

## #2105 Japan-Nordic Frontier Research Projects for Healthy Longevity

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**Final submission date** 07.10.2021 13:00

**Call deadline** 07.10.2021 13:00

### Background

The Nordic countries and Japan face similar demographic challenges. Age-related health challenges in their increasingly elderly populations are among the greatest concerns of future health care and will demand steadily rising costs for both the health care system and society. Increased knowledge leading to more healthy years for individuals could in the long run prevent these rising costs as well as improve citizens' quality of life.

The Nordic countries and Japan are high-performing with regard to health data research such as biobanks and epidemiological studies, as well as improving the health of individuals by utilising novel technology. The Nordic countries, with a population of 27 million, hold a rather unique position in this context. They share similar health care systems and have access to register data collected for decades, providing an exceptional data resource. Japan has excellent track records in regenerative and genomic medicine and technological innovations in medicine and health.

Joining forces provides a unique opportunity to contribute to the development of personalised medicine for healthy longevity. Strategies for frontier research that emphasise knowledge development, patient centricity and digital application development have great potential to contribute to healthy ageing for the individual.

Under this call, Japan-Nordic collaborations will create possibilities for novel research projects that go beyond what the countries can achieve alone through national activities, and will provide outcomes and impacts of greater value for the countries' citizens. Examples of such added value could be building critical mass, networking, comparing data, cooperation on infrastructures and resources, and enhancing scientific excellence as well as creating societal impact and contributing to research-based policymaking.

Based on this background, a joint call entitled "Japan-Nordic Frontier Research Projects for Healthy Longevity" for proposals seeking funding for Japan-Nordic collaboration is now announced as a collaborative effort between the Academy of Finland, Research Council of Norway, Swedish Research Council, Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development (AMED), and NordForsk.

### Aim of the call and thematic framework

The aim of the call is to generate new knowledge on healthy ageing and longevity through Japan-Nordic research collaboration. The thematic framework includes fundamental, translational/basic clinical and epidemiological research on populations in the Nordic countries and Japan.

Utilisation of existing high-quality health data sources in a Nordic-Japanese context is central to the research to be funded under this call.

Examples of such utilisation include, but are not limited to:

1. Health data being utilised in order to add value to, support or follow up already ongoing research at the Nordic and Japanese level.
2. Data being used to follow up individuals with the aim of improving healthy longevity in terms of e.g. disease outcome, care, rehabilitation, side effects and quality of life.
3. Determination of risk factors for severe medical complications (analysis of epidemiological, clinical, immunological, genetic markers) in the elderly population.

Health data is defined here as data directly or indirectly linked to individuals, often by a personal identification number. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Register or electronic health record data
- Biobank analysis data
- Omics, imaging, laboratory or other health care data
- Patient self-reported data
- Expression patterns, biomarkers, mutations to be tested in a more clinical setting.

## Data Management

The research projects should pay special attention to implementing good data management practices when managing, sharing and linking health data across borders. A central focus of the call is the necessity of semantic interoperability between different data sources from different countries. Due to the nature and sensitivity of health data, the projects must acknowledge the need for thorough project planning in order to meet challenges such as differences in the disclosure process from data providers (such as national register holders) between participating countries as well as different legal, ethical and technical frameworks. All these factors must therefore be included in project planning and management in order to secure the research project progression. The [FAIR principles](#) could serve as inspiration.

## Nordic-Japanese added value

The collaborations will create outcomes and impact of greater value for the countries involved than could be achieved through national activities alone. Examples of such added value could be: building critical mass; networking; research infrastructures and resources; enhancing scientific excellence; creating societal impact; and contributing to research-based policymaking.

The Nordic countries and Japan are individually high-performing in health research. The Nordic countries, with a population of 27 million, share similar health care systems and have unique register data that have been collected for decades, providing an exceptional data resource. Japan has excellent track records in regenerative and genomic medicine and technological innovations in medicine and health, including medical devices and robotics in health care. By joining forces, Japan and the Nordic countries have a unique opportunity to contribute to the development of personalised medicine in an ageing population.

Data from biobank sample analyses generated in large population-based studies or health care has great potential to be linked to register and clinical trials data. Cooperation on health data is an evident added value and strength for the Nordic countries and Japan.

