Biomedical follow-up research into ME/CFS: collaboration grant

RESEARCH PROGRAMME ME/CFS

Date: 10 December 2026

Deadline grant call: 11 February 2027, 14.00 CET.

Colofon

Working with knowledge to boost good health for all. That is what the Dutch Organisation for knowledge and innovation in health, healthcare and well-being (ZonMw) is about. ZonMw programmes and funds research and innovation in health, healthcare and well-being, stimulates knowledge infrastructures, and promotes the use of the knowledge developed. Together with its partners, ZonMw works to identify and address knowledge needs.

Our main contractors are the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the Dutch Research Council.

For more information about the research programme ME/CFS, please contact the secretariat by email at mecvs@zonmw.nl or by phone at +31 (0)70 349 54 71.

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Date: 10 December 2026
Place: The Hague

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1. Reading guide

This document is a translation of the Dutch version of this document. The following is to be considered an extra service for non-Dutch speaking applicants. In case of any differences or other inconsistencies between the Dutch text and the English translation, the Dutch grant call is legally binding and prevails.

This grant call is the responsibility of ZonMw. In this grant call you can read what the purpose of the grant call is, how the application and assessment procedure is organised and what conditions the grant application must meet. In addition, this document provides an overview of the obligations that apply if your grant application is granted and how to contact us if you have any questions. Chapter 6 ‘Contact and further information’ explains how to contact ZonMw. We recommend that you read this grant call carefully. This will help you understand what is expected of you when submitting a grant application.

2. About the grant call

2.1. Background and context

Research programme ME/CFS
Patients are at the base of the research program ME/CFS, through the citizen initiative 'Erken ME'. This initiative led to Health Council of the Netherlands to investigate the state of scientific knowledge concerning ME/CFS and a biomedical research agenda for ME/CFS. The research programme ME/CFS was launched in late 2021. The mission of this programme is to improve the health, quality of life and social position of people with ME/CFS. This grant call falls under the programme line "Biomedical Research". This programme line focuses on the development of biomedical knowledge into the cause, diagnosis and treatment of ME/CFS.

Reason for the call
In the first funding round of the programme, funding was awarded to 2 consortia: the Netherlands ME/CFS Cohort and Biobank Consortium (NMCB) and the MECFS Lines consortium. The consortia are currently conducting biomedical research into ME/CFS through 17 projects, covering various disciplines such as microbiology, immunology, neurobiology and genetics. The aim of the consortia is to establish a knowledge infrastructure for long-term research into ME/CFS. They are also working to promote the utilisation of knowledge and the dissemination of research findings. More information about the consortia and projects is available on the ZonMw programme page.

2.2. Aim

The aim of this grant call is to fund collaborative projects that address fundamental research questions about the onset, course and/or underlying mechanisms of ME/CFS. This includes fundamental research questions that contribute to knowledge about the diagnosis or treatment of ME/CFS as a multisystem disease. This grant call provides funding for additional, in-depth, integrative and/or comparative biomedical analyses of ME/CFS. These analyses must combine and integrate existing biological samples and/or data from 2 or more of the 17 ongoing research projects. Applications may therefore only be submitted by researchers involved in projects that have received funding under at least 1 of the following grant calls within the research programme ME/CFS: *Consortia for biomedical cohort research into ME/CFS* or *Second call for biomedical research on ME/CFS*. In addition, funding is only available for analyses that combine, compare and/or jointly analyse data and/or biological samples from at least 2 projects. Projects involving the collection of new data or biological samples are outside the scope of this grant call. The same applies to research focusing exclusively on a single project. In addition, funding cannot be requested for projects that primarily focus on data accessibility. These are activities aimed at making existing data more easily discoverable and reusable by others.

By bringing together researchers and data from different disciplines and projects, additional, in-depth, integrative and/or comparative analyses can be carried out that would not be possible within individual projects. This cross-project and, where possible, interdisciplinary approach increases the impact of the ongoing research. It also creates opportunities to identify new connections, patterns, insights and subgroups. In this way, this funding round will contribute to a better understanding of the onset, course and underlying mechanisms of ME/CFS as a multisystem disease. These insights may also help generate new hypotheses for future research into the diagnosis and treatment of ME/CFS.

This funding round aims to build on and further deepen the knowledge gained from previously funded research projects by encouraging collaboration and data sharing between these projects. Collaboration between at least 2 funded research projects is a requirement. This collaboration may take place between research projects within a single consortium, or between research projects from both Dutch ME/CFS consortia. The ME/CFS knowledge infrastructure is still at an early stage of development. By focusing on connecting existing projects, this funding round will help consolidate and strengthen this developing infrastructure. For this reason, only researchers who have received funding in the first or second biomedical funding round are eligible to apply.

