



HDRS Data Driver Project Call

Brief

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<https://www.hdrs.com/about-us/>

1. Purpose and objectives

This call for data driver projects seeks to demonstrate the untapped potential of existing data, infrastructure and access routes to deliver research, clinical and public benefit. Projects may build on existing capabilities, partnerships, datasets and services, or create new ways to use them to generate measurable outcomes.

The programme forms part of HDRS's wider ambition to accelerate the use of health data for research and innovation and to support the optimisation, access and re-use of current data assets. It will showcase how health data assets, infrastructure and access routes can create value for researchers, patients, the public, and NHS and HSC organisations across the UK. The projects funded through this call will provide valuable insights to inform future HDRS services, priorities and investments, including a better understanding of the needs of researchers, innovators, industry and the wider health data ecosystem.

Particular emphasis will be placed on ambitious but deliverable projects that can show clear meaningful benefits and outcomes within the funding period and leave lasting impact through reusable datasets, assets, resources, or capabilities. This does not necessarily mean full project completion by March 2027; outcomes may include the delivery of a minimum viable product (MVP), proof of concept, pilot, demonstrator, dataset, evidence resource, or other artefact that provides immediate value and creates a clear foundation for future impact.

Projects should focus on one or more of the following themes (See Annex A for examples of what such projects could include under each theme):

- **Discovery Research:** Demonstrating how existing health data can accelerate scientific discovery, enable new research opportunities, or create new datasets, cohorts, linked resources and assets that support future research.
- **Clinical Trials:** Demonstrating how health data can improve the planning, feasibility, recruitment, delivery or follow-up of clinical trials.
- **Innovation Development:** Demonstrating how health data can support the development, testing, or validation of innovative technologies, diagnostics, medicines, AI-enabled solutions or digital health products.
- **Evaluation and Evidence Generation:** Demonstrating how health data assets can be used to generate robust evidence on the effectiveness, safety, value or impact of interventions, technologies, services or medicines to support clinical, commissioning or regulatory decision-making.

Applicants must clearly explain:

- how the needs of patients, the public and other relevant users have been considered and communicated in the design and delivery of the proposed work
- the challenge, opportunity or unmet need being addressed
- the intended users and beneficiaries
- the activity that will be enabled
- the expected outcomes and benefits
- how the project will deliver research, clinical and/or public value through the use of health data
- why HDRS investment is required at this particular time and the additional value that funding will unlock

Applicants should also set out how the capability they propose to build could be maintained, supported and adopted beyond the life of the project; see Sustainability and exit (Section 12).

Applications from partnerships and consortia are encouraged, particularly where they bring together complementary expertise, data, infrastructure, delivery capability, and routes to adoption. Applicants should clearly describe the role of each partner, the governance arrangements in place, and how collaboration will contribute to the successful delivery and wider impact of the project.

HDRS particularly welcomes projects that leverage additional investment through match funding, co-funding or in-kind support where appropriate. While not a requirement, applicants should identify any additional contributions that will help maximise the scale, impact and sustainability of the proposed work. Where applicable, co-funding and matched funding should be evidenced through a Letter of Support submitted alongside the application.

Where a project intends to implement outputs within NHS or HSC services, applicants should provide evidence of support from the relevant organisation(s), demonstrating a credible route to adoption and use should the project be successful.

Note: The Data Driver Projects call is one of two Driver Project funding calls being delivered by HDRS during 2026/27.

The two calls are designed to be complementary. Technical Transformation Driver Projects strengthen the foundations of the health data ecosystem, while Data Driver Projects demonstrate the research, clinical and public value that can be achieved through its use.

The Technical Transformation call, launched in July 2026, focuses on strengthening shared technical capabilities across the UK health data ecosystem and is open to eligible UK health data secure environments and their partners. Applications for the Technical Transformation call close on 14 August 2026.

Further information on the Technical Transformation Driver Projects call is available on the HDRS website: <https://www.hdrs.com/technical-transformation-projects/>.

For the avoidance of doubt, this competition is exempt from the Procurement Act 2023 under the Research and Development services exemption.

