistry, pharmaceutical, medical, or translational research, etc.), with a project focusing on cancer research to improve pathways, outcomes and supports for marginalised and underserved communities.

During the programme, the Scholar will undertake general and cancer-specific training while participating in a structured PhD programme and will have the opportunity to gain experience at an international or national research institution through a mobility element.

The application form is outlined in **Section 3** of this document. All applications will be reviewed by a panel of external, **multidisciplinary**, international scientific reviewers and Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) reviewers. Shortlisted applicants will be invited to an online interview in late May – early June.

The application form is accessible through the Irish Cancer Society Gateway Grant Tracker online system (see: <https://grants.cancer.ie/>). Please ensure that you use the correct application form.

1.2. Purpose

Through the public's generous support, the Irish Cancer Society funds research in line with our mission to ensure fewer people get cancer and those that do have better outcomes. We always keep people affected by cancer at the heart of everything we do. Since 2021, the Society has been funding research specifically looking at improving cancer pathways, outcomes and supports for marginalised and underserved communities in Ireland. This research intends to inform not only the Irish Cancer Society, but also government, policy makers and the wider public so we can make healthcare more accessible and equitable for all.

The purpose of this funding call is to provide new evidence on improving the inclusion of underserved or marginalised groups and communities in cancer care. In this instance, underserved or marginalised groups include those with a higher healthcare burden that is not matched by the supports and services that are currently available.

The Society does not wish to be over prescriptive with the type of research conducted; the focus should be on how the research will provide a tangible benefit to those who need improved access to cancer care. It is established that health status of an individual aligns closely with their socioeconomic position, i.e., the lower the socioeconomic status, the more likely they are to experience poor health and illness. Socioeconomic status is determined by non-medical factors such as age, employment status, housing, education etc. These non-medical factors are known as the social determinants of health and play a crucial role in our health outcomes.

While life expectancy and cancer outcomes have improved, this has occurred unequally. Therefore, research proposals should address the impact of the social determinants of health. **Research proposals should not focus on specific poor prognosis cancer types, but rather on the social determinants of health.**

Example of social determinants of health include*:

- Demographic factors (e.g., age, sex, race, and ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, educational disadvantage).
- Social and economic factors (e.g., employment status, carers, language barriers, rural residents, stigmatised populations, atypical residential

circumstances, e.g., migrants, asylum seekers, individuals in care homes, prisoners, Travellers, homeless and unhoused).

- Health status (e.g., mental health conditions, cognitive impairment, learning and physical disabilities, individuals living with addiction).

*This is not an exhaustive list and should be seen as guidance rather than definitive.

1.3. Indicative Timelines

Table 1: Timeline for the Underserved Communities in Cancer Research Call

Milestone	Date
Full Applications and Intention to Submits Open	Wednesday 7 th February
Intention to Submit Deadline	3pm Wednesday 13th March
Full Application Deadline	3pm Thursday 4th April
Review of Applications	April – May
Shortlisted Applicants Invited to interview	Early May
Interview (will be held virtually)	Late May – Early June
Announcement of Award	June

Please note: The above dates are provisional and subject to change at the discretion of the Irish Cancer Society.

1.4. Research Project Eligibility

All proposals must be aligned with the Society's Strategy (2020-2025) (see [here](#)) and its Research Roadmap (see [here](#)). Please ensure you refer to these documents prior to submitting an application.

Proposed projects **must focus on improving pathways, outcomes and supports for minority and underserved communities in cancer research** (please see Section 1.2 for more detail).

As this application focuses on a specific strategic priority, on underserved communities, applications that wish to undertake a PhD Scholarship on our other areas of cancer research should apply to our **Irish Cancer Society – Irish Association for Cancer Research PhD Scholarship Programme 2024: Cancer Survivorship Research** or **Irish Cancer Society – Irish Association for Cancer Research PhD Scholarship Programme 2024: Translational & Clinical Cancer Research**.

Please note: The research must take place at a host institution in the Republic of Ireland. This must be one of the HRB's [approved host institutions](#).

1.5. Funding and Duration

The total value of the Underserved Communities in Cancer Research Scholarship is €160,000. This budget should cover the costs for stipend, fees, running costs, equipment, training, dissemination and travel, mobility placement, and PPI. For more details pertaining to the budget, please see **Appendix 1**.

The scholarship will last 3 to 4 years at a full-time capacity or at a part-time capacity, over a maximum of 6 years. If you are considering applying for a part-time scholarship, please contact grants@irishcancer.ie **prior** to submitting your application to discuss this with the Irish Cancer Society research team.

Please note the following budget stipulations that are specific to this Scholarship Call:

- PhD stipend is funded at a **minimum rate** of €22,000 per year.
- A **minimum** provision of €1,500 must be allocated to support Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) in the proposed research project.
- Funding of €5,000 is ring-fenced for a mobility element (Section 1.6).

Each budget application (main grant budget and PPI budget) will be reviewed before a funding decision is made.

1.6. Mobility Element

A unique aspect of the Irish Cancer Society Scholarships is the mobility element. The mobility element has ring-fenced funding (€5,000) which must be used to undertake research at a national or international research institution, for a maximum of 3 months. The mobility element must advance the project's aims and must be used in the first 3 years of the scholarship. It cannot take place in the host institute of the awardee.