2.3. Available budget

The total budget available for this grant call is € 120,000. You can apply for a maximum of € 40,000 per project, for a maximum duration of 12 months.

Under this grant call, the available budget will be allocated in order in which the grant applications are received. Applications will be awarded funding if they meet the specified conditions and criteria. For more information about what this means, see Chapter 4 ‘Assessment process’.

The project budget may only cover activities that have not already been funded through a previous ZonMw grant.

ZonMw may decide to launch an additional grant call for projects awarded funding under this call. This could, for example, provide an additional boost to the dissemination and/or practical application of the results.

2.4. Important dates

Grant applications for this funding round may be submitted on a rolling basis until 11 February 2027, 14:00 CET. Grant applications will be assessed in the order in which they are received. It may happen that the total available grant budget (the grant ceiling) is reached before the deadline. In this case, the call will close earlier, and this will be announced on the ZonMw website.

The key dates for this grant call are:

What	When
Opening grant call	10 december 2026
Deadline grant application submission	Continuous submission until 11 February 2027 at 14:00 CET
Decision	Maximum 8 weeks from submission of application
Online Q&A session	17 december 2026 13.00 – 14:00 CET 14 januari 2027 11.00 – 12.00 CET
Latest start date projects	Maximum 1 month after awarding

3. Conditions for applicants

This chapter sets out the conditions that apply to your grant application. First is described who is eligible to apply for funding and what activities can be funded. Then the requirements for preparing and applying are described.

ZonMw assesses whether grant applications meet the conditions described in this chapter.

3.1. Who can apply?

- Only research organisations may submit a grant application as the main applicant and/or co-applicant.
- Only organisations with a funded project under the grant calls '*Consortia for biomedical cohort research into ME/CFS'* or '*Second round for biomedical research on ME/CFS*' are eligible to apply for funding under this call. The main applicant must be the project lead or main applicant of an ongoing research project funded under 1 of these calls. Co-applicants from ongoing projects may also participate as co-applicants in this funding round, but not as main applicants.
- The project group may not consist solely of the main applicant and co-applicants from the same research project funded under the grant calls '*Consortia for biomedical cohort research into ME/CFS'* or '*Second round for biomedical research on ME/CFS'*. The application must include at least 1 co-applicant who is the main applicant and/or project lead of another research project funded under these calls.
- A maximum of 2 grants may be awarded under this funding round for each funded project from the calls for grant calls '*Consortia for biomedical cohort research into ME/CFS'* or '*Second round forbiomedical research on ME/CFS'.*
- A main applicant or project lead of 1 project funded under the previous calls may receive funding as an applicant for a maximum of 2 different collaborative partnerships under this funding round.

3.2. State aid

This grant call is open exclusively to research organisations, not to enterprises. The funded activities involve independent scientific research and the dissemination of knowledge, which based on “Kaderregeling O&O&I” are classified as the primary non-economic activities of research organisations. As no funding is provided to enterprises and no economic activities are funded, no state aid is involved.

If a research organisation carries out economic activities in addition to its non-economic activities, it must ensure a clear and verifiable separation between the 2 types of activities. The funding, costs, revenues and use of resources for economic activities must be kept administratively separate from those for non-economic activities. This ensures that public funding provided under this grant call is used exclusively for non-economic research activities and that no indirect support is provided to economic activities.

3.3. Collaboration with third parties

ZonMw encourages collaboration between different parties and their participation in projects. However, ZonMw will not award funding if the agreements could result in unlawful state aid being granted, or if they prevent compliance with the General Grant Conditions of ZonMw or the conditions of the grant call. Agreements on collaboration and sponsorship must be in place before the start of the project.

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that the collaborations they enter do not result in unlawful state aid.

In the case of a collaboration, the grant application and budget must clearly set out the following:

- Which parties are participating. Describe how each party will be actively contributing to the project; these should in any case be parties who appear in the budget as a party intending to claim a portion of the grant. Also include parties that will be making an active contribution as partners in the collaborative project for their own account and at their own risk. The budget must clearly show which activities will be funded through the grant applied for, and which organisation is responsible for carrying out those activities and what the associated costs are.
- Which parties will enter into a sponsorship agreement and how they will contribute: financially or through the provision of staff and/or resources (in kind).
- Which parties will be hired, or, if this is not yet known, which activities are forecast as being performed by third parties, plus the related costs that will be incurred (including VAT). For more information and the conditions of hire/terms of contract, see the ZonMw webpage on Grants and collaboration: contributions from third parties.

