



Irish Cancer Society Research

Early-Stage Clinician Research Bursary Award 2026

Introduction

1.1 Overview

A key priority of the Irish Cancer Society Strategy is to ensure that people affected by cancer in Ireland benefit from world-class cancer research and expertise. Central to this ambition is the development of research talent, ensuring that Ireland can foster, attract and retain the next generation of cancer research leaders who will drive evidence-based improvements in cancer outcomes and patient care.

As part of this commitment, the Irish Cancer Society is pleased to invite eligible Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors (NCHDs) considering, or already undertaking training in a cancer-related discipline to apply for the Early-Stage Clinician Research Bursary Award 2026.

As highlighted in the National Cancer Strategy, clinicians require support at key stages of their professional development to build research skills, gain experience, and develop the expertise necessary to contribute to and lead world-class cancer research in the Republic of Ireland.

The purpose of the Early-Stage Clinician Research Bursary 2026 is to provide NCHDs with the opportunity to develop the skills, experience, networks and preliminary research activity required to establish a future career in cancer research. The award is focused on developing research skills and supporting career development, by funding a research project.

Applicants may have **limited prior research experience (up to 6 months)**.

Applicants can be at any career stage from Intern to Senior Registrar level; however, it is important that applicants can demonstrate a clear commitment to pursuing a career focused on cancer care.

Funding of up to €10,000 may be used to support a range of activities related to this research project's running costs, that contributes to the applicant's research development and future competitiveness. Most of the funding should go towards consumables. Other allowable costs include: training and education costs directly related to this research project- for example, local training to use relevant equipment for this project, public and patient involvement (PPI) training courses etc.; travel and dissemination costs directly related to this research project- for example, attending a national conference to present a poster on this project, or dissemination costs for publishing this project in an open access journal.

Please note that this award is not a fellowship and cannot be used to support salary costs, buy-out time, major equipment purchases (including laptops), or activities that duplicate funding already provided through other awards, fellowships or PhD programmes.

This award represents a strategic investment in aspiring clinician researchers who are passionate about improving outcomes for people affected by cancer through research. It is intended to provide recipients with the support, experience and opportunities needed to accelerate their development towards becoming future leaders in cancer research in Ireland, by facilitate

ng a research study through funding its running costs.

1.2 Indicative Timelines

Milestone	Date (2026)*
Grant Call Opens	24 th of August 2026
Application Deadline	24 th of September 3pm
Review of Applications	September – October 2026
Award Announced	October 2026
Earliest Start Date	November 2026

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

1.3 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the Early-Stage Clinician Research Bursary Award is to support outstanding Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors (NCHDs) in establishing and developing a career in cancer research by providing the funding required to engage in a research project.

This award is intended to develop cancer research skills in individuals who demonstrate strong potential to contribute to innovative cancer research in Ireland. Eligible applicants must be NCHDs based in the Republic of Ireland who are on, or who are considering undertaking, training in a cancer-related discipline; have

enrolled or are considering enrolling on a recognised Higher Specialist Training (HST) programme with a recognised Postgraduate Medical Training Body; or on an equivalent parallel training pathway. Applicants should demonstrate a clear commitment to developing an active career in cancer research in Ireland.

The ideal candidate is a clinician with a strong interest in cancer research, and the educational background required to pursue a research career. Applicants may have **limited prior research experience (up to 6 months)**; however, they should demonstrate enthusiasm for research, a commitment to career development, and the potential to become future leaders within the Irish cancer research community.

Applications will be assessed by a review panel comprised of international cancer research experts. Applicants should clearly articulate how this award will advance their research career development and how the proposed activities will help them build towards a long-term leadership role within cancer research in Ireland.

The proposed research and career development plans should be well justified, achievable within the award period, and demonstrate potential to make a meaningful contribution to the applicant's development as an independent cancer researcher.

Applicants must have the full support of their host institution and mentor(s) to successfully undertake the proposed activities. The host institution must also demonstrate its commitment to supporting the applicant and be able to undertake the administrative and financial responsibilities associated with the award in a timely manner.

