Call for applications

Decision-making and Cancer Prevention

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cancer Research UK, in partnership with the Bupa Foundation, launched the CRUK/Bupa Foundation Cancer Prevention Initiative in 2013 to tackle cancer by funding cutting edge research into behavioural and lifestyle changes that can prevent people getting cancer. As part of the Initiative, the Bupa Foundation Fund aims to catalyse new multidisciplinary collaborations and develop innovative, radical and pioneering research in cancer prevention via a series of sandpit workshops.

The next Innovation Workshop will take place from 11-13 April 2016 at The Oxford Belfry, Oxfordshire, focusing on new research based on decision-making for cancer prevention. This full 3-day event is dedicated to developing new multidisciplinary and revolutionary research ideas, with up to 5 best proposals being awarded seed-funding to support the subsequent pilot and feasibility studies.

Applications are welcome from across a range of academic, industry, and community sectors. Participants will be expected to engage constructively with each other, the event facilitators, the Director and Subject-Guides to develop collaborative research ideas during the sandpit.

CRUK invites online applications from eligible individuals using the online application form. The submission deadline is noon on 29 February 2016. The sandpit is an intensive residential event and participants must attend all three days of the event. By submitting an application form, you are confirming that you are available for the full three days of the sandpit.

It is a requirement that you obtain the approval of your organisation before applying. Applicants must provide a covering statement from a representative of their organisation (e.g., supervisor, manager, or other relevant persons); confirming that, in the event of a grant, their organisation is willing and able to engage in, and support a collaborative project.

We expect that feasibility studies will run for up to 12 months, commencing by June 2016. Studies will be funded under the auspices of the CRUK/Bupa Foundation Cancer Prevention Initiative. Following the outcome of the feasibility studies, we expect this to lead to the development of high quality full research proposals to be submitted to a CRUK, or other appropriate funder, research committee.

FIGURE 1: INNOVATION WORKSHOP APPLICATION AND FUNDING PROCESS.
RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Cancer Research UK’s vision is that three in four people will survive cancer by 2034. Preventing cancers that are caused by people’s behaviours will play a major part in helping us achieve this. It is estimated that more than four in ten cancer cases could be prevented by lifestyle changes, including those linked to tobacco, alcohol, diet, being overweight, inactivity, infection, ultraviolet (UV) light exposure, occupation, post-menopausal hormones or lack of breastfeeding. A data visualisation representing the results is available (see Figure 2), showing the proportions of cancers in the UK linked to the 14 lifestyle and environmental factors studied. We know many cancers can be prevented, but knowing how to prevent cancer for everyone is a huge challenge.

Everyday people make decisions that impact their cancer risk; what they will eat, how much they will exercise, and whether they will smoke. Decision-making plays a key role in health behaviours for cancer prevention. We need to effectively apply what is known about human behaviour and decision-making to address the behaviours that increase cancer risk, and to understand how these may be influenced across individual, social and environmental levels.

At an individual level health decisions are influenced by motivational processes. For example, self-regulation can help elucidate how people initiate behaviours and how such behaviours are maintained over time. This is pertinent to obesity, which may be partly caused by repeated and consistent actions such as over-eating and sedentary behaviour. More research is needed to help us understand how individuals prioritise health behaviours, navigate new health information and under what circumstances health interventions work (and why).

At a social level many health decisions are made by relationship dyads (e.g., patient-doctor, parent-child, and spouse-spouse), yet little is known about how these relationships can influence health behaviours (e.g., how parenting influences adolescent diet decisions). More research is needed to understand how social variables influence cancer risk behaviours.

These individual and social variables that influence decision-making operate within the larger (and richer) context of the environment. Environmental influences include information, policy, and physical environment. The information environment can influence the reach, efficiency, and effectiveness of cancer prevention interventions. For example, effective health interventions need to tailor health information to target the population’s level of health literacy (i.e., the ability to search for, understand, and use health information). Law, regulations and policies can have profound effects on health behaviours, such as the smoke-free legislation that has been hugely successful for tobacco control. Yet we are only beginning to understand what types of policies are most effective and why. Complementing the information and policy environment is the physical environment within which most health behaviours take place. These include products that influence health behaviours (e.g., novel tobacco and food products) and the extent to which the physical environment helps or hinders health behaviours (e.g., building cycle lanes to work). Without further research on these outside influences, interventions targeting the individual, home, or community will be ineffective at producing long-term, sustainable impact for cancer prevention.

