



AXA
Research Fund

Call for Projects

Women's Health & Access to Healthcare

June 2018

Towards an improved Women's Health & Access to Healthcare

Women's health is a growing concern for a large number of countries, international organizations and governance bodies. At the AXA Research Fund we are firmly convinced of the key role for research to help women enhance their health conditions and gain timely access to healthcare throughout the life course – from infancy to old age.

Despite undeniable progress over recent decades, women around the world still face many disparities when it comes to health conditions and access to healthcare. These may be linked to: **gender differences** (e.g. women experience specific biological processes such as pregnancy and childbirth; they face gender-related diseases such as breast and cervical cancers; they tend to be underrepresented in therapeutic trials); **social disparities** (e.g. in many countries, women's access to healthcare, education and information tends to be lower than men's, often linked also to socio-economic factors such as lower levels of income); or **misconceptions / stereotypes** (e.g. some conditions such as cardiovascular issues and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease – COPD - are perceived principally as male risks, with women's vulnerability being relatively neglected).

In terms of life expectancy, although women live longer on average than men, they tend also to develop more illness and disability towards the end of their longer lives (the so-called **survival-disability paradox**) for reasons which as yet are poorly understood. However, in certain low-income countries women's life expectancy is actually lower than men's, because of differences in access to healthcare.

Thus, the goal of sustainable and equitable good health for women worldwide is far from being reached as the following non-exhaustive list shows:

- **Maternal deaths** have reduced by 45% since 1990; however, in 2013, nearly 800 mothers died daily from maternal causes, with 99% of such deaths occurring in developing countries.
- **Malnutrition** remains a critical issue (e.g. nearly 42% of pregnant women globally suffer from anemia due to malnutrition), while obesity is an emergent one (e.g. more than 45% of women are obese vs 30% of men in the Middle East and South Africa).
- **Deterioration of physical and mental health linked with domestic violence:** women globally face physical violence, especially from intimate partners, which is found by WHO to be a major factor affecting their physical and mental health.
- **HIV / AIDS** still widely kills women during the fertile period (15-44 years) – with women under 25 being 50% more likely to contract HIV than males of the same age.
- **Cancer** remains a leading cause of death among women worldwide, often due to limited healthcare access resulting in late detection: among women's cancers, breast cancer prevails as the most lethal across the world; cervical cancer comes second, with nearly 90% of deaths from this cause occurring in low and middle-income countries; lung cancer is expanding, mainly driven by more women smoking (they are more susceptible than men to smoking-induced cancer lung), but even for cases arising in non-smokers the majority are women.
- **Cardiovascular diseases** are increasing dramatically among women (reflecting recent increases in tobacco and alcohol consumption); yet they are often underdiagnosed, making them a major cause of death and chronic conditions after the age of 60.
- Impacted by rising tobacco consumption, particularly during pregnancy, **COPD** keeps growing while being frequently under-diagnosed (many women are first diagnosed wrongly with asthma).
- **Threats to health from cooking smoke:** indoor air pollution due to smoke from using unprocessed biofuels is a significant contributor to morbidity in the rural areas of developing countries, affecting COPD, cancer, cataracts and other ailments.
- **Age-related sight loss** is spreading; this is particularly evident in developing countries, where the number of blind women is forecast to triple by 2050, due to insufficient access to information and healthcare – including cataract surgery.
- **Depression and suicide** are more widespread among women than men.

This call for projects aims to identify and support future research leaders in improving Women's Health. We will look for transdisciplinary research topics (including big data and new technologies), adopting either a global perspective or focusing on regional challenges. Projects can adopt a life-course or transgenerational approach or focus on a specific life stage (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age), in areas such as but not limited to:

- **Consumption or behavioral changes (including addictions) and related rising health risks:** increased consumption of sugar (risk of obesity), tobacco (risk of lung cancer), alcohol (risk of cardiovascular diseases), lack of physical activity ...
- **Maternal health:** healthcare (including preventative interventions) during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum periods (including prenatal, delivery and postnatal complications),...
- **Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD):** prevention, detection, screening, treatment / therapy, follow-up, psychological support, recurrence prevention, palliative care... targeting:
 - o **Cancer** – including breast cancer, cervical cancer, lung cancer
 - o **Cardiovascular diseases**
 - o **COPD**
 - o **Diabetes**
 - o **Cataract**
- **Mental diseases, depression and cognitive impairment:** prevention, detection, screening, treatment, monitoring, psychological support,...
- **Ill health (physical and mental) linked to domestic violence:** prevention, care, therapy, support,...
- **Healthy ageing:** increase healthy lifespan by delaying/avoiding impairments, disabilities and dependency...

Profiles we look for

We are seeking to award Fellowships to early-career researchers (max. 5 years after completing a PhD) with proven scientific excellence and high potential for innovation, transformation and dissemination (including open-data approaches).

In terms of excellence, the main criteria are research outputs (e.g. publications), research activities (organizing networks, being involved in communities) and research impact (policy report, specific recognition through awards etc).

In terms of engagement, the main criterion is visibility beyond academic community.

Diversity will be an important criterion in the selection process, with regard to research theme, methodology, gender and geography. Furthermore, attention will be brought to the opportunity for the grant to deliver a significant step-change in the career of the awardee.

Guidelines

AXA Research Fund

The AXA Research Fund’s mission is to support academic institutions hosting outstanding researchers and committed to improving peoples’ lives through cutting-edge, innovative research in areas of Life & Health, Data & Technology, Climate & Environment and Economics & Insurance.

The AXA Research Fund evaluation process has been designed to assess scientific excellence. The evaluations are monitored to ensure transparency, fairness and impartiality in the treatment of proposals.