In summary, the applicant:

- is a Non-Consultant Hospital Doctor (NCHD) at an early stage of their research career.
- is based in the Republic of Ireland.
- is considering or already training in a cancer-related discipline.
- is considering enrolling or is enrolled on a recognised HST programme affiliated with a Postgraduate Medical Training Body, or an equivalent training pathway.
- has the desire and potential to develop an active career in cancer research in Ireland.
- has a fully supportive institutional and mentoring environment.

The funding provided through this award will offer a unique opportunity for recipients to develop the skills, experience and research profile necessary to become future leaders in cancer research in Ireland.

Please note that applicants with previous significant research experience are not eligible for this award (Applicants must have < 6 months research experience).

1.4 Research Themes

The Early-Stage Clinician Research Bursary Award 2026 aims to invest in the development of an early-career clinician planning to or currently undertaking training in a cancer-related discipline, enabling them to gain research skills, experience and capacity in cancer research. By fostering research development at this early stage of their clinical career, the award seeks to support the recipient's progression towards becoming a future leader in cancer research in the Republic of Ireland.

All proposals must be aligned with the Society's Strategy. Proposed activities can be in any of the following areas:

- Translational biomedical research
- Clinical research
- Survivorship.

These areas are described below in greater detail.

a) **Translational Biomedical Research** can be defined as 'bench to bedside' or patient-focused biomedical research, the aim of which is to translate existing knowledge about cancer biology into techniques and tools that will accelerate progress towards patient treatment. Research in this area will build upon basic biological discoveries and improves their Translational Biomedical potential through pre-clinical studies. Much of the outputs of Translational Biomedical research naturally merge into Clinical research, the next area of focus. Please note, applications in drug design, SAR (structure–activity relationship) analysis, drug screening or basic biomedical research will not be considered at this time.

b) **Clinical research** involves carefully designed studies in people to evaluate the safety, effectiveness, and benefits of new approaches to cancer treatment and care. For example, clinical research may investigate whether a new medicine can improve survival outcomes for individuals with a particular type of cancer.

In addition to funding Investigational Medicinal Product (IMP) trials, the Irish Cancer Society is committed to supporting high-quality non-IMP clinical research. The Society welcomes applications for non-drug-based trials that have the potential to improve cancer outcomes, patient experiences, and quality of care. Eligible areas of research for non-IMP trials include, but are not limited to, diagnostics, digital health and other technologies, radiotherapy, surgery, psycho-oncology, exercise and physical activity, nutrition, supportive care interventions, and multidisciplinary approaches that combine multiple treatment or care modalities

c) **Survivorship Research** seeks to improve the care and outcomes experienced by people affected by cancer, through person-centred research methods. Studies should yield person-centred data, and can include research such as prevention/screening incidence and behaviour; psycho-social or

physical long term effects of cancer and its treatment; quality and experience of treatment and care (including palliative and end-of-life care); self-management and health behaviour; health literacy and information; genetic risk and counselling; physical and practical needs of people living with cancer or those who care for them (e.g. financial, employment, accessibility). Survivorship research does not include in-vitro or ex-vivo methods (i.e. studying cancer cells or tumour tissue outside a living organism), or in-vivo methods (i.e., studying cancer cells or tumour tissue within a living experimental model)

1.5 Funding and Duration

There are **two** awards available.

Each lead applicant may only be listed on one application for this award. Applicants may request funding of up to €10,000 to support cancer research and research development activities in any of the eligible areas (translational, clinical, or survivorship research). Proposed activities may be undertaken on either a full-time or part-time basis, with the duration of the award ranging from 3 to 18 months depending on the level of time commitment and the activities proposed.

Further details on budget requirements are described in Section 4K, and Appendix 2 'Irish Cancer Society Research Budget & Expenses Policy 2026'.

1.6 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. It is recommended that PPI be involved at any stage of research activities, from development and design to interpretation and dissemination.

