



Innovate UK - Accelerated Knowledge Transfer 4 – Addiction Healthcare Goals

(AKT4)

AKT Round 4 Competition Scope

This document will be hosted on the following webpage
<https://iuk-ktp.org.uk/accelerated-knowledge-transfer/>

This document only relates to the Competition Scope for AKT 4.

This document includes:

- An overview of AKT - Addiction Healthcare Goals (2025): AKT4
- Examples of topics within the scope
- Areas out of scope
- Note to applicants
- Addiction Healthcare Goals Background
- Previous Addiction Healthcare Goals Competitions



An Overview of AKT - Addiction Healthcare Goals (2025): AKT4

Treatment, recovery, and harm prevention for those with drug and alcohol addictions

The Addiction Healthcare Goals programme, led by the Office for Life Sciences is aiming to make the UK a place where researchers and industry in drug and alcohol addiction healthcare can thrive and partner effectively with NHS and Third Sector treatment providers to design, research and deploy innovative treatments and technologies which effectively tackle the challenges of these addictions, saving and improving the lives of those affected, and reducing the harms to the individual, their family and friends, and wider society.

As part of this ambition, the programme is launching an Accelerated Knowledge Transfer (AKT) fund through Innovate UK focused on treatment, recovery, and harm prevention for those with drug and/or alcohol addiction(s).

Projects supported by the Addiction Healthcare Goals AKT fund will explore questions linked to treatment of, recovery from, and reduction or prevention of harm by addictions or dependence to substances treated in a typical treatment service in the UK. These substances include alcohol, opioids (both illicit versions and abuse of prescription medication), stimulants (including but not limited to cocaine/crack, amphetamine, methamphetamine), cannabis, GHB, ketamine, benzodiazepines and, gabapentinoids. This is not a comprehensive list, and other substances could be applicable.

Applications should explore areas of established unmet need in addiction treatment, linked to key government priorities, such as those described in the 2021 strategy [From Harm to Hope](#), Dame Carol Black's Independent Review of Drugs, and equivalent drug and alcohol strategies across the devolved UK nations. Specific local priorities and needs, **such as those of local authorities or regions**, and those of specific service providers or treatment settings should also be accounted for.

Projects should also set out where relevant how they relate to delivering on the Government's core Missions especially, 'building an NHS fit for the future' (Health), 'kickstart economic growth' (Growth), Safer Streets, and 'break down barriers to opportunity' (Opportunity).

For more information on these Government Missions please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/missions>



Examples of topics within the scope

Within the context of the AKT, projects may explore any areas which relate to improving treatment, recovery, or prevention of harm from drug and/or alcohol addiction(s) in any relevant setting UK-wide.

Applicable topics for projects include but are not limited to:

- Scoping, designing or deployment of new or improved treatment options (e.g. pharmaceuticals, MedTech, or digital technologies), recovery options, or innovative harm (including overdose) prevention approaches.
- Piloting approaches to improve access to treatment services for researchers, including NHS or third sector led and those in criminal justice system settings.
- Devising methods for improving data collection, processing or availability for research across relevant settings and UK nations.
- Developing and testing optimal methods to best engage people with lived and living experience across the UK in product, treatment, or treatment pathway design and research.
- Exploring approaches to enhancing the awareness and openness of people with lived and living experience to the use of new technologies, treatments, and approaches for the treatment of, recovery from, or reduction and prevention of harms caused by drug and/or alcohol addiction(s).
- Investigating key barriers to the roll out of new treatments and technologies by service providers across settings and regions and devising potential solutions to these barriers.
- Exploring optimal approaches to ensure well connected pathways across treatment, recovery and community support services.
- Mapping current pathways and systems of joint working between substance use treatment and recovery, mental health treatment and physical health treatment providers, and devising opportunities to enhance these to improve joined up care.
- Exploring approaches for improved pathways and ways of joint working between substance use treatment providers with social (including housing, education, family services) and criminal justice system settings to ensure continuity and quality of care.



Areas out of scope

- Projects focused primarily on addictions to tobacco/nicotine or behavioural addictions such as gambling.
- Projects focused on intervening in earlier use (before addiction or dependence is established).
- Projects focused on primary prevention of initiation of substance use.

Notes to applicants

Individuals may have a range of needs such as mental and physical health challenges, housing, education and childcare and some are likely to be involved with criminal justice system. As such projects which account for the often-complex circumstances of individuals presenting to an addiction service are warmly invited to apply. However, it is not required for every proposal to focus on all of these areas and projects focused on addressing a specific barrier or opportunity in treatment, recovery or harm prevention are welcomed.

To support the growth of innovators in this field, applications from those new to research and early career researchers and innovators are particularly welcomed. We hope to encourage fresh ideas from new innovators and appropriate applications are welcomed from those with limited research experience looking to develop experience in the field of drug and alcohol addiction.

Within England, we are particularly keen to encourage projects including the third sector treatment delivery services. We hope to support applications from all countries and regions of the UK to help familiarise and lower barriers to research participation in areas traditionally less active in research, as well as in areas of existing research expertise.



Addiction Healthcare Goals Background

Drug addiction causes more than 5000 preventable UK deaths, with alcohol use estimated to be responsible for nearly a further 10,500 deaths.

The health and wider societal costs to society in England of illegal drug use is approximately £20 billion per year, with the harms from alcohol use estimated to cost another £27.4 billion.

