Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to you as experts and leaders in the fields of cardiovascular and cancer research, and as British Heart Foundation (BHF) and Cancer Research UK (CRUK) funded academics carrying out research at leading UK universities, research centres and institutes. We wish to highlight the significant impact COVID-19 has had on the medical research sector and to urge you to take swift action to invest in a Life Sciences-Charity Partnership Fund to protect the vital and unique contribution charity-funded biomedical research makes to the UK’s R&D ecosystem and the wider economy.

The biomedical research sector is key to the health and the wealth of the nation. We therefore welcomed the Government’s commitment to ‘make the UK the leading global hub for life sciences’. We believe that the sector can be one of the key engines that will help boost the UK economy through COVID-19 recovery, leaving the EU, and beyond. Recent funding announcements, such as the university research support scheme, are positive first steps to help achieve this ambition, but we remain concerned they will not fully address the significant shortfall in charity investment in the UK science base.

The funding provided by charities plays a unique role within the wider funding mix, supporting high-risk discovery science that drives the breakthroughs in our fields (and others), as well as de-risking projects to attract commercial investment and supporting clinical trials that bring the latest innovations and life-saving treatments to patients. Charity funding invests in skills and has supported many of us earlier in our careers, allowing us to continue to build our expertise within the UK system, adding to the strength of its research base and building the UK’s global reputation for research excellence.

However, both the BHF and CRUK are now seeing their incomes decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This will have a catastrophic and long-lasting impact on both cardiovascular and cancer research in the UK, but also on the broader R&D sector. CRUK could be forced to cut £150 million per year from its research funding, and the BHF anticipates having to cut its research spend by half this year from £100 million to around £50 million. This means a significantly lower investment in life saving high quality research, in skills and in infrastructure.

To put this challenge into context, last year, medical research charities invested £1.9 billion in research in the UK. CRUK and BHF alone funded 50% and 55% of all UK-based independent research into cancer and heart and circulatory diseases respectively – something that will not be possible to maintain for the foreseeable future. Given that level of contribution, such a drastic reduction in their capacity to fund research will have a dramatic impact on the national investment in research in two key areas of unmet medical need.

Moreover, this reduction will have a knock-on impact on our partners in industry and on the inward investment into the UK life science sector. For example, for every £1 the BHF invests, its researchers attract £2.14 of additional funding. CRUK is the second largest licensor in oncology in the world –
licenses that underpin tomorrow’s medicines and today’s investment by companies such as Astra Zeneca. Charities have led to the formation of over 40 spin out companies, which in turn have raised over a £1bn in third party investment and the creation of thousands of jobs. The Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) estimates a reduction in UK medical research investment of £310 million this financial year alone which will severely impact the UK’s internationally recognised strength in the life sciences.

While charities are doing all they can to support existing research, we are gravely concerned for the future of biomedical research in the UK, and we fear that the latest research support package will not go far enough to plug the funding gap charities are facing. We urge you to support the proposal from CRUK and the BHF, as well as 151 other medical research charities and AMRC, to work in partnership with the sector to establish a Life Sciences-Charity Partnership Fund. This co-investment scheme is urgently needed to help protect and invest in world-class research across the UK’s four nations, whose quality is assured through a stringent peer-review process, and could provide matched funding from Government for future charity research over the next 3-5 years (the period in which funding is expected to be most acutely affected).

Without your support, the UK risks a slide backwards, undermining decades of pioneering and life saving research, as well as losing a generation of new researchers and a major decline in our nation’s international competitiveness in life sciences that we have worked so hard to achieve. This will diminish our reputation as a world-leader in developing medical breakthroughs that save lives lost to cancer, heart and circulatory diseases and countless other conditions. We ask that you reaffirm your commitment to science and research by investing to support medical research charities in this time of need.