While a PPI plan is not mandatory for the research programme of this application, **applicants must include a plan for developing their PPI skills throughout this award**. This can be through official training courses, such as those provided by the Irish Cancer Society, PPI Ignite, or another organisation; through engaging with the PPI Ignite networks in the applicant's host institution; working with existing patients networks involved with other research groups locally etc. Involving patients in research through a partnership model ensures that research is impactful, and to be a leading researcher in future, this funding should be used to gain the skills and knowledge required to involve patients in future research.

It is strongly recommended that applicants read Appendix 1 'Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) in Research' guidelines prior to beginning work on an application.

2 Eligibility

2.1 Applicant Eligibility

Applications from individuals that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be assessed. This award is open to any NCHD interested in a cancer related discipline.

2.1.1 Lead Applicant

At a minimum, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Be a non-consultant hospital doctor (NCHD), with an interest in a cancer related discipline in a public hospital in the Republic of Ireland.
- Based in the Republic of Ireland.
- Be affiliated through their clinical facility with a higher education institution in the Republic of Ireland that is one of the HRB's approved host institutions below:
 - Atlantic Technological University (ATU)
 - Dublin City University (DCU)
 - Maynooth University (MU)
 - Munster Technological University (MTU)
 - Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)
 - South East Technological University (SETU)
 - Technological University Dublin (TUD)
 - Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS)
 - Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
 - University College Cork (UCC)
 - University College Dublin (UCD)
 - University of Galway (UoG)
 - University of Limerick (UL)
- Demonstrate a high level of support from the academic host institution, hospital, training body (where relevant) and peers for the duration of the award.
- Demonstrate a high level of mentorship support.
- Have a keen interest and commitment to cancer research.

***Please note: This is an award aimed at providing the opportunity for an individual to develop cancer research experience and expertise. It is not intended to support development of general service approaches in cancer care.**

2.1.2 Academic Mentor

As part of the application, the applicant must identify an academic mentor. The role of the academic mentor is to provide guidance and support in terms of the academic aspects of the research award such as grant administration, laboratory, technical or other healthcare expertise (nursing, dietetics, physiotherapy etc.) that may be required by the applicant during the duration of the award.

The academic mentor may also assist in establishing further research networks nationally and internationally.

The academic mentor must be:

- an established senior academic with a proven track record for research
- based at one of the HRB-approved host institutions listed in Section 2.1.1
- must hold an academic appointment that will remain in place for the full duration of the award.

2.1.3 Career Mentor

A cornerstone of many high-performing clinical researchers is their integration into an ongoing network of direct and indirect mentorship and supportive counsel. We wish to highlight and reinforce the importance of this, often undervalued, aspect of a researcher's career development.

As part of the application form, the review panel will examine the candidate's articulation of the current and future arrangements to support them as a mentee. Mentors may include individuals and/or committees. They could be of any relevant background who will ensure a rounded evolution of the applicant's career, will help benchmark, will broaden their expertise base and collaborative network (nationally/internationally) and foster and champion the further development of the candidate.

A mentor should be an established senior academic or clinician with a proven track record for research and mentorship.

If the mentor is a senior academic within one of the listed HRB-approved host institutions in the Republic of Ireland, they may also fulfil the role of academic mentor for this grant.

2.2 Institution Eligibility

The host institution is the organisation that receives and administers grant funding and is responsible for compliance with all general and specific terms and conditions of awards. The applicant should be affiliated with one of the HRB-approved institutions listed under the subsection 2.1.1.

Applicants conducting research out of non-approved sites (e.g. a hospital) must nominate an approved host institution and all finances must be managed by this institution.

3 Application procedure

3.1 Application Overview

The structure of the application and review process is designed to allow for an iterative development and improvement of applications to maximise their potential.

Stage	Description
Stage 1: Application	The application should provide a detailed description of how this funding will support their proposed research activities and support their development as a cancer researcher.
Review	An expert international review panel, comprised of scientific/clinical reviewers, will evaluate the application submissions. Applications will be evaluated based on their quality.
Feedback	Reviewer feedback will be made available to all applicants.

3.2 How to Apply

Applications must be completed and submitted through the new Irish Cancer Society online grant management system. To submit an online application, you are required to register at the following address:

<https://irishcancersociety.optimytool.com/en>.

