Our Research Strategy
Introduction

Kidney Research UK has a 52-year legacy in funding excellent research into all aspects of kidney diseases and disorders. Each year over £3.7 million1 new investments are made into driving forward new research, which culminates in the charity having an ongoing active research portfolio greater than £12 million. We are continuing to fulfil our role as the major UK funding organisation supporting a wide range of research into improving our understanding of the kidney in both healthy and disease states.

Realising our vision of: Lives free from kidney disease, through:

• Fund and deliver life-saving research into kidney diseases
• Improving treatments for people with kidney diseases and enhance their quality of life
• Increase awareness of kidney health

Historically, the kidney (renal) field has received a lower priority from other funding sources; this lower investment has resulted in advances in treatments for kidney conditions falling behind others such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease. As the major funder of renal research, we will seek to substantially contribute to addressing this by moving key opportunities forward over the next three years and will continue to ensure that more than 75% of our charitable expenditure will be vested on research year-on-year.

We will achieve this by developing our funding schemes and governance models to create and deliver a balanced research portfolio which, incorporates support for the brightest and best researchers at key stages of their careers; supports new ideas and hypotheses that are curiosity driven; and which supports research collaborations that address evidence gaps or research questions not being addressed through the traditional ‘response-mode’ approach.

We will monitor the changing research landscape taking an active role in supporting and driving forward advances in renal medicine, facilitating collaborations and partnerships, and working with a wide range of experts and professionals. We plan to build on existing levels of funding, whilst also increasing our commitment to careers and curiosity-led research.

We will continue to listen to patients and secure their views on research priorities, and have made a commitment to engage patients in the development and delivery of research in the most beneficial way for all stakeholders. In doing so, we will be supporting the ethos that any person affected by kidney disease should have the opportunity to participate in research, thereby placing the patient at the heart of the research.

Evaluation of the impact of our research, analysis of careers and research outputs and outcomes will be undertaken alongside communicating the achievements from our research to a wide multi stakeholder audience.

Elaine Davies, Director of Research Operations

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1 2014/15 £5.1 million in new investments made.
Guiding Principles

This research strategy outlines our intentions to achieve this through comprehensive research funding programmes and initiatives over the next 3 years. There will be an increase in partnerships and collaborations where applicable, to deliver advances in understanding and treating kidney disorders.

It will encompass four main elements:

- Projects/Studies
- People (including Kidney Research UK Alumni)
- Collaborative Partnerships
- Patients

There are three core principles in the implementation of our research strategy.

1. We will maintain and develop our robust governance across the breadth of our research portfolio to ensure we continue to support the highest quality research.

2. We will improve how we measure and report the impact that the research achieves for people living with kidney diseases and disorders.

3. We will enhance how we evaluate the long term returns on each of our areas of funding and seek to ensure that investments are fully realised for maximum patient benefit.
Our Investment

Our investment will encompass different approaches to driving research forward. We will ensure that we capture the impact by measuring the value of the outcome and the output. We will increase year-on-year the funding available for research.

Capacity Building

The future of kidney (renal) research relies on the investment in the people that carry it out. It is essential that funding continues to be invested in the training of a cadre of doctors, multi-health professionals and scientists committed to kidney research. We will continue to review the funding support needed for all those involved or wishing to be involved in research. We will identify gaps where there are barriers to recruitment or retention into renal research and where practical seek new models of funding these.

Curiosity-led Research

Fundamental biomedical research has been a UK strength and remains at the forefront of delivering substantial benefits to understanding the kidney, the causes and progression or disease markers of kidney diseases. Translation of this knowledge base will enable the development of better diagnosis, screening and new treatments. Research investigating current treatments and clinical practice and care will ensure that the quality of life and health for those already affected by kidney disease can be improved. We will increase the funds available to fund this research and develop new ways to support and accelerate the translation closer to clinical practice.

Directed and Commissioned Research

Research opportunities not addressed via the normal ‘response-mode’ approach and larger clinical studies both require substantially higher levels of investment and an increased level of collaboration across the research community. We expect to increase the number we will take forward through working in partnership with other funders and partners, and with the existing renal infrastructures using a more directed open call or commissioning approach.
Sharing UK ‘best-practice and knowledge’
We can play a bigger role in amplifying the sharing of best practice by working with partners. Ensuring all our supported researchers publish their research and by investing in our plans to increase our public affairs activity to ensure that outcomes are known to those who can influence further investment and effect change in clinical practice.