Although a collaboration agreement is not mandatory, it is advisable to make written agreements on matters such as the distribution of the grant, the use of the results and the distribution of any proceeds. Before the start of the project, submit these agreements to the programme team by emailing to mecvs@zonmw.nl. The main applicant has overall responsibility for the execution of the project.

3.4. What can be applied for?

In this grant funding round, you can apply for a maximum of € 40,000. The maximum project duration is 12 months.

Only activities focused on conducting additional, comparative, integrative and/or in-depth research into ME/CFS are eligible for funding. These activities must use existing biological samples and/or data from the 17 ongoing research projects. Activities that do not primarily contribute to this aim will not be funded. The following activities are examples of activities that are eligible for funding under this call, provided they are carried out using previously collected data and/or biological samples from 2 or more ongoing research projects:

- Processing and analysis of biological samples (such as blood, tissue, urine and faeces);
- Isolation and characterisation of DNA, RNA and proteins;
- Cell culture and cell biology experiments;
- Bioinformatics analyses;
- PCR, qPCR and sequencing experiments;
- Flow cytometry experiments;
- ELISA and other biomarker analyses;
- Immunohistochemical analyses and microscopy;
- Analysis of patient data and registry data;
- Statistical analyses;
- Analysis of existing genomic, proteomic and metabolomic data;
- Preparation of datasets to enable the integration of different data sources;
- Mathematical modelling;
- Machine learning and AI applications.

The list above is not exhaustive, and other activities not listed here may also be eligible for funding.

The following additional activities can be funded under this grant:

- Only costs incurred during the project period can be claimed. Costs incurred before or after the project period are not eligible for funding or reimbursement. VAT will only be reimbursed if the grant recipient is not entitled to reclaim it and if it forms part of the applicant's costs.
- Communication and implementation activities: You must allocate at least 3% of your project budget to these activities and include this in the grant application budget. Knowledge-sharing activities, such as producing podcasts or webinars, organising think tanks or conferences, can only be funded from the communication and implementation budget. Activities and/or products funded from this budget must be reported to ZonMw through an impact report.
- Open Access publication costs provided the publication follows the Gold Open Access route. These costs are eligible up to a maximum of € 5,000. This amount is part of the total grant amount requested and can be included under the ‘Open Access’ budget category. For more information, see section 5.1, ‘Obligations’, under ‘Reusable knowledge from grants’.

The grant **may not** be used for:

- Activities aimed at obtaining new biological samples and/or data;
- Activities aimed at inclusion of new patients;
- Activities aimed at setting up and/or maintaining a biobank or database (infrastructure);
- Depreciation of existing equipment;
- Contributions towards overhead costs;
- Outsourcing work or contracting external parties;
- Research into psychosocial interventions, behavioural interventions and psychotherapeutic treatment methods.

Under this funding round, grants will not be awarded to applications with overlapping or similar aims or research questions. If the aims or research questions overlap, only the first application submitted will be awarded funding. The application must meet the specified conditions and criteria.

3.5. Preparing and submitting the application

- Complete the application form in My ZonMw and attach the required appendix (the budget). Together, these form the grant application. You must submit the grant application before the deadline.
- The project start date must be after the date on which the grant decision is sent (see section 4.4, 'Decision-making').
- Write the grant application in Dutch or English. Note: the application form is only available in Dutch. Use the mandatory Budget for Other Institutions template.
- A maximum of 2 A4 pages of figures and tables may be included as an appendix.
    - Please ensure that all appendices are combined into a single document. Only 1 appendix can be uploaded in My ZonMw.

3.6. Submission requirements

ZonMw will check your grant application using the submission requirements listed below. Your application will only be assessed if it meets all these requirements. If you have made an administrative error when submitting your application – for example, by attaching the wrong document – you will be given 48 hours to correct it so that your application can still meet the submission requirements. We ask you to remain available during this period after submitting your application.

- The grant application is complete and has been submitted via My ZonMw before the specified deadline.
- The grant application is written in Dutch or English.
- The main applicant and co-applicant(s) meet the conditions described in section 3.1.
- The start date of the project is after the date by which the grant decision will be sent at the latest. The grant decision will be sent no later than 8 weeks after submission of the application.
- The proposed project has a maximum duration of 12 months. Please ensure that the start and end dates are consistent with the project duration.
- The grant amount requested does not exceed €40,000, -.
- All required appendices (the budget) are complete and have been prepared and submitted in accordance with the instructions and conditions of this grant call. The main applicant is responsible for ensuring that the budget is correct. If the budget is incorrect or the total amounts do not match, the application does not meet the requirements and will be rejected on these grounds.
    - The Budget for Other Institutions template has been completed in full, is correct and has been signed.
    - The total amounts in the application form must match those in the budget template.