Signed,

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Professor Andrew H Baker, BHF Professor of Translational Cardiovascular Sciences and Gustav Born Chair of Vascular Biology, University of Edinburgh
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Professor Shoumo Bhattacharya (MD MSc FRCP FESC FMedSci), Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine; BHF Chair; and Fellow of Green Templeton College, University of Oxford
Professor Robert Bristow (MD PhD FRCPC FMedSci), Director, Manchester Cancer Research Centre; Chief Academic Officer and Honorary Consultant, The Christie NHS Foundation Trust
Professor Massimo Caputo, BHF Professor of Congenital Heart Surgery, University of Bristol
Professor Neil Carragher, Professor of Drug Discovery and Director of Translation, University of Edinburgh
Professor Jason Carroll, Professor of Molecular Oncology, Senior Group Leader, CRUK Cambridge Institute
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Professor John Danesh, BHF Professor of Epidemiology and Medicine; Director, BHF Cardiovascular Epidemiology Unit; Head, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge; Faculty Member, Wellcome Sanger Institute; and Director, Health Data Research UK-Cambridge

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Professor Charlie Gourley, Professor and Honorary Consultant in Medical Oncology; Clinical Director, Cancer Research UK Edinburgh Centre and Director, Nicola Murray Centre for Ovarian Cancer Research, Institute of Genetics and Molecular Medicine, University of Edinburgh

Professor George B Hanna (FRCS, PhD), Head of Department of Surgery & Cancer, Imperial College London

Professor Gregory Hannon (PhD, FRS, FMedSci, FAACR), Royal Society Wolfson Research Professor of Cancer Molecular Biology and Director, CRUK Cambridge Institute, University of Cambridge

Professor Mark Hanson, British Heart Foundation Professor and Director, Institute of Developmental Sciences, University of Southampton

Professor Sian E. Harding, Professor of Cardiac Pharmacology, Imperial College London and Director, BHF Cardiovascular Regenerative Medicine Centre

Professor Aroon Hingorani, Director, UCL Institute of Cardiovascular Science and UCL BHF Research Accelerator

Professor Daniel Hochhauser (DPhil, FRCP), Kathleen Ferrier Professor of Medical Oncology, Clinical Director, CRUK UCL Centre

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Professor Kay-Tee Khaw (FMedSci FRCP), University of Cambridge

Professor James Larkin (FRCP PhD F Med Sci), Medical Oncologist, Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust and Institute of Cancer Research

Professor Deborah A Lawlor, Professor of Epidemiology, University of Bristol
Professor Nick Lemoine (MD PhD FMedSci), Director of Barts Cancer Institute & Barts CR-UK Centre, Queen Mary University of London

Professor Xin Lu (FRS, FMedSci, FRCPath, FRSB, PhD), Director, Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Co-Director, CRUK Oxford Centre and Cancer Theme Lead, Oxford Biomedical Research Centre (BRC)

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Professor Federica Marelli-Berg (MD PhD), British Heart Foundation Chair of Cardiovascular Immunology and Head, Centre for Biochemical Pharmacology, Heart Centre, William Harvey Research Institute, Barts and The London SMD

Professor Manuel Mayr, BHF Professor of Cardiovascular Proteomics, King’s College London

Professor Iain McNeish, Chair in Oncology; Head of the Division of Cancer and Director Ovarian Cancer Action Research Centre, Imperial College London

Professor Gary Middleton, Professor of Medical Oncology, University of Birmingham

Professor Mark Middleton (PhD, FRCP), Professor of Experimental Cancer Medicine, University of Oxford

Professor Nicholas Morrell, BHF Professor of Cardiopulmonary Medicine and Director, Cambridge Heart and Lung Research Institute

Professor Gavin Murphy, British Heart Foundation Chair of Cardiac Surgery, University of Leicester; Director, Leicester Clinical Trials Unit and Honorary Consultant Cardiac Surgeon, University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust

Professor David E. Newby, British Heart Foundation Duke of Edinburgh Chair of Cardiology; Director, Edinburgh Clinical Research Facility; and Director, Edinburgh Imaging, University of Edinburgh

Professor Sir Paul Nurse (FRS), Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine 2001, Director of the Francis Crick Institute

Professor Kinya Otsu (MD, PhD, FMedSci), BHF Chair of Cardiology, King’s College London

Professor Peter Parker (FRS), Professor of Cancer Cell Biology and Director of the CRUK KHP Centre

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Professor Ruth Plummer (PhD), Professor of Experimental Cancer Medicine, Newcastle University

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Professor Paul Workman (FRS), Chief Executive and President, The Institute of Cancer Research

Cc:
Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care