When registering, please fill out all fields on the registration form.

Please note: We recommend that you use a non-HSE email address when creating this application to avoid any security issues when receiving correspondence from the online system.

When registering, you will receive a verification email from noreply@optimytool.com within five minutes (please check your spam).

When you enter your login details, you will be directed to the portal homepage. From here, you can:

- Manage personal data
- Change email address
- Change password
- Delete your account

You should then select 'Submit a new application' at the top of the homepage, then 'Early Stage Clinician Research Bursary Award 2026'.

4 Application form

There are 5 sections outlined on the left-hand side of the page:

1. Application Outline
2. Benefit to the applicant's career
3. Project outline
4. Budget
5. Summary

By clicking 'PREVIOUS SCREEN' you will be brought to the previous section and by clicking 'NEXT' SCREEN you will be brought to the next section, and your application will be saved. Alternatively, you can click 'SAVE AND EXIT'.

*Academic and career mentors: Academic mentors can be invited as co-applicants, to view and edit the application via the 'MANAGE INVITATIONS' button on the left hand side of the page.



You can choose which sections will be visible to them and grant either 'Full access' or 'Read-only access' to the co-applicant.

If you re-invite a mentor to access the application again, they should use the original link i.e. there will not be a second link sent.

Further details on each section of the application form

4.1.1 Application Outline

In this section, you will be asked to provide basic information about your application. Input and save the information as required under the following headings:

a General

- Proposed title
- Proposed start date (this is an estimate start date)
- Funding Period/Grant Duration (must be between 3 - 18 months)
- Please specify whether it is part-time or full time

b Lead Applicant Details

- Title
- First Name
- Last Name
- Email Address
- Position
- Institution
- Department
- Lead applicant's CV

c Proposed host Institution

- Host institution

- Department / School / Division
- Address line 1
- Address Line 2
- City
- County
- Declaration of Support (HOD)

d Postgraduate Medical Training Body

- Postgraduate Medical Training Body
- Letter of Support from affiliated medical training body

e Academic Mentor Details

- Title
- First Name
- Last Name
- Email Address
- Institution
- Department
- Why have you chosen them? (up to 2400 characters)
- Academic Mentor CV
- Academic Mentor Declaration of Support
- Is the academic mentor the same as the career mentor?

*Please note: if your academic mentor and career mentor are the same person, you will be able to upload one overall letter of support covering both aspects detailed in Sections d & e

f Career Mentor Details (Only if necessary)

- Title
- First Name
- Last Name
- Email Address
- Institution
- Department
- Why have you chosen them? (up to 2400 characters)
- Career Mentor CV
- Career Mentor Declaration of Support

4.1.2 Benefit to the applicant's career

- How is this project relevant to you? (up to 2400 characters).
- How does this proposal align with the funding call? (up to 2400 characters).
- What is your research experience, and what knowledge or skills will you (and if applicable other researchers) gain from this research project? (up to 2400 characters).

- How will this funding benefit your future career and research plans? (up to 2400 characters).
- How will the proposed project benefit the wider cancer research community in Ireland, and what impact is it expected to have on cancer research capacity, collaboration, knowledge generation, or patient outcomes? (up to 2400 characters).

4.1.3 Project outline

a Project Description

- Please provide a description of the research project (up to 4000 characters).

b Oncology-specialist Field

- Please select the oncology-related discipline you are currently enrolled in.
- *If other, please describe below.*
- *Do you have any plans to specialise in an oncology-related discipline?*

c Keywords

- Please provide up to 5 keywords which describe your proposed research. If applicable, these should include recognised divisions of cancer (paediatric, geriatric etc.) and/ or certain specialisms (diagnostics, radiotherapy, surgery etc.)

d Cancer Type

- Please indicate your cancer focus: are you advancing research on anatomically or biochemically defined forms of cancer?

e Research Type(s)

- Please select the most appropriate research type for your proposal using the Common Scientific Outline (CSO).