3.7. Grant conditions

When applying for a grant from ZonMw, the ZonMw's General Terms and Conditions Governing Grants and the Agreement on the Funding of Scientific Research 2008 apply.

Co-financing is not mandatory under this grant call, but co-financiers may be included.

4. Assessment process

4.1. Procedure

Grant applications are assessed in order in which they are received. The date on which the grant application is submitted is considered the date of receipt.

It may happen that the total available grant budget (the grant ceiling) is reached before the deadline. In this case, the call will close earlier than the deadline, and this will be announced on the ZonMw website.

4.2. Processing of the grant application

As soon as possible after you have submitted your grant application, you will be informed whether ZonMw will process it. ZonMw makes this decision based on the submission requirements. Your grant application can only be processed if it meets these requirements. Please note that ZonMw may contact you within 2 weeks of submission to request administrative corrections so that your application meets the submission requirements. You will be given 1 opportunity to make corrections. You will have 48 hours from the time ZonMw sends the request for corrections to make these changes. The date and time at which the corrected grant application is submitted will determine its date of receipt and, consequently, its place in the order of receipt.

4.3. Assesment

Grant applications are assessed in order of receipt against the quality and relevance criteria. ZonMw grant officers assess whether the grant application meets all the assessment criteria. They also check whether all grant conditions have been met. Only grant applications that meet all the assessment criteria and grant conditions can be awarded funding.

4.4. Decision

Applicants receive a grant decision no later than 8 weeks after submitting their grant application. The decision describes whether the grant application is awarded or based on which assessment criteria and/or grand conditions the grant application is rejected.

4.5. Assessment criteria

The quality and relevance criteria are listed below. During the assessment, it will be determined whether grant applications meet these criteria.

4.6. Quality criteria

Aim

- The aim of the application is clearly and specifically formulated and leads to a concrete and measurable scientific research question addressing a fundamental knowledge gap regarding the onset, course and/or underlying mechanisms of ME/CFS.
- The application clearly describes how data and/or biological samples from different projects will be combined, compared and/or analysed jointly.
- The intended results and any final products are described in concrete terms.
- The application demonstrably contributes to gaining new insights into ME/CFS and/or to developing new hypotheses, research questions or starting points for future research into diagnosis and treatment.

Project plan

The project plan demonstrates that the aim can be achieved and describes how the results will be implemented. It also explains how the target groups and/or stakeholders will be involved in the project. The project plan must address the following elements:

- The (working) hypothesis, activities, approaches and methods to be used in carrying out the project;
- The additional, in-depth, integrative and/or comparative analyses to be carried out on existing data, biological samples and/or research results from at least 2 ongoing research projects;
- Which existing data and/or biological samples will be used and which biobank/project they originate from;
- How the results obtained from the datasets and biological samples used will be made findable, for example by using a persistent identifier such as a DOI;
- Timeline;
- Roles and responsibilities;
- How the target group and/or stakeholders (including experts by experience) will be involved in the project;
- Feasibility in terms of personnel, time, finances and the availability of data and/or biological samples.

Project team

The project team has the expertise required to carry out the project. In the application form, you must describe the expertise and experience of each project team member individually in section ‘2.1 Project team members’. To do so, select ‘Yes’ under ‘1.4 Additional project team members’.

Budget

The budget specifies who will incur which costs. These costs must be proportionate to the project plan and the activities to be carried out. The budget must comply with the budget conditions set out in the grant call.

4.7. Relevance criteria

Alignment with the grant call
The grant application describes how the proposed project aligns with the aim of the grant call.

- The application describes how the project contributes to 1 of the programme objectives.
- The application concerns research into ME/CFS. Research that is focused on chronic fatigue as a consequence of diseases or disorders other than ME/CFS does not fall within the scope of this call. Forms of fatigue that result from or are related to disorders other than ME/CFS (i.e. post-COVID) can only be researched in relation to ME/CFS.
- The application uses existing data and/or biological samples from 2 or more projects awarded funding in the first or second biomedical funding round of the research programme ME/CFS.
- The application involves analyses in which data and/or biological samples are combined, compared and/or analysed jointly.
- The application concerns additional, in-depth, integrative and/or comparative research into the onset, course and/or underlying mechanisms of ME/CFS.