2. Eligibility

Applicants must be UK-registered organisations from one or more of the following:

- NHS and HSC organisations across the UK (including, trusts, health boards, and integrated care boards)
- Charities, non-profit research organisations
- Universities and academic research institutions
- Life sciences and pharmaceutical companies
- Health technology and AI companies (including SMEs and start-ups)
- Health data organisations, including secure data environments and trusted research environments across the UK

The call is intended to support projects and initiatives that are sufficiently set up to begin delivery shortly after award. **Applicants must demonstrate that all organisations involved in project delivery have, or will have by project mobilisation, the necessary data access, information governance, partnership, and delivery arrangements in place to undertake the proposed work.**

3. Support on offer

At HDRS's absolute discretion, HDRS will engage with successful projects on delivery and resourcing requirements and, where possible, will seek to provide delivery and specialist support to help projects overcome barriers to delivery. HDRS will remain engaged throughout the project lifecycle, providing advice and support where appropriate to help address risks, dependencies and other challenges as they arise.

4. Assessment criteria

Applications must:

- Clearly explain how the project aligns with one or more of the programme themes and describe the expected benefits for researchers, patients, the NHS/HSC, industry and/or the wider health data ecosystem.
- Set out clear and measurable outputs, deliverables and outcomes to be achieved at the end of the contract (31 March 2027). Depending on the project type, these may include datasets, data assets, evidence resources, research capabilities, clinical trial capabilities, innovation demonstrators, methodologies, documentation, or other reusable assets.
- Present a clear and detailed delivery plan, including key milestones, dependencies, risks and mitigations.
- Identify the research, clinical, innovation and/or evaluation use cases, users and beneficiaries that will be enabled by the project.
- Demonstrate how existing data assets, infrastructure and access routes will be leveraged and the additional value that HDRS funding and support will unlock.
- Demonstrate that the necessary data access, information governance, partnership and delivery arrangements are already in place, or are expected to be in place by project mobilisation.
- Include a deliverable resource plan with appropriate analytical, technical, clinical, operational and programme resource identified where relevant.
- Include a cost schedule with a clear breakdown of revenue and/or capital expenditure.

- Demonstrate how outputs will be documented, shared and made available for wider use across the wider research community.
- Set out a clear approach to intellectual property, ensuring that outputs generated through the programme can be shared, accessed, adopted and built upon beyond the life of the project.
- Describe how resulting datasets, data assets, evidence resources or capabilities will continue to be used beyond the funding period and how they will contribute and support the long-term build of HDRS.

Applicants must also take into account the readiness criteria set out in Annex B. Where the answer to any item is no, applicants should provide a justification and a credible mitigation for how the risk will be managed; not every question requires a strict yes or no, and applicants may add a short explanatory note where helpful.

Note: Successful projects selected for funding may be required to refine and confirm deliverables, milestones, success measures with HDRS as part of project initiation and contracting.

Applications will be assessed against the following themes:

- **Strategic Relevance:** The extent to which the proposal aligns with the objectives of the Data Driver Projects programme and contributes to one or more of the programme themes.
- **Potential Impact:** The extent to which the project demonstrates the potential to deliver meaningful research, clinical and/or public benefit through the use of existing health data assets, infrastructure and access routes.
- **Deliverability and Readiness:** The extent to which the project is delivery-ready and capable of achieving meaningful outcomes within the available timeframe.
- **Adoption, Scalability and Reuse:** The extent to which the outputs, approaches or learning can be adopted, replicated or scaled beyond the original project.
- **Value for Money:** The extent to which the proposed costs are proportionate to the anticipated benefits and outcomes, including the degree to which the project leverages existing assets, infrastructure, partnerships, match funding, co-funding or in-kind support where appropriate.
- **Learning and Future Potential:** The extent to which the project will generate evidence, insights or capabilities that inform future HDRS services, priorities and investment decisions, including a better understanding of the needs of researchers, innovators, industry and the wider health data ecosystem.

Funding recommendations will take account of individual application scores against the assessment criteria. Consideration will also be given to the overall balance of the proposed project portfolio and its potential to maximise impact across researchers, patients, the NHS and HSC, and the wider health data ecosystem.