Infrastructure Development
The kidney research community already has some well-established infrastructures such as the Renal Registry, Renal Patient View, RaDaR, GN DNA & Data Bank, UK Kidney Research Consortium (UKKRC). We will aim to strengthen our role in supporting the development of each of these, and support the creation of any new emerging needs. Through the UKKRC we will support the development of the National Renal Research Strategy (NRRS) being called for in the Kidney Health Delivering Excellence paper.

Scientific Research Meetings
Scientific and multi-stakeholder meetings play a vital role in sharing knowledge, discussing ideas and forming new collaborations. Our Alumni Programme also provides the opportunity for development of wider skills needed in career development and establishing oneself as an independent expert. Our aim over the next three years will be to develop the current programme that we have established, and to seek increased involvement in the external engagement as part of our plan to improve the dissemination of research.
Research Themes

We will continue to support research across all these themes;

- **Basic science and enhancing the knowledge base**
  Increase our understanding of the kidney and human biology to underpin future research.

- **Biological pathways and mechanisms**
  Develop new models to study kidney diseases and identify potential therapeutic targets.

- **Emerging technologies**
  Explore the potential around genetics and cell therapy, as well as IT and data resources and their relevance to kidney diseases.

- **Translational and proof of concept**
  Support the progression of evidence across to clinical application.

- **Managing and treating complications of kidney diseases**
  Increase our understanding and develop new approaches to addressing co-morbidities in kidney diseases.

- **Diagnosis, screening and prevention**
  Developing current and acquire new knowledge and methods to improve diagnosis and treatments.

- **Improving clinical care and quality of health/life**
  Exploring the treatment pathways and processes, and measuring the benefit experienced by kidney patients. Develop new evidence to influence patient, health professionals and public behaviours that affect or enhance kidney care.
## Enabling (funding investment)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curiosity-led/pump-priming (researcher derived field of interest, question and delivery of answer)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building - supporting the brightest and the best (personal funding such as fellowships, PhD’s &amp; Alumni Programme)</td>
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<td>Sharing ‘best practice’ and networking globally from the UK (ISN fellowships)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Directed research - targeted open calls; addressing evidence gaps: Field/theme defined - question and answer researcher defined</td>
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<td>Commissioned research - working with the UKKRC &amp; CSGs / RDGs (translational, POC, clinical trials); Driving the ‘next stages’ of research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commissioned research - infrastructure/capital investment (eg. DNA banks, RADAR etc)</td>
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## Research Themes

- **Investing in tomorrow: Basic science & enhancing the knowledge base**
  **UNDER-PINNING**

- **Specific kidney diseases: Biological pathways and mechanisms**
  **New models of diseases**
  **CAUSE (AETIOLOGY)**

- **Emerging technologies: Genetics, gene & cell therapy and stem cell**
  **APPLICATION TO KIDNEY DISEASE**

- **Translational: Evidence into patient benefit**
  **(long-term and short-term)**

- **Managing kidney disease: Progression, co-morbidities and mortality**

- **Diagnosis, screening and treatment: Biomarkers, genetic screening**
  **Phase I (POC) - Phase II clinical trials**

- **Improving clinical research: QoL/QoH health service research**
Working in Partnership – Collaboration

A key part of delivering high quality research will involve working in partnership. We will do this with other stakeholders, including industry, other funders & charities, professional societies whilst also assisting in the development of current and future infrastructures/consortia. Working with the charity, the UK Kidney Research Consortium and the various kidney disease and clinical study groups will be part of helping prioritise and deliver research that will benefit kidney patients.

Patients have a vital role to play in research. Their involvement can improve the design of research and is essential to increase the learnings from clinical trials. They can help to identify research priorities and improve the dissemination of knowledge.