## Financial framework

Project funding for joint research will be available for the period 2022–2024. The total funding available under the call is approximately NOK 25 million. The Nordic funding allocated to the call is approximately NOK 18 million (approx. EUR 1.8 million) in total through a Nordic common pot. The Japanese funding allocated to the call is JPY 90 million (approx. NOK 7.8 million). The Japanese funding is allocated through a virtual common pot, which means that the Japanese project partners will be funded by AMED. National requirements apply, and Japanese project partners are therefore strongly advised to consult AMED for further guidance (see also Annex 1 to this document).

Each proposal for a three-year research project may seek funding of maximum NOK 6 million for the Nordic project partners. Additional funding, maximum of JPY 30 million (including indirect costs) as stipulated in Annex 1, is sought from AMED for Japanese project partners, respectively. Three projects are expected to be funded under the call.

Project partners from countries that are not co-funding the call (including Denmark and Iceland) must fund their own participation. Virtual mobility is encouraged.

Funding may be used to cover:

- PhD salaries and post-doctoral positions (including overheads);
- Coordination and administrative costs;
- Research-related costs (such as data collection, access and analysis and publication charges);
- Project-related costs (such as collaboration activities with project partners and stakeholders, administrative expenses, and costs related to technical staff);
- Communication, dissemination and knowledge exchange activities;
- Travel/accommodation costs and mobility for project partners when virtual communication platforms cannot be successfully used;
- Data management, such as data stewards, data application costs, etc.

Payroll, including salaries for PhD positions, and indirect expenses must be calculated in accordance with national rules, and the respective organisations' own budgeting models. For guidelines on national rules, please contact the relevant national funding agency and Annex 1.

The contribution from consortium partners must be documented in the budget specified in the application form.

## Eligibility criteria

- The research project must include partners from research-performing organisations\* in the three Nordic countries co-funding the call (Finland, Norway and Sweden) and from Japan. In addition, the research project can include other public sector partners. Private organisations, such as patient organisations and other undertakings, can participate in the project, but are not eligible to receive financial support. Nordic partners must be State Aid compliant in the Nordic countries. For Japanese partners, please refer to Annex 1 for further information.
- Proposals must be submitted electronically through the NordForsk Application Portal by the call deadline. In addition, for administrative purposes, Japanese partners must submit a supplemental application form to AMED through e-Rad (see Annex 1).
- In order to promote interoperability of Nordic and Japanese data, applications must put explicit emphasis on good health data management.
- Proposals must be written in English and follow the structure set out in the application form available on the NordForsk Application Portal.
- There must be one host institution (Project Owner) for the research project from a research-performing organisation\* based in one of the Nordic countries co-funding the call (Finland, Norway and Sweden) as well as one host institution from Japan. The Nordic Project Owner enters into agreement with NordForsk for the Nordic part of the budget. The Japanese Project Owner enters into agreement with AMED.
- If the Project Leader comes from Japan, the Nordic Project Owner must appoint a Co-PI that will be NordForsk's contact point.
- The Project Leader and Co-PI must be qualified researchers at the host institution.
- A researcher may only serve as a Project Leader for one application under this call. Research institutions may be affiliated with more than one application, and individual researchers may participate in several applications provided that total planned activities do not exceed one FTE and that the activities included in the proposals are not overlapping.
- The projects must describe how data should be managed according to high data management standards and how to promote interoperability of Nordic-Japanese data.
- Projects funded under this call for proposals must publish with Open Access.
- The proposal must describe how it will secure coordination with other ongoing activities at the international, Nordic or national level in order not to overlap or put extra pressure on an already pressured health care system due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The proposal must include a signed Letter of Commitment from each partner institution. Letters of Commitment must be signed by a person authorised to take on commitments to implement the proposed project on behalf of the institution for the entire duration of the project. If funded, the partners must sign a consortium agreement.

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\* Definition: A research-performing organisation is a legal entity which is a university, university college, university hospital or a research institute, and is characterised by the following:

- A primary goal to independently conduct fundamental research and/or applied research, clinical research, and or research-based innovation where results are published.
- The entity may be private or public but must not pay out dividends from its activities.
- The entity must have significant production of academic, published research.

## Communication and knowledge exchange

Projects should include relevant stakeholders in order to ensure that the results benefit patients, citizens, health care and society. The proposals must include a detailed communication and knowledge exchange strategy. Where appropriate, the strategy should describe the processes by which research-based knowledge can feed into practice and policy in collaboration with stakeholders.

## Open Access to publications and data

- If there are obstacles to data sharing, for example due to ethical and legal restrictions, metadata should be made accessible.
- NordForsk and AMED encourages projects to follow the [Horizon 2020 Guidelines for open access to publications, data and other research outputs](#)
- For Japanese applicants, please see Annex 1 for further instruction about open access and data management plan.

