

# Hearts need more research breakthroughs

Supercharge research to unlock future treatments and cures

## We are in the grip of a heart care crisis.

Over the past six decades, we've made huge strides in improving outcomes for people living with heart and circulatory diseases. Today, this progress is at risk. We knew things were challenging before the pandemic. But now, in its wake and with unrelenting pressure on NHS services, the situation is far worse. We have reached an impasse.

## Our hearts need and deserve more

If we want to stop this heart care crisis in its tracks, we need the UK Government to take bold, co-ordinated action on three fronts:

**Protection.** Better prevent heart disease and stroke by addressing drivers like obesity and smoking.

**Focus.** Prioritise NHS heart care to minimise the time it takes to get help.

**Breakthroughs.** Supercharge research to unlock future treatments and cures.

## Why our hearts need more research breakthroughs

The huge progress that has been made in improving outcomes from cardiovascular disease (CVD) over the past six decades has been possible, in part, due to medical research discoveries. In fact, British Heart Foundation (BHF) funded research has led to world-leading breakthroughs in how we detect and treat heart attacks, stroke and other heart conditions, helping to halve the number of deaths from CVD in the UK since we were founded in 1961.



But with CVD still causing around a quarter of all UK deaths—more than 160,000 deaths each year – and with an ageing population likely to increase prevalence of CVD in the UK, we need to accelerate the pace at which we translate promising science into revolutionary breakthroughs. To ensure funders like the BHF can continue to make lifesaving discoveries, we need a thriving research and development (R&D) ecosystem in the UK.

## Breakthroughs

To unlock the UK's full potential as a science superpower, help reduce pressure on the NHS and ultimately increase the number of years people live in good health, UK Government must:

### 1. Maximise the attractiveness of UK-based cardiovascular research

Despite being home to outstanding institutions that translate research into meaningful patient care, a thriving life sciences industry and a universal healthcare system, the UK's attractiveness as a research destination has been hampered in recent years. The UK's reassociation with Horizon Europe will go some way towards restoring this, facilitating renewed collaborations across Europe and attracting top scientific talent from around the world. However, there were elements of Government's "Plan B", Pioneer, that should still be explored, such as efforts to strengthen the partnership between Governments, universities and the third sector.

Further, significantly increased upfront visa costs risk undermining efforts to attract global talent. To guarantee that top international research staff continue to support the UK's science base, the Home Office must bring costs associated with the immigration health surcharge and Global Talent Visa in line with international competitors and reduce the administrative burden of applying.

### 2. Build clinical research capacity in the NHS

Clinical research is a cornerstone of medical advancement, improving patients' lives by delivering innovative changes in the way we detect, diagnose, treat and prevent diseases. The UK's response to

Covid-19, rapidly pivoting research towards vaccine development, demonstrated the strength of our research base, but it also significantly diverted resources and capacity away from other clinical trials – an issue that is still being felt today. To boost the recovery of the UK's clinical research ecosystem, Government must build research capacity within the NHS. Creating a world-class, research-active health system will drive better patient outcomes, improve staff satisfaction and deliver benefits for the wider economy.

We welcomed the Health and Care Act mandate to promote and facilitate clinical research in the NHS, but UK Government has a long way to go to realise this. A key challenge is the lack of capacity and time for clinical staff to undertake research, so Government should build on the Long Term NHS Workforce Plan to ensure we have a sustainable, supported, and diverse cardiovascular research workforce who have sufficient time and appropriate training. To ensure we avoid producing unrepresentative research outputs that may exacerbate health inequalities, public participation in clinical research should be increased and diversified to ensure all patients are represented.

### 3. Fund CVD research in line with its impact on society

Despite the significant health and economic impact CVD has on society, cardiovascular and stroke research has been historically underfunded. In fact, in 2020, IPPR found that it would require an extra £650m per year to bring cardiovascular investment up to match its relative impact on the nation's health. UK Government should consider how public R&D funding is invested relative to disease burden.

Increasing overall public investment in R&D would also provide significant benefits to both the UK's patient population and our economy. Currently, the UK lags behind other research-intensive nations in terms of investment as a percentage of GDP, such as South Korea, the United States and Germany. To meet its ambition of becoming a science superpower, UK Government must increase public sector investment in R&D in line with competitor scientific nations, supported by clear annual targets for additional public investment and a sustainable long-term R&D strategy.

### How you can help

The scale of the challenge facing heart care is immense. We need your support to ensure this remains a cross-party, parliamentary and Government priority. Below are some actions you can take:

- **Call on UK Government and your Party to unlock our R&D potential**

Please consider writing to the Science Minister to stress the need for action as outlined above. We would be happy to assist with draft messaging and supporting evidence.

Additionally, write to your Party policy team to urge them to prioritise commitments to supercharge UK R&D as they develop the manifesto ahead of the General Election.

- **Be a voice for heart patients in Parliament**

Submit a question during Science, Technology and Innovation Oral Questions, or a Written Parliamentary Question and advocate for one of our three key asks about how Government can support medical research to continue funding the cures of the future:

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Technology and Innovation:

1. What assessment she has made on the impact of the increased costs for the Global Talent Visa and immigration health surcharge on the Government's science superpower ambition.
2. How she is working with the Health Secretary to build research capacity into the NHS.
3. Whether she will consider increasing public investment in cardiovascular research in line with its relative burden on the UK.

- **Meet with us to find out more**

Contact [westminster@bhf.org.uk](mailto:westminster@bhf.org.uk) to arrange a meeting to discuss the campaign in more detail.

Only with more protection, more focus and more research breakthroughs can we give people hope for a brighter, healthier future.

Please email Lucy Hewitson at [westminster@bhf.org.uk](mailto:westminster@bhf.org.uk) or visit [bhf.org.uk/HeartsNeedMore](https://bhf.org.uk/HeartsNeedMore) for more information.