4.1.4 Budget

All applications should include a detailed budget, with detailed breakdowns and justifications of all costs. The Irish Cancer Society does not cover indirect costs or overheads. Please consult the Irish Cancer Society Research Budget & Expenses Policy 2026 when developing your grant budget (Appendix 2).

Approval of all budget items is at the discretion of the Irish Cancer Society. Any budgeted costs that do not adhere to spending guidelines risk rejection. We therefore strongly recommend you get support from the research office in your chosen host institution when preparing this budget.

a Budget costs

Direct costs can be requested for the following budget categories:

Budget Item	Details
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Running costs	Running costs are costs associated with conducting the principal research activities e.g. materials and consumables, survey costs, travel for participants, transcription costs, etc.
Travel & Dissemination costs	Costs associated with research dissemination may be budgeted e.g., poster printing, open-access publication costs, engagement events, conference attendance, etc. Include any dissemination-related travel and accommodation costs here. Note: It is preferred that conference travel is restricted to short distances, for example conferences within Europe.
PPI, Training & Education costs	Education and training for the researcher may be budgeted. This may include attending courses, workshops, professional development training, etc. Include any training-related travel and accommodation costs here. Please note these must be directly relevant for the completion of this research project. Justification is required for any budgeted course or travel plans. The Irish Cancer Society places great emphasis on Public and Patient Involvement in the research activities it funds. It is mandatory that the applicant avails of PPI training or participates in PPI work through this research project.

b **Justifications**

- Justification for Running Costs (up to 1200 characters)
- Justification for Travel & dissemination (up to 1200 characters)
- Justification for PPI, Training and Education (up to 1200 characters)
- Other justification (if needed) (up to 1200 characters)
- Does the proposed budget to the Irish Cancer Society cover the budget of the research activities in full?

4.1.5 Summary

The summary page will notify you of any incomplete sections. You will not be able to submit the application until all required fields are complete. Before submitting, please ensure invitations to co-applicants are managed/ sent via the blue 'MANAGE INVITATIONS' button on the lefthand side of the page. This will give them read-only access or full access to edit the application.

4.2 Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

While applicants must ensure that the application is written in their own words, applicants may use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to support the preparation of their application. However, applicants remain fully responsible for the accuracy, integrity and originality of all information submitted.

Any content generated or assisted by AI tools must be carefully reviewed by the applicant. Applicants must ensure that all statements, references, data, and claims are accurate and appropriately attributed where relevant.

Generative AI tools must not be used to fabricate, misrepresent, or falsify research data, research outputs, qualifications, publications, or any other information included in the application.

The Irish Cancer Society reserves the right to seek clarification regarding any aspect of an application where concerns arise regarding accuracy, authenticity, or compliance with these guidelines.

5. Submission of the application

The application is ready for submission once the form has no incomplete sections. Please double check for any mentors who have yet to confirm their participation/ approval. Once the application has been validated, it may be submitted by the lead applicant by clicking 'VALIDATE AND SEND'.

The application will not be received by the Society until all specified mentors have approved it before the application deadline. It is the responsibility of the lead applicant to ensure that mentors are given sufficient time to approve the application before the deadline.

Applications must be received by the Society prior to the deadline. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

6. Application assessment

The Irish Cancer Society bases its funding decisions on the recommendations of an external 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 may not proceed to external review.

6.1 Conflicts of Interest

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

6.2 Assessment Procedure

Applications will be reviewed by a panel of international academic/clinical experts (scientific panel). Each reviewer will provide scores and feedback on each application, shortlisting the top applicants to reach a final decision during a review panel meeting.

6.3 Assessment Outcome

Review scores and comments will be collated, and all applications will be discussed at a review panel meeting. Applicants will be informed of the outcome by email. Reviewer feedback will be available to all applicants.

Applicants may be asked to provide responses to the review panel's comments. Applicants will be expected to demonstrate a detailed and critical understanding of their proposed project.

7. Contact

If you require assistance with the online grant management system, or have any questions about the application form or grant call, please contact the Irish Cancer Society Research Department:

Email: grants@irishcancer.ie FAO: Dr. Alfredo Ormazabal.