5. Out of scope

The following will not be funded through this call:

- Projects that are pure research studies with no reusable asset or capability and no clear route to adoption by researchers, the NHS, industry or the wider health data ecosystem.
- Projects that will not deliver quantifiable impact or benefit by the end of the funding period (March 2027)

- Projects that generate assets or capabilities that cannot be appropriately shared, accessed or reused through future HDRS services or by the wider research community/data environments
- New projects that do not have the necessary data access, governance, partnership or delivery arrangements in place, or a credible plan for securing them within the project timeframe.
- Projects that develop intellectual property that is solely owned by an individual collaborator or partner.
- Business-as-usual maintenance, support or licence renewal costs.
- Capital equipment purchases not tied to a specific, scoped project.
- Work that duplicates activity already commissioned or funded elsewhere.
- Non-health data or non-UK data projects.
- Contingency budgets, including risk and optimism bias allowances.

6. Funding envelope

The overall funding envelope for this call is flexible. Applicants should size their proposals according to the required scope of work and should expect HDRS to challenge costings that do not appear realistic or proportionate to the deliverables. The intention is that proposals reflect the true cost of delivery, rather than being inflated or reduced to align with a predefined funding limit. Applicants should therefore present the scale of investment they believe is necessary to deliver the proposed outcomes in the most effective and proportionate way.

Funding priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate the strongest strategic fit with the objectives of the call, clear and deliverable impact within the funding period, scalability and reusability of outputs, and strong value for money relative to the benefits expected.

There is no set number of projects that will be funded through this call. HDRS currently expects to support up to six projects, although this is indicative rather than fixed. The final number of awards will depend on the quality, scale and mix of applications received.

7. Application schedule

The call will operate as a rolling funding opportunity, allowing applications to be submitted at any point during the application window while providing two fixed assessment cycles: a mid-point assessment and a final assessment at the close of the call. Applications will be reviewed as they are received for eligibility, feasibility and strategic fit before being shortlisted into the most appropriate assessment cycle.

Key dates:

- Call opens: 12 August 2026
- Webinar dates/times:
 - 14 August 2026: 2pm - 2:45pm
 - 2 September 2026: 2pm - 2:45pm
- Assessment Cycle 1 submission deadline: by 5PM on 9 September 2026
- Assessment Cycle 2 submission deadline: by 5PM on 2 October 2026
- Call closes: 5PM on 2 October 2026

These dates are indicative and HDRS reserves the right to amend the dates. Where the dates/times for the webinars or submission deadlines are amended, HDRS will publish the revised dates. Funding recommendations are expected within one month of each assessment

cycle deadline, with successful projects expected to mobilise as soon as possible thereafter (subject to contracting).

Successful projects will be announced on our website. Information on the benefits and outcomes delivered by these projects by the end of March 2027 will also be published on our website following the completion of the programme.

8. Contract terms and payment schedule

Unless HDRS requires otherwise, any awards made under this call will be subject to HDRS's contract terms and conditions (to be issued within two weeks of the release of this Call Brief) (the "Contract Terms"). The Contract Terms will govern, among other matters, use of funds, reporting and audit, confidentiality and data protection, intellectual property and licensing, publicity and branding, subcontracting, termination, and governing law and jurisdiction. Successful applicants will be required to accept the Contract Terms as a condition of award.

HDRS may stipulate alternative contracting routes for certain types of applicant where relevant to their status as a public body (for example, NHS Trusts and Regional SDEs). Any successful applicant will be required to enter into and comply with terms that are substantially similar to the Contract Terms as a condition of award.

Applicants must ensure that all project activities comply with applicable data protection, research governance and information governance requirements, including UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Payment(s) will be made in line with the payment schedule and terms agreed in the contract. Projects will be subject to ongoing high-level oversight throughout the funding period against criteria agreed at award, which may include delivery milestones, outputs, outcomes and other measures of progress.

Projects that consistently fail to demonstrate sufficient progress against agreed objectives, and are unable to provide appropriate mitigations, may have their contract terminated and the project discontinued.

