

Government to invest £375 million in neurodegenerative disease research



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Funding includes at least £50 million for motor neurone disease related research to find a cure

New NIHR Motor Neurone Disease Research Unit to attract more innovative research applications

People living with neurodegenerative diseases could live longer, healthier lives due to innovative new research, following a government commitment to invest £375 million over the next 5 years.

At least £50 million will be made available specifically for research to help find a cure for motor neurone disease (MND) - a condition that affects the brain and nerves and affects 5,000 people in the UK. New, innovative projects will help researchers to better understand the disease and its related conditions, develop and test treatments and improve care for those living with MND.

The full £375 million investment will fund projects into a range of diseases such as Pick's Disease, Fronto-temporal dementia, wernicke-korsakoff, Parkinson's disease dementia, Lewy Body dementia, Alzheimer's disease and mild cognitive impairment, improving our understanding while searching for new treatments.

For MND, a new NIHR Research Unit will be set up to coordinate research applications for the new funding, encouraging more innovative studies with the ultimate goal of finding a cure.

The government has already invested millions of pounds in MND research, including over £7 million to support pioneering clinical trials, which have led to major advances in how the disease is understood. This includes improving our understanding of how different types of MND are passed on genetically which could unlock new treatment options for patients using gene therapy.

There is currently only one drug licensed in the UK to treat MND – Riluzole – which slows the progression of the disease and extends someone’s life by a few months. The funding announced today will accelerate progress across the UK to find better treatments for MND, and give people living with the condition the chance of a better quality of life, and more good years with their loved ones.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid, said:

Neurodegenerative conditions like MND can have a devastating impact on people’s lives and I’m committed to ensuring the government does everything we can to fight these diseases and support those affected.

We’ve already invested millions in understanding and treating MND and our new funding commitment will back more research into this and other neurodegenerative diseases.

The UK is a global leader in medical research. Our world-class research sector was central to the discovery of lifesaving treatments for COVID-19 like dexamethasone and Tocilizumab, as well as the development of the vaccine programme which has saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

We will continue to harness this expertise and innovation to support pioneering projects to find better treatments for those living with motor neurone disease, like the excellent work underway at NIHR Sheffield Biomedical Research Centre where scientists are trialling new drugs to treat the condition.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

The UK is home to some of the most transformative and innovative medical research in the world, and the availability of this research funding, alongside the work of our strong life science and pharmaceuticals sector, will make the most of that research to help those living with motor neurone disease.

It is vital that we increase our understanding of this condition in pursuit of new treatments and better care, and I am pleased to see UK institutions at the forefront of that work.

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) has committed to ongoing research into MND, reinforced by issuing a Highlight

Notice inviting applications from ambitious research projects to take potential treatments from the lab to the clinic, as part of scaled-up efforts to significantly improve the care and support available.

The NIHR has also awarded a prestigious Research Professorship to leading motor neurone disease researcher Professor Chris McDermott. The award will focus on improving care for people with MND, bolstering leadership in this area of research, and strengthening the design of clinical trials to help more people with the disease take part.

While there is still work to be done, significant progress is already being made – including through the development of better data resources such as MND Register and MND Biobanks which support researchers working to better understand the disease.

Improved data sets make it easier for scientists to monitor responses to treatment in clinical trials. And through innovative and flexible trial designs, researchers are able to conduct faster and cheaper trials which will deliver potential new treatments to patients more quickly.

As well as the funding for research into neurodegenerative diseases, a new motor neurone disease partnership will be formed to pool expertise and resources across the research community to accelerate the delivery of new treatments. The partnership, backed by £4 million, is co-funded by the National Institute for Health Research, UK Research and Innovation, Life Arc, MND Association and My Name's Doddie Foundation.

Researchers can apply for funding via the NIHR and UKRI websites.

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