## Submission of proposals

Proposals must be developed jointly by a research team that consists of project partners from the three Nordic countries financing the call and Japan. The Project Leader must submit proposals electronically through the [NordForsk Application Portal](#) no later than 13.00 CEST on **7 October 2021**. To access the application form, the Project Leader must register as a user on the [NordForsk Application Portal](#).

The proposal must contain all supporting documents as requested below:

- The proposal form as specified in the application portal.
- Research plan (maximum ten pages, including references).
- An overall budget detailing the expected costs for the project.
- A specification of how the costs will be distributed among the different funding sources, including funding sought from NordForsk and AMED, respectively. The project partners' own contribution (cash and in-kind) to the project must be documented (see instructions in the application portal).
- CV, including a short list of maximum 10 publications of relevance to the proposal and research area (maximum three pages for the project leader and one page for each key researcher).
- Description of research teams, gender balance in the project consortium (standard template). Please consult the [NordForsk Gender Policy](#).
- A description of how gender perspectives will be incorporated into the cooperation, please consult the [NordForsk Gender Policy](#).
- Letters of Commitment.
- A plan for how the data generated will be aligned with the [FAIR principles](#).
- A plan for how to comply with the [Horizon 2020 Guidelines for open access to publications, data and other research outputs](#).
- A description of legal and ethical issues of relevance to the proposed cooperation.
- A plan for data analyses and management.

The Japanese researchers must submit a supplemental application form to AMED as an administrative purpose electronically through the [e-Rad application system](#) no later than 17:00 Japan Standard Time on 7 October 2021. Please see Annex 1 for more details.

## Assessment criteria

An international expert panel will assess the proposals according to the following criteria:

- Scientific quality of the research proposal, including:
  - expected research results, societal relevance, and potential for impact;
  - ethical and legal considerations and plans for handling these;
  - gender perspectives of the research.
- The plan for rapid open access to publications and data. In particular, high-quality metadata descriptions should be provided. Particular attention should also be paid to how data are accessed and analysed across countries. Projects are encouraged to employ novel federated approaches using techniques that send the analyses to the data rather than pool the data into one location.
- The added value of the proposed research collaboration for the Nordic region and Japan.
- Quality of the research team and, if relevant, measures to improve the gender balance of the project team composition.
- Feasibility and rigour of the project plan.
- Communication and knowledge exchange plan (including stakeholder involvement).

The Nordic-Japanese call-specific committee will assess:

- Fulfilment of the aims of the call for proposals and achievement of a balanced portfolio, including a balanced distribution of projects and participants across co-funding countries;
- Potential for building long-term partnerships;
- The added value of the proposed research collaboration for the Nordic region and Japan.

## Processing of proposals

NordForsk's [Guidelines on Impartiality](#) will be applied in the event of potential conflicts of interest. Based on the assessments of the international expert panel, the Nordic-Japanese added value of the projects and the balance of the project portfolio, the call-specific committee will submit a recommendation of projects to be awarded funding to the NordForsk and AMED Boards, respectively, who are responsible for taking the final funding decisions. This is expected to take place in December 2021.

The funding decision will be announced in December 2021. All applicants will receive written feedback from the expert panel. The tentative start date for projects is January 2022.

## Management and monitoring of the research projects

NordForsk will sign a contract with the Nordic host institution for the project. The contract will set out the specific funding rates and details in accordance with NordForsk Standard Terms and Conditions of Contract. The grant will be disbursed to this institution and a consortium agreement regulating the rights and obligations of the various institutions involved in the project must be drawn up. NordForsk will not transfer any funds before the consortium agreement has been signed. The research projects will be monitored through annual reporting consisting of a scientific progress report and a financial report. A final report must be submitted to NordForsk at the end of the funding period. Japanese project partners will be funded by AMED. AMED will take the formal decision for its financial contribution, and enter into contract with the Japanese project partners in line with their own routines and procedures.

The Nordic project partners should follow the basic principles of the [EU Charter for Researchers](#) and the [EU Code for the Recruitment](#) of Researchers for Nordic participants in the projects.

### Maximum amount that may be sought:

NOK 6 million for the Nordic project partners. Maximum JPY 30 million for the Japanese project partners (including indirect costs). Funding is available in the period 2022–2024. Please note that project start-up must be in Q1 2022 (January–March). Project funding will be available for a period of max. 36 months and any budget costs for 2025 should be added to last budget year 2024.

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### Appendices

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