9. Assessment process

Applications will be assessed by a panel comprising of HDRS representatives and external members, which will include domain experts alongside experts bringing patient and public, user, and ethics perspectives, with representation from across the UK.

The same assessment process, criteria and panel members (where possible) will be used for both assessment cycles to ensure consistency of approach.

There is not expected to be any advantage or disadvantage in funding decisions based on which assessment cycle an application is considered within. Applications in both cycles will be assessed against the same criteria and standards. However, applicants who are successful in the first cycle will benefit from an earlier funding decision and a longer period for project delivery before the programme end date of 31 March 2027.

Applications that are unsuccessful in Assessment Cycle 1 may be invited by HDRS to submit a revised application for Assessment Cycle 2 provided any significant gaps, weaknesses or recommendations identified through the assessment process can be satisfactorily addressed.

Successful projects selected for funding may be required to refine and confirm deliverables, milestones, and success measures with HDRS as part of project initiation and contracting.

As part of the assessment process, HDRS may request applicants to provide additional information, clarifications and/or evidence relating to their applications. Applicants must respond promptly within the timeframe specified by HDRS. Failure to respond in time, or material delay in providing the requested information, may adversely affect the assessment of the application and its chances of success.

Funding decisions are final and not subject to appeal.

10. Governance

Decision-Making Responsibilities

The assessment panel (see Assessment process – Section 9) will recommend projects for funding. Final funding decisions will be made through HDRS governance processes.

Success Criteria

At award, each project agrees a small set of success criteria with HDRS: the specific deliverable(s) to be produced, the research use case(s) or users it enables, and the milestones expected by project end. These criteria form the basis for the final assessment of the projects progress and impact.

Continuation Decisions

Decisions relating to continuation, discontinuation and any associated funding adjustments will be communicated to projects as soon as possible.

11. Artefact and IP requirements

Projects are expected to produce reusable outputs, which may include datasets, data assets, evidence resources, research capabilities, methodologies, documentation, implementation guidance or other assets relevant to the programme objectives.

Applicants should describe how project outputs will be documented, shared, accessed and reused through future HDRS services and by the wider research community.

Intellectual property is not a barrier to funding; however, it must not limit the future use, sharing, adoption or development of outputs generated through this programme. Funding will not be provided for the development of intellectual property owned solely by an individual collaborator or partner (see Out of Scope – Section 5).

Applicants should clearly describe any intellectual property, licensing or access arrangements that will apply to project outputs and explain how these support wider ecosystem benefit.

Applicants must ensure they have secured all necessary third-party rights and that publication and sharing of outputs will not infringe third-party intellectual property or contractual restrictions.

12. Sustainability and exit

Applicants should set out how the outputs, assets, and capabilities generated through the project will be maintained, adopted and used beyond the initial funding period.

Projects funded through this call are expected to deliver their core objectives by 31 March 2027. Projects that are demonstrating strong progress, delivering significant value, and have a credible

case for further development may be considered for additional support in FY2027/28, subject to future funding availability and a final assessment of progress and impact.

13. Confidentiality and transparency

HDRS will treat application materials as confidential and will use them solely for assessment and programme administration, subject to any applicable transparency, freedom of information or audit obligations.

HDRS intends to publish information about funded projects, which may include but may not be limited to the project title, lead and partner organisations, a short non-confidential summary of the project, and the amount of funding awarded. Applicants should ensure summaries are suitable for publication and clearly identify any confidential or commercially sensitive information in their applications.

Public announcements regarding awards require the prior written approval of HDRS.

14. Conflicts of interest

Applicants must declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest relating to their proposal. Assessment panellists will be required to declare conflicts and recuse themselves where appropriate. HDRS may take any action it considers necessary to manage conflicts, including exclusion of a proposal.

15. Subsidy control

Awards will be made in accordance with the UK subsidy control regime and State aid law (where applicable). HDRS may adjust, impose conditions on, or withhold funding to ensure compliance.

16. Amending, suspending and terminating the call

Neither this call nor any information given as part of the call shall be regarded as a commitment or representation on the part of HDRS (or any other person) to enter into a contractual agreement.