Evaluating what we are achieving

Not all our research portfolio will impact on kidney patients in the short-to-medium term, however it should all demonstrate the potential to make a difference and we will be collecting and evaluating both outputs and outcomes from all our funded research using a variety of measures, including annual data collection through Researchfish, and undertaking research site visits.
By 2017 we will have made the following progress

- We will have made at least 120 grants available
- We will have extended the upper end of our career support to include senior clinical fellows
- We will be attracting a larger number of grant applications from a broader audience to enrich the range of research undertaken
- Working with our partners, we will have established a National Renal Research Strategy and identified the priority areas for developing evidence
- We will have supported an increased number of meetings that drive forward the research agenda and disseminate knowledge
- We will have established a larger network of industry partners
- We will have grown our annual investment in research to at least £5 million
- We will have invested c. £3 million in implementing a major new project to make transplanted kidneys work better and last longer (enabled by the Make Every Kidney Count Appeal)
- We will have invested in delivering one large-scale clinical trial and at least two smaller-scale projects to address vital gaps in evidence
- We will be able to cite new evidence generated which strengthens both basic science and clinical knowledge bases
- We will have helped to establish new, or extended existing renal infrastructure biological/data resources
- We will be able to cite several significant examples of patient benefit, arising from changes in clinical practice, enabled by our research programme
Our core annual research funding schemes

Research Projects and Innovation Grants
Fund innovative standalone research projects that will advance our knowledge of kidney disease and refine current treatments or lead to new advances in the future or that will advance our knowledge of kidney disease particularly for new hypotheses where initial pilot/supporting data is required prior to a full research project.

Training Fellowships (clinical)
Supports medical graduates to specialise in the renal field thereby expanding the levels of expertise in kidney research and treatment. Appropriate for medical graduates in clinical or academic renal medicine and are only awarded after interview of short-listed candidates, at which they will be asked to make a brief presentation of the proposed proposal followed by questions & answers. Supervisors are asked to carefully consider the appropriateness of the project to the candidate’s career development, and to provide a brief statement of their own research and training record in the chosen field.

Intercalated Degrees (clinical)
This annual competition for Intercalated Degrees for medical students aims to encourage and capture undergraduates with an interest in renal medicine at this early stage in their career development. The £5,000 award is paid directly to the student who can use this for living costs and fees, (award not allocable to research costs). The level of funding was agreed so as to be on par with that offered by other funders providing intercalated year funding. Dissemination of this opportunity is carried out via the Medical Schools Council (Medschools.ac.uk) and their secretaries at each school.

Senior Non-Clinical Fellowships
Supports non-clinical scientists who have conducted independent research in the renal field and wish to build on their history and reputation in this field, deepening their knowledge and experience. Awarded after interview of short-listed candidates, at which they will be asked to make a brief presentation of the proposed proposal followed by questions & answers. Ordinarily candidates will be expected to have a significant publication record in their chosen field. The charity recognises the importance of such individuals to the national research structure. Sponsors are asked to provide a responsible statement as to the candidate’s prospects for gaining tenured position with the host institute, or indicate how they see the candidate’s career developing outside the host institution.
Post-Doctoral Fellowships
Supports experienced post-doctoral scientists to specialise in the renal field thereby expanding the levels of expertise in kidney research. Appropriate for non-clinical graduates who hold a PhD or equivalent degree and have at least two years post-doctoral experience. Awarded after interview of short-listed candidates, at which they will be asked to make a brief presentation of their proposal followed by questions & answers. Supervisors are asked to carefully consider the appropriateness of the project to the candidate’s career development, and to provide a brief statement of their own research and training record in the chosen field.

PhD Studentships
Supports postgraduates to undertake a PhD in renal research, via a competition restricted to current holders of Kidney Research UK project & innovation grants. Those eligible are contacted directly.

Joint Fellowships:
Support a variety of joint renal career awards in partnership with other renal and non-renal partners, including but not limited to:

- Medical Research Council
  - Clinical Research Training Fellowship
  - Academic Clinician Scientist Award
- International Society of Nephrology Fellowship
- Multi Professional Fellowships

Additionally, ad hoc topic open call or commissioned research collaborations will be undertaken.

Directed Studies
Funds studies in a selected or discrete topic area of kidney research identified either through a specific open call and competition or via a commissioned approach. In these scenarios, the open call or the study remit may be developed in consultation with leading collaborative experts, such as the UKKRC Clinical Study Groups and the Rare Disease Groups.

Programme Grants
Higher levels of funding are offered through either specific open call and competition or via a collaborative approach to drive forward research in a specific area.

For more information contact: grants@kidneyresearchuk.org
Apply for funding www.kidneyresearchuk.org/research/apply-for-funding  Alumni www.kidneyresearchuk.org/research/alumni

Our Research Strategy
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