

INSPIRE Research Challenge



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Background and rationale: Over the past four decades, AICR/WCRF have built a reputation as the global authority on diet, nutrition, physical activity and cancer. AICR/WCRF were among the first to recognize and support research on how lifestyle factors could reduce cancer risk and improve survivorship. Three Expert Reports, four decades of funding research projects, annual conferences highlighting the latest research and the Global Cancer Update Program (formerly Continuous Update Program), have all cemented the WCRF network as the most trusted source of the latest evidence.

The concepts pioneered by AICR/WCRF and AICR/WCRF Cancer Prevention Recommendations are now the mainstay of public health cancer (and other non-communicable diseases) prevention initiatives and clinical practice. Despite this huge success, cancer incidence rates and the burden of disease remain unacceptably high so the urgent demand for progress remains.

AICR/WCRF have always been at the forefront of innovative research, new ideas and fostering progress in the field of diet, nutrition and cancer. As part of our continued commitment to accelerating progress, AICR (in partnership with WCRF International, World Cancer Research Fund and Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds (WKOF)) is launching the “**Inspire Research Challenge**” a new grant call aimed at **Early Career Investigators**, that will run in parallel with our existing Grant Programs. The *Inspire Research Challenge* will prioritize innovative, bold, and creative proposals with the potential to catalyze rapid and impactful advances in cancer prevention, treatment and survivorship.

Eligibility:

The **Inspire Research Challenge** is open to early career individuals (defined as not less than two years but not more than six years post-doctoral degree (PhD or MD research)). Eligible applicants must currently be employed on a research contract within a department at a research institution affiliated with a university or medical school. The *Inspire Research Challenge* is open to investigators worldwide.

Applicants are expected to demonstrate conceptual independence from post-doctoral supervisors or mentor(s) and post-doctoral applicants must provide proof of support for their application from their current supervisor. Applicants must have a valid Orchid ID.

Scope:

Applicants are encouraged to be bold. The Inspire Research Challenge prioritizes inspiration over incrementalism. Inspire Research challenge funding will accelerate novel research ideas that provide unique insights to challenge current conventions and longstanding dogma or take advantage of emerging themes and technologies. Inspire Research Challenge funding aims to support the development of new research ideas/concepts, the combination of research areas in innovative ways, the establishment of new collaborations, and/or the application of new innovative methods or technologies.

Proposed projects must have direct relevance to cancer prevention, treatment or survivorship and may address any or all stages of the cancer journey. Proposals should address modifiable factors including both lifestyle, such as diet, nutrition, physical activity, and environmental factors such as pollution/contaminants and pathogens. Particular priority will be given to novel exposures including stress, sleep and host factors such as immune function.

We anticipate that the greatest opportunities will present themselves at the intersection of previously independent ideas, approaches and topics that may not have previously been combined. Opportunities may also exist in the application of approaches or concepts adapted from other diseases or conditions that may not have yet been investigated with respect to cancer.

Proposals must address an explicitly stated hypothesis and clearly state objectives that will enable the applicant to test that hypothesis. The use of experimental models must be justified regarding their relevance to human cancers. Evidence synthesis approaches, such as systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and applications that propose solely cell line studies will not be considered.

Applicants should clearly state the expected outcomes of their proposal, and the anticipated potential for exploration with future funding. Applicants must demonstrate the feasibility of their proposal as well as the suitability of their research environment.

Funding:

Max funding: Up to \$85,000

Funds can be used for any justifiable expenses including salary (especially to protect time for the applicant to pursue the proposed project) and services.

Funding will be available for 12 months and stated objectives must be achievable within that timeframe. Extension of funding may be available, contingent on meeting original objectives plus demonstration of significant potential for further progress.

Application Process:

The Inspire Research Challenge will be launched on 01 May 2023 when the Letter of Intent phase will open.

- 1) **Letter of Intent:** The deadline for submission of Letters of Intent will be 26 May 2023. Submission of a Letter of Intent is a mandatory component of the Inspire Research Challenge application process. Only ONE letter of intent may be submitted by each applicant. Letters of intent will be critically reviewed and invitation to submit a full application will be highly competitive. The LOI phase is NOT merely an administrative step. Applicants are encouraged to consider application quality to be equivalent to standards required for scientific publication.
- 2) **Full Application:** Invitations to submit a full application, based on the review of the Letters of Intent, will be announced 26 June 2023. We anticipate that we will invite up to 20 full applications. The deadline for submission of full applications will be 24 July 2023. Full applications will be reviewed by external independent content experts. The Inspire Research Challenge Review Panel will then review the independent experts feedback to adjudicate the merits of each application. We anticipate that we will fund up to four proposals.
- 3) **Video Presentation for Shortlisted Applicants:** “Shark Tank”/“Dragon’s Den”-style: 15 minute Zoom Interview as final selection from fundable proposals (we anticipate that 6 shortlisted candidates will present, from which up to 4 will be selected for funding). We anticipate that video presentations will be conducted by 08 September 2023 with funding decisions announced early October 2023.

Contact: For queries regarding applications, please e-mail inspire@aicr.org