This important element is intended to provide the awardee with experience that goes beyond their traditional research environment and will aid in developing the impact of the project and the awardee's career.

Please note: It is not expected at this stage in the call that applicants would have a finalised mobility plan. Applicants who are awarded the PhD Scholarship funding will be required to submit a detailed mobility element plan and budget breakdown at least 3 months in advance of the commencement of the mobility element. **However, we do ask as part of this application to provide a short general summary and budget of the applicant’s mobility element and how it will fit in with the overall objectives of the PhD Scholarship.**

1.7. Public and Patient Involvement

The Irish Cancer Society is dedicated to putting patients, families, survivors, supporters, and the public at the very heart of what we do. Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) in the research process ensures that research is meaningful and of benefit to those affected by cancer. PPI can be involved at any stage of a research project, from development and design to interpretation and dissemination. It is encouraged that PPI is incorporated into the research proposal from as early a stage as it is feasible.

In line with this commitment, it is expected that all applicants include a detailed PPI plan (and the associated **minimum** €1,500 budget allocation) and Sharing of Research Findings plan within their application.

Applicants should read Appendix 2 ‘Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) in Research’ Guidelines prior to beginning work on an application.

1.8. Research Impact

In line with our current strategy 2020-2025, from 2021 the Irish Cancer Society places a greater focus on maximising and measuring the impact of the research that we fund. Applicants are required to complete an impact plan as part of the application process. The Research Impact Framework (RIF) is a guide on research impact and how to monitor it for those applying for funding from the Irish Cancer Society.

It is strongly recommended that the RIF is consulted when completing the impact (see Appendix 3).

2. Application Procedure

2.1. Application Overview

The application should be initiated by the applicant, with strong input from the supervisors throughout. The application must **not** be written by the supervisors alone.

Application Process

There are three stages to the application process, as detailed in Table 2 below.

- a. **Intention to Submit.** The intention to submit form is **not** peer reviewed or used in the decision-making process for this award. It provides information to aid the Society in contacting appropriate reviewers and anticipate the number of full applications. The intention to submit form must be submitted by **3pm Wednesday, March 13th, 2024**. The form can be found on our website.
- b. **Full Application.** All full applications with a corresponding Intention to Submit form will be sent for full review. The review process is detailed in Section 5.
- c. **Interview.** Shortlisted candidates will be invited to interview. Applicants who are invited to interview will be expected to display in-depth knowledge of the proposed project, and must demonstrate the ability to think independently.

Table 2: Application Process.

Stage	Description
Stage 1: Intention to Submit	The intention to submit form is to allow us to anticipate the number of full applications that we will receive and to aid the Society in selecting the most appropriate peer reviewers. It will not be peer reviewed or used in the decision-making process for this award.
Stage 2: Application	This stage allows applicants to give a detailed description of each aspect of the proposed project, and the benefits to the applicant as an emerging researcher. All submitted applications will be reviewed by both a scientific and PPI review panel.
Stage 3: Interviews	Interviews are conducted between shortlisted applicants and the review panel. Feedback from the full application stage should be used to further improve the application in advance of the interviews.

2.2. How to Apply

Applications must be submitted through the Irish Cancer Society online grant management system (<https://grants.cancer.ie>).

From this platform, you can:

1. Update your basic information (please ensure all fields are completed);
2. Make a new grant application;
3. Access previous grant applications;

4. Manage any active grants.

You will be able to create a new application from the portal home page. Alternatively, select 'New Application' from the 'My Applications' tab, and click 'Apply' for 'Underserved Communities in Cancer Research Scholarship Programme 2024'.

3. Application Form

Prior to starting the application, all applicants should carefully read all sections of the application form.

Saving your progress regularly is **strongly recommended** by clicking 'Save' as you go through the form. Alternatively, the information will be saved when you click 'Save and Close'.

When uploading supporting documents, select 'attach', choose the appropriate file, select 'open file', and then press 'attach' again, to ensure document is uploaded correctly.

Mandatory sections are marked with a red circle icon. You will not be able to submit the application if these sections are incomplete. There are **10 sections** in the online application form, as noted below. Details of each section can be accessed through Appendix 4.

1. Project Outline

2. Applicant Details

- a. Curriculum Vitae
- b. Personal Statement
- c. References

3. Supervision

- a. Supervisors
- b. Supervisors' CVs
- c. Declaration of Support - Supervisors

4. Research Programme

- a. Alignment to 'Underserved Communities in Cancer Research' Theme
- b. Basis for Research

- c. Hypothesis and Aims
- d. Methods of Research
- e. Research Programme References
- f. Gantt Chart
- g. SWOT Analysis of Proposed Project
- h. Ethical Approval
- i. Research Environment
- j. Declaration of Support – Head of Department

5. Mobility Element

- a. Mobility Element Summary

6. Public and Patient Involvement Plan

- a. Project Summary (Public and Patient Involvement)
- b. Public and Patient Involvement Plan

7. Sharing of Research Findings Plan

8. Research Impact Plan

9. Budget

- a. Main grant budget
- b. Public and Patient Involvement plan budget

10. Validation Summary

4. Submission of the Application

The application is ready for submission once the form has been validated on the validation summary page. Once the application has been validated, it may be submitted by the **lead applicant**, in this case the proposed scholar. An Application Checklist is available in Appendix 4: Application Form Details.