HDRS may amend, suspend or cancel this call or issue additional information at any time and is not obliged to make any award. Applicants will remain responsible for all costs and expenses incurred by them, their staff, and their advisers or by any third party acting under their instructions in connection with this call. For the avoidance of doubt, HDRS shall have no liability whatsoever to applicants for the costs and expenses associated with any amendments to this call, nor if the call is suspended or terminated.

Annex A: Suggested data driver project themes

The themes below illustrate the type of projects likely to be well suited to this call. They are intended to help applicants understand the scope and ambition of the programme and are indicative rather than exhaustive or prescriptive. Applicants are encouraged to propose alternative ideas that align with the objectives of the call. Projects may focus on a single theme or span multiple themes where appropriate.

Discovery Research

- Link data from multiple organisations to address important health and care research questions.
- Create or extend a regional or national research-ready dataset, cohort, registry or resource.
- Create a reusable data asset focused on a priority population, underserved group or disease area.
- Enable new forms of cross-organisational or cross-nation research through improved use of existing datasets, infrastructure and access routes.

Clinical Trials

- Use routine health data to improve trial feasibility assessments and site selection.
- Develop or scale participant identification and recruitment approaches using existing datasets and access routes.
- Demonstrate innovative approaches to synthetic controls, external comparators or digital trial delivery.

Innovation Development

- Develop, test or validate AI-enabled technologies using existing health data assets.
- Establish innovation testbeds that enable companies, researchers and NHS/HSC organisations to evaluate new healthcare solutions.
- Validate AI models, diagnostics, medical devices or digital health technologies using real-world health data.

Evaluation and Evidence Generation

- Generate real-world evidence on the effectiveness, safety or value of medicines, technologies or healthcare interventions.
- Demonstrate the use of existing data assets to generate evidence supporting regulatory, commissioning or clinical decision-making.
- Support post-market surveillance and long-term outcomes monitoring.

Annex B: Readiness criteria

Applicants should be able to answer yes to the checklist below. Where the answer is no, applicants must provide strong mitigations explaining how the risk will be managed.

Data

- Have the relevant datasets / data assets previously been used for research or analytical purposes?
- Is the quality, completeness and coverage of the data sufficient for the intended use?
- Are the data assets required for the project accessible through existing access routes and/or secure health data environments, without requiring new infrastructure to be built/established first?
- If the project relies on linking datasets, is the linkage already established or achievable through existing routes?
- Does the source data provider have access to identifiable data, where the project relies on this (for example, for data linkage or trial recruitment)?
- Do you have access to experts who understand how the data is generated, managed and used?
- Can you share a schema for the data to be used in this project?
- If the project is successful, can the resulting output(s) continue to be used without requiring substantial changes to the existing governance or controllership model?

Governance and approvals

- Have all relevant information governance requirements been identified and scoped?
- Are all required approvals (e.g. CAG support, Section 251 support, DPIAs, Data Access Committee approvals and other governance approvals, where applicable) either in place or expected to be in place by project mobilisation?
- Are all required data sharing agreements, partnership agreements and collaboration agreements either in place or expected to be in place by project mobilisation?
- Are any third-party contracts, licences or supplier agreements required for delivery and, if so, are they in place or expected to be in place by project mobilisation?
- Are you confident that no outstanding governance, contractual or regulatory requirements will create a material delay to delivery?

Delivery readiness

- Is there a viable model for effectively resourcing the project?
- Does the project team have the necessary technical, analytical, clinical and/or domain expertise to deliver the work?
- Is the software, analytical tooling, compute capacity and storage required for the project already available, or expected to be in place by project mobilisation?
- Do you have all required third-party contracts, licences or supplier agreements in place, or expected to be in place by project mobilisation?
- Is there an agreed Statement of Work, collaboration agreement, or equivalent document in place that sets out each partner organisation's role, responsibilities and contribution?
- Do you have a detailed project plan that is shared among collaborators?
- Can the project begin delivery immediately following funding approval and contracting?
- Can the project deliver meaningful outputs and outcomes by 31 March 2027?