Target groups and stakeholders
The application describes how the project's results are relevant to specific target groups and/or stakeholders, and what added value the research offers to people with ME/CFS.

5. Further steps and obligations

5.1. Obligations

If a grant application is approved, the applicant will receive a positive grant decision. ZonMw will transfer the complete grant amount around the project start date. Receiving a grant also entails certain obligations. You must therefore comply with the following requirements when carrying out your project:

- **Start and end dates**
  The project must start no later than 1 month after the date on which the grant decision is sent. Deviations from this deadline are only possible in exceptional circumstances. If you wish to request an extension, contact your ZonMw contact person within this 1-month period.
- **Duty to report changes**
  No progress reports are required for this grant. However, there is a consistent reporting requirement. This means that if there are any changes to the project or planning, you are obliged to report these changes to ZonMw in good time. You can do this by using the change form in Mijn ZonMw or by notifying the programme team via mecvs@zonmw.nl. Failure to comply with this reporting obligation may affect the amount of the grant awarded.
- **Proof of performance**
  For this funding round, grants are first awarded and only established once the activities have been completed. Reporting takes place after the duration of the project. This report only concerns the performance of the activities. You are not required to keep detailed financial records, but you must retain documents as evidence that the activities for which funding was requested have been carried out as described in the application. 2 weeks before the project end date, a task will become available in My ZonMw, allowing you to submit proofof performance. This must be submitted within

10 working days after the project end date. You will be asked to submit 1 or more of the following examples:

- Invoices with supporting specifications of the analyses carried out;
- (Interim) research reports;
- Analysis reports of laboratory research;
- Dataset files that have been produced and/or consulted (DOI links or persistent identifiers);
- Statistical analysis output;
- Publications, preprints or manuscripts resulting from the research.

If the final check shows that the activities have not been carried out, or have not been fully carried out, and you have not reported this in a timely manner, ZonMw may set the grant amount at zero.

- **Reusable knowledge from grants**
  To make research results accessible and useful to everyone, ZonMw expects project leads to make their results available as much as possible. These may include articles, metadata, data, presentations, training materials, protocols, posters, books, research software and recommendations. All scientific articles resulting from research funded by ZonMw must be made available directly through Open Access. The underlying data and/or non-numerical results supporting the conclusions of these publications must be made as openly available as possible at the same time as publication.
- **Approvals and permits**
  Before the project starts, all requirements for conducting the research must be met. These may include a positive opinion from an accredited Medical Research Ethics Committee (METC), the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO), a project licence from the Central Authority for Scientific Procedures on Animals (CCD), or a permit under the Population Screening Act (WBO).

5.2. Impact report

After the project ends, ZonMw will ask you to report on the project's results and impact in an impact report. You will receive a task in My ZonMw to prepare and submit this report.

The information in the impact report will be published on the ZonMw website. This is important for sharing knowledge and increasing the societal and/or scientific impact of the results. In addition, ZonMw will also use the impact reports to evaluate the knowledge and impact generated by this grant call.

6. Contact and further information

6.1. Questions about the content

For questions about the content of this grant call, please contact:

Name: Babs van Haaren
Position: Programme Secretary

Telephone: 070 349 54 10
Email: mecvs@zonmw.nl

For information and advice on the ethical, legal and societal aspects of scientific research (such as consent procedures, guidelines and regulations, legislation, data protection, feedback on findings, ethical review and data sharing), please contact the National ELSI Servicedesk.

6.2. Technical questions

For technical questions about using My ZonMw, ZonMw's online application system, please contact the ZonMw Service Desk. The Service Desk is available Monday to Friday, from 09:00 to 17:00, by telephone on 070 349 51 78 or by email at servicedesk@zonmw.nl.

Please include your telephone number in your email so that we can contact you by phone if necessary.

6.3. Information sessions

ZonMw will organise 2 online Q&A sessions for this grant call. These will take place on 17 December 2026, from 13:00 to 14:00, and on 14 January 2027, from 11:00 to 12:00.

If you would like to receive an invitation to one of these sessions, please email mecvs@zonmw.nl.

6.4. Downloads and links

- What should I submit? | ZonMw (link to the Budget for Other Institutions template)
- Example application form (for reference only; applications must be submitted via My ZonMw)
- Applying for a grant in 10 steps
- Conditions and obligations
- Grants and collaboration: contributions from third parties
- My ZonMw user guide
- Support with implementation
- Programme text
- Programme page