The application will then be routed to any required signatories. The application will not be received by the Society until all signatories (primary supervisors) have approved it. It is the responsibility of the lead applicant to ensure that signatories are given sufficient time to approve the application **before the deadline**. Applications that have been submitted by the lead applicant but not approved by the signatories before the deadline will not be considered. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that each signatory approves the application before the deadline.

Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

5. Application Assessment

The Irish Cancer Society bases its funding decisions on the recommendations of an external scientific and PPI review panel. However, the Society withholds the right to reject any funding application at its own discretion.

Incomplete, ineligible, or late applications will be rejected by the Society and will not proceed to external review.

5.1. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

The Society endeavours to ensure that external reviewers are free of any conflicts of interest that might unduly bias the decision-making process.

5.2. Assessment Procedure

For this call, applications will be reviewed by both a **multidisciplinary scientific panel** and a **PPI panel**. As this award is open to applications from all disciplines working in underserved communities in cancer research, it is important that applications are accessible to a multidisciplinary panel, where feasible. **Scientific and PPI reviewers will have access to view the entire application.** It is essential that all sections are written in a manner that facilitates review by all reviewers assigned to them. Please make note of assigned reviewer group in Table 3 and score breakdown in Table 4.

The main grant budget will **not be scored**, but reviewers will provide feedback. The approval of all grant budget items is at the discretion of the Irish Cancer Society.

Scientific reviewers will score applications based on:

- The strength and suitability of the research environment in supporting the applicant in their research and career progression.
- The scientific merit of the proposed research, including feasibility of the proposed research, the methods of research and any ethical considerations.
- The potential impact of the proposed research.

PPI reviewers will score applications based on:

- Clarity and feasibility of the PPI plan, e.g., use of local resources, **genuine** inclusion of people affected by cancer, inclusion of all relevant stakeholders, timelines etc.

- A clear understanding by the researcher of the value of involving people affected by cancer in their research project.
- Whether the PPI activities constitute true involvement and not participation/engagement.
- Whether the methods for the sharing of research findings are inclusive and appropriate.
- The potential impact of the proposed research.

Please note: PPI reviewers are also given an opportunity to comment and provide feedback on the overall application, including sections they do not score.

Table 3: Application Sections and Reviewer Groups.

	PPI Review	Scientific Review
Project Outline		
Project Outline	x	✓
Applicant Details		
Curriculum Vitae	x	✓
Personal Statement	x	✓
References	x	✓
Supervision		
Supervisors	x	✓
Supervisors' CVs	x	✓
Declaration of Support: Supervisors	x	✓
Research Programme		
Basis for Research	x	✓
Hypothesis and Aims	x	✓
Methods of Research	x	✓
Research Programme References	x	✓
Gantt Chart	✓	✓
SWOT Analysis of Proposed Project	x	✓
Ethical Approval	x	✓
Research Environment	x	✓
Declaration of Support: Head of Department	x	✓

Mobility Element		
Mobility Element Summary	x	✓
PPI Plan		
Project Summary (PPI)	✓	x
PPI Plan	✓	x
Sharing of Research Findings Plan		
Sharing of Research Findings Plan	✓	✓
Research Impact Plan		
Research Impact Plan	✓	✓
Budget		
Main Grant Budget	x	✓
PPI Plan Budget	✓	x
Validation Summary		
Validation Summary	x	x

Table 4: Breakdown of Section Scores.

Scientific Review	% of Scientific Score
Applicant Details	20
Supervision	10
Research Programme	50
Mobility Element	10
Sharing of Research Findings Plan/Research Impact Plan	10
Budget	n/a comments only
PPI Review	% of PPI Score
PPI Plan and Gantt Chart	60
Sharing of Research Findings Plan	20
Research Impact Plan	20
PPI Plan Budget	n/a comments only

5.3. Assessment Outcome

Review scores and comments will be collated, and all submitted applications will be discussed at a review panel meeting. Scientific and PPI reviewers will all attend the panel meeting. The review panel will select which applications should proceed to interview.

Applicants will be informed of the outcome by email. Reviewer feedback will be available to all applicants.

6. Next Stage: Interview

Applications shortlisted will be invited to attend a virtual interview in late May 2024, likely the week starting Monday May 27th, 2024. The interview panel will be made up of scientific and PPI reviewers, in addition to an Irish Cancer Society representative.

Applicants will be asked to present a summary of their project, including a response to the review panel's comments from full application review. This will be followed by a question-and-answer session.

Applicants will be expected to demonstrate a detailed and critical understanding of their proposed project. The final funding decision will be co-decided by the scientific and PPI reviewers.

7. Contact

If you require assistance with the online grant management system or have any questions about the grant call, please contact the Irish Cancer Society Research Department at grants@irishcancer.ie.