The Addiction Healthcare Goals, first announced as part of the UK's Drug Strategy: From Harm to Hope, and delivered as one of the Office for Life Sciences' Healthcare Goals programmes, is aiming to help reduce this cost by enhancing the UK-wide research environment and incentivising the development of innovative and effective new treatments, technologies and approaches to support recovery, and reduce the harm and deaths addiction can cause.

In May 2023, Anne Lingford-Hughes (Professor of Addiction Biology at Imperial College London) was appointed as the expert Chair to spearhead the delivery of the programme.

The UK's Drugs Strategy, From Harm to Hope, published in December 2021, set out the Government's high-level ambition to combat the harm caused by illegal drug use and create an environment that treats addiction as a chronic healthcare condition. The Addiction Healthcare Goals forms a part of this strategy and the ambition to deliver a world-class treatment and recovery system for drug and alcohol addictions.



Addiction Healthcare Goals Objectives

The Addiction Healthcare Goals programme, led by the Office for Life Sciences is aiming to make the UK a place where researchers and industry in drug and alcohol addiction healthcare can thrive and partner effectively with NHS and Third Sector treatment providers to design, research and deploy innovative treatments and technologies which effectively tackle the challenges of these addictions, saving and improving the lives of those affected, and reducing the harms to the individual, their family and friends, and wider society.

To realise these ambitions, the Addiction Healthcare Goals is delivering on two key areas:

- **Transforming the UK’s drug and alcohol addiction research ecosystem:**
better linking multidisciplinary researchers and treatment delivery partners with industry and innovators, enhancing research capacity and the ability to deliver novel patient research, and accelerating the development, testing and use of innovations targeting addiction.
- **Catalysing Innovation in Addiction Treatment, Recovery and Harm Prevention:**
Funding innovation competitions to attract industry and innovators to the addiction field and to the UK and catalyse the development and deployment of new and effective interventions that help to treat drug and alcohol addiction, aid in recovery, or prevent drug misuse related harm and deaths.

Transforming the UK’s Addiction Research Ecosystem:

- The Addiction Healthcare Goals programme is working with government, industry, academic and healthcare partners to make the UK a leading location for developing, testing, and deploying cutting edge medicines and technologies to combat drug and alcohol addictions.
- The programme is aiming to build a pioneering, national capability to test and trial all types of addiction medicines and technologies in all four nations of the UK.
- To do this, we are developing and delivering a suite of measures that will facilitate the design and delivery of innovative addiction research across the UK including:
 - enabling internationally leading data capabilities for R&D in drug and alcohol addictions that includes UK wide linkage of substance use and treatment data sets to wider physical and mental health, crime and social data, and enables efficient and secure access to industry and researchers for use in trials of innovative treatment and recovery technologies.



- creating a pipeline of talented researcher leaders across the UK able to deliver innovative drug and alcohol addiction treatment and recovery research studies, and act as pioneers for the integration of research outputs into clinical practice.
- Through strengthening the UK's addiction research ecosystem, the Addiction Healthcare Goals will help to improve the lives of people who are impacted by substance misuse, reduce the burden on health and criminal justice systems, and attract innovators and industry to locate and grow in the UK, boosting regional economies.

To date:

- The Addiction Healthcare Goals programme has been working with the James Lind Alliance (JLA) to deliver a Priority Setting Partnership (PSP) in Addiction. The PSP enables clinicians, those with addictions, and carers to work together to identify the Top 10 evidence gaps in addiction treatment and recovery that they would like to see answered by research. The Top 10 priority research questions will be published in the coming months.
- The Addiction Healthcare Goals team have also been working with the NIHR Innovation Observatory to conduct a horizon scan of emerging global technologies of pharmaceutical, MedTech or psychedelics for the treatment of addiction. The final report is due to be published in the Spring.

Catalysing Innovation in Addiction Treatment, Recovery and Harm Prevention

The Addiction Healthcare Goals has so far funded two innovation competitions:

Reducing Drug Deaths Innovation Challenge:

- In January 2023, the Addiction Healthcare Goals, in partnership with the Scottish Government's Chief Scientist Office (CSO), launched its first innovation competition, the Reducing Drug Deaths Innovation Challenge. Twelve UK projects were awarded an initial share of £5m in funding to develop innovative new technologies, that focus on detection of, response to, and intervention in potentially fatal drug overdoses.
- The Phase 1 feasibility projects included novel technologies such as:
 - Wearable technologies including smart watches or breathing monitors to detect overdoses and alert healthcare professionals, family, or members of the community to the need to intervene.



- Emergency systems using drone technology to deliver antidotes, novel antidote release patches and storage mechanisms to improve carriage rates and signal authorities to naloxone usage.
 - AI technologies to remotely monitor or detect overdoses and alert systems to enable life-saving interventions.
- In September 2024, seven of these projects were awarded phase 2 funding to further develop and demonstrate their innovations through 12-month studies in real world settings with an additional £375,000 allocated by the Addiction Healthcare Goals to the competition fund to enable this.

NIHR i4i Addiction Healthcare Goals: Innovation for Treatment and Recovery:

- In May 2023, the Addiction Healthcare Goals launched the £10 million NIHR i4i Innovation for Treatment and Recovery awards to support UK organisations and researchers to develop and test pharmaceuticals, MedTech, and digital tools to improve treatment and aid recovery for people with opioid and cocaine addictions. Four projects have been awarded funding to conduct 3-year research projects on innovations including virtual reality and psychedelics assisted psychotherapies, prison release engagement and opioid substitution therapies.