Underpinning the challenges for the decision-making and cancer prevention is the need for methodological innovation. Observational cancer data is increasingly detailed, complex and longitudinal in nature, which provides opportunities to better explain and predict cancer risk behaviours. New technologies will also transform intervention design. It is important to understand how interventions interact (and possibly undermine each other); how their impact may vary over time; and the extent to which interventions are effectively implemented. Although technology-delivered interventions may result in less human interaction, they have the capacity to be scalable, adaptable and responsive, with minimal additional cost, and fully maintain treatment fidelity. These advances will increasingly require collaboration among the more traditional social and behavioural science with the fields of engineering, computer science, biostatistics, research methodology, mathematical modelling, and biological sciences.

In sum, the challenge of this workshop is to tackle decision-making and cancer prevention across the different levels of influence (i.e., individual, social and environmental), while taking advantage of the many new methodological tools, platforms, data sources and multidisciplinary approaches that can facilitate this important work to prevent cancer.
FIGURE 2: THE PROPORTION OF CANCERS IN THE UK LINKED TO 14 LIFESTYLE AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS.
This workshop is specifically interested in facilitating fresh new thinking to for decision-making and cancer prevention. The aim is to bring together a diverse range of expertise to generate innovative, radical ideas for how to change health behaviours that increase cancer risk, using new methodological innovations to facilitate this important work. Research conducted in response to this call will be relevant to a range of contemporary issues surrounding decision-making and cancer prevention, including (but not limited to):

- How do cancer risk behaviours interrelate?
- What are the behavioural processes that underpin decision-making about cancer?
- How are behaviours influenced across individual, social and environmental levels?
- How do cancer risk behaviours differ across the lifespan?
- How do cancer risk behaviours differ across different groups and communities?
- How do people prioritise health behaviours and navigate new health information?
- What circumstances enable effective health interventions and why?
- How can we effectively use and develop new methodological tools, approaches and data sources to accurately explain and predict behaviours associated with cancer.
- What are the innovative new interventions we can develop to facilitate sustained behaviour change for cancer prevention?
- How can we accurately measure how these interventions interact, their impact over time and their effectiveness?

Consideration should also be given to:

- Ensuring that policies and interventions do not exacerbate inequalities or have other unintended consequences.
- Identifying where the biggest gains in terms of cancer prevention can be made.
- Sustainability of behaviour change.
- The potential for evaluation of any policy or intervention, including a consideration of value for money.

The sandpit workshop commissioning process

The sandpit is an intensive, interactive and free-thinking environment, where a diverse group of around 25 participants from a range of disciplines and backgrounds get together for three days - away from their everyday worlds - to immerse themselves in collaborative thinking processes in order to construct innovative transdisciplinary approaches.

The sandpit begins on the Monday morning and finishes on the Wednesday afternoon.

The process can be broken down into several stages:

- Defining the scope of the challenge
- Sharing understandings of the challenge and expertise brought to the sandpit by participants
- Evolving common languages and terminologies amongst people from a diverse range of backgrounds and disciplines.
- Breaking down preconceptions of researchers and stakeholders.
- Taking part in break-out sessions focused on challenges, using creative thinking techniques.
- Capturing outputs in the form of highly innovative feasibility study proposals.
- A funding decision on those proposals at the sandpit, using “real time” peer-review.

As the sandpit is an intensive process, so opportunities for relaxation, reflection and networking will be built into the timetable. The sandpit is led by a Director. The Director of this workshop will be Dr Bill Klein, Director of the National Cancer Institute’s Behavioral Research Program. The Director and a number of Subject-Guides and stakeholders will take part in the sandpit, but will not be eligible to receive research funding. During the sandpit, a number of speakers will provide different perspectives that may help participants develop new questions or novel ideas for potential feasibility studies. The Director and Subject-Guides will act as independent reviewers to make recommendations concerning the allocation of funding to research ideas emerging from the process through the real-time peer review process.