The AXA Fellowships

The AXA Fellowships are a funding scheme aimed at supporting promising researchers (max. PhD+5) on a topic aligned with AXA’s priorities and societal challenges. Our support should be transformative for the researcher and the advancement of their field.

Duration

An AXA Fellowship is awarded for a period of 2 years.

Institution eligibility

The AXA Research Fund partners with academic institutions (vs individuals), located within the AXA Community which currently includes the following countries:

Europe	Americas	Africa & Middle East	Asia Pacific
Belgium	Brazil	Egypt	China Mainland
France	Colombia	Morocco	Hong Kong
Germany	Mexico	Nigeria	India
Greece	US	South Africa	Indonesia
Ireland		Turkey	Japan
Italy			Philippines
Spain			Singapore
Switzerland			South Korea
UK			Thailand

Researcher

Candidates should be of the highest caliber and have demonstrated outstanding research achievements, as evidenced by the usual indicators for assessing academic excellence.

Research program

The research program should demonstrate its scientific originality and innovative nature, and have the potential to contribute to a step change in the considered field. It is the responsibility of the institution to demonstrate the relevance of the proposed research topic to AXA.

Outreach

It is a requirement that researchers would be proactive in engaging science with society when supported by the AXA Research Fund, and use an open-data framework when applicable.

Budget

An AXA Fellowship is awarded for a maximum amount of 125.000€. It is the applicant's responsibility to submit a carefully calibrated budget, appropriate for the ambition of the research program and justified in a detailed and coherent manner. Budget will cover annual salary of the researcher (based on institution internal policy), equipment/resources (databases, survey costs, consumables...), academic activities (conferences, workshops, fieldwork...) and outreach activities (beyond academic audiences). Any other type of costs not listed above should be justified in the application template. No overhead costs can be eligible.

Ethics

The AXA Research Fund places extremely high importance on the ethics of the work it supports. Programs are required to comply fully with all relevant ethical review processes and for this compliance to be evidenced. Cases of scientific misconduct (such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or misrepresentation of data) or of inappropriate behavior towards staff or other parties will be considered as breaches of the Fund's ethical principles and will be excluded.

Intellectual property

The researcher and the host institution remain fully independent to conduct the Research project. AXA will not claim any right to the ownership or use of the results.

Application process & Timeline

The AXA Research Fund partners with the [European Science Foundation \(ESF\)](#) to carry out the scientific evaluation process. ESF is an established, independent and non-governmental organization dedicated to supporting scientific endeavors. ESF conducts the peer review in accordance with the criteria defined by the AXA Research Fund.

Please note that:

- The application must be submitted in English, on time, online, and complete. It must respect the template structure and the page limit.
- The research topic must fall within the scope of the eligible topic focus as listed above.
- The candidate must submit a free standing independent research project involving full-time work for the duration of the fellowship (with an exceptional acceptance of up to 20% time dedicated to teaching).

Application process

- **[Step 1 - Expression of interest](#)**

To apply for our scheme, host academic institutions will **first indicate their interest in participating in the call: details about the profile of the candidate (PhD date and title) and the research project should be submitted to researchfund@axa.com**. AXA will then provide ESF with the names of the institutions (including contact details), and ESF will send them an invitation to nominate their candidates online.

- **[Step 2 - Application](#)**

Academic laboratories will be given an access to the dedicated ESF platform so as to nominate **1 candidate** by entering his/her name & email address online.

Nominated candidates will be invited by ESF to submit their research proposals and will be provided with the necessary information to access the application form. Eligibility criteria and relevance of the application call will be screened by ESF.

- **Step 3 – Rebuttal**

Candidates will have the opportunity to respond online to ESF experts' pre-assessment before their applications are reviewed by the AXA Research Fund panels. The main purpose of the rebuttal is to provide applicants with the possibility to comment on any potential misinterpretations or misunderstandings that may have been made by the experts while initially assessing their proposals. This rebuttal step is strongly recommended.

- **Step 4 – Scientific assessment**

The evaluation of the scientific quality of research proposals is carried out in a fully independent manner by ESF. ESF will set up Review Panels in charge of assessing all proposals. Review Panels are composed of renowned scientists and scholars from all over the world with a broad view and knowledge across areas covered by their respective panel. Review Panel members are independently identified, invited and appointed by the ESF office to ensure a balanced coverage of disciplines and scientific cultures.

- **Step 5 – Selection & results publication**

The Scientific Board of the AXA Research Fund selects applications to be funded based on the scientific case and panels' assessments.

As soon as the Board has taken its decision, the AXA Research Fund informs the Institution through the Institution's representative. Results of the campaign will also be made available online (<http://www.axa-research.org/>). In parallel, the announcement will also be reflected on the dedicated platforms for applicants and institutions, where the outcomes will be published.

Timeline

Full applications must be submitted on the ESF online platform by:

- July 5, 2018 – 2p.m. C.E.S.T.

Host Institution phase	Expression of interest <i>by email: researchfund@axa.com</i>	June 1, 2018 - June 12, 2018
	Submitting Candidate names <i>on ESF online platform</i>	June 13, 2018 - July 5, 2018
Applicant Phase	Research proposal submission <i>on ESF online platform</i>	June 13, 2018 - July 5, 2018
	Deadline for submission of applications	July 5, 2018
	Rebuttal Phase	Oct. 11, 2018 - Oct. 17, 2018
	Results announcements	December, 2018

Projects selected for funding are expected to start between December 2018 and September 2019.

Please note that all deadlines above are 2p.m. C.E.S.T.