More information about the sandpit workshop will be shared with successful applicants in February.
Eligibility

Participants are selected for the sandpit workshop via a short application form. Applications are welcome from academic, industry, and community sectors.

The range of people selected is intentionally diverse, and it is intended that a wide range of disciplines, including those from private, public and third sector organisations and community groups will be represented. If you would like to transform the future of cancer prevention in the UK, we invite you to apply - irrespective of your expertise or background. We are more interested in new ideas, underpinned by radical and innovative thinking.

We regret that, on this occasion, PhD students and applicants based overseas are not eligible to apply. It is a requirement that you obtain the approval of your research organisation/employer/board/shareholder(s) (as appropriate) before applying to ensure that your organisation is willing and able to engage in and support a collaborative project. Applicants must provide a covering statement from a representative of their organisation (e.g., supervisor, manager, or other relevant persons), confirming that, in the event of a grant, it will provide accommodation and facilities for the applicant.

Due to the interactive and intensive nature of the workshop, applicants must have the personal attributes of creativity, openness, and the ability to work effectively as part of a team. A willingness to engage with policymakers, community organisations, government agencies, businesses and other key stakeholders is also essential.

The sandpit is an intensive residential event and participants must attend all three days of the event. By submitting an application form, you are confirming that you are available for the full three days of the sandpit. Standard class travel (as per CRUK Travel Policy), accommodation, refreshments, breakfast, lunch and dinner costs will be met by CRUK.

Application process

A decision will be made based upon your answers to the online application form. Applicants should demonstrate their suitable skills and attitude to participate in the sandpit. It is strongly advised that applicants do not merely list their achievements (e.g., publications, research experience), but, rather, use these to demonstrate how they may approach the challenge using innovative and collaborative ways. No other documentation will be accepted or considered.

The online submission deadline for completed applications and statement of support is noon 29 February 2016. Applications will not be considered after this deadline.

All application forms received by the deadline will be reviewed by CRUK to ensure a mix of disciplines, skills and experience. Selection criteria will include:

- The potential to work in trans-disciplinary environments
- The potential to develop innovative and adventurous approaches to research
- The ability to work collaboratively with others
- The ability to communicate and engage with diverse non-academic stakeholders throughout the research process
- Relevant research expertise and experience

Successful candidates will be notified by email after the closing date in February. We regret that we will not be able to provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

Proposals

On the final day of the sandpit, project teams will present their final ideas, with up to the 5 best research ideas being awarded seed-funding to support the subsequent development of feasibility or pilot work, focus groups, stakeholder/colleague meetings, etc. The funding decisions will be made by the sandpit Director and Subject-Guides on the final day of the sandpit.

Following the sandpit, the principal investigator (PI) for each successful project team will have four weeks to draft a full feasibility study proposal that covers their group’s intended activities as presented at the sandpit. PIs who are not established members of a recognised research organisation must be accommodated by a research organisation and provided with appropriate facilities to carry out the research as agreed by the Head of the organisation in the cover letter.

The specific role of each project team member, in terms of their involvement with, and contribution to, the project will be agreed by the project team (i.e., some members may be named as joint lead investigators or contribute in an advisory capacity, etc).
Feasibility study proposals will be submitted via CRUK’s electronic Grant Management System (eGMS) by 16 May 2016. Feasibility studies will last up to 12 months in duration, starting in June 2016. All awards are subject to CRUK’s terms and conditions. CRUK will offer support and advice throughout the lifetime of the project, including quarterly teleconferences with project groups. A report of feasibility outputs will be required by CRUK on completion of the project, and may lead to the generation of full project proposals to be submitted to the appropriate CRUK committee for further funding.

Further guidance on the post-award processes will be made available to successful applicants at the sandpit.

Commissioning time table

- Noon 29 February 2016 - Deadline for submission of online application forms
- 4 March 2016 - Applicants notified of outcome
- 11-13 April 2016 - Sandpit event (The Oxford Belfry, Oxfordshire)
- 16 May 2016 - Deadline for submission of feasibility study proposals
- June 2016 - Feasibility studies commence

Further information

If you have any questions or would like any further information please contact Dr Lucy Davies on cancerprevention@cancer.org.uk or 020 3469 8824.

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