

## INDEPENDENT GRANT REQUEST

### MSD ONCOLOGY POLICY GRANT PROGRAM

*Realizing the full benefit of innovative cancer treatment*

The MSD Oncology Policy Grant Program aims to establish a global community of health policy researchers driving evidence-based and forward-looking health policy recommendations that will improve health outcomes for cancer patients.

The competitive grant program seeks to provide up to four grants in 2025. Each grant will be valued at up to \$50,000 (USD), to provide funding for health policy projects, and to create opportunities to encourage dialogue and dissemination of findings as they relate to access to cancer care. In some cases, up to \$25,000 (USD) can be supplemented to the grant with detailed justification.

Prospective applicants should note that the focus of this grant program is on cancer policy – in other words: policies, regulations, programs and actions related to cancer. This program will not consider grants for research focused on specific clinical therapies or the outcomes associated with such therapies. Clinical research, collection of patient data (quantitatively or qualitatively), and modelling are out of scope for this grant program. *Grant disbursement is subject to successful completion of an up to two-month due diligence process for each of the selected applicants.*

#### ABOUT THE MSD ONCOLOGY POLICY GRANT PROGRAM

For more than a century, MSD has been inventing for life, bringing forward medicines and vaccines for many of the world's most challenging diseases.

Cancer represents one of the world's most urgent unmet medical needs. Worldwide, more than 19.3 million new cancer cases were diagnosed in 2020. This number is expected to grow to more than 28.4 million by 2040.<sup>1</sup>

At MSD, we remain committed to turning breakthrough biomedical innovations into novel therapies that help extend and improve the lives of people with cancer worldwide.

We believe that policy researchers play a critical role – through their research work, educational activity, and public outreach – in informing valuable policy dialogues based on evidence. Through this Independent Oncology Policy Grant Program, MSD seeks to enable institutions to enhance their capacities in research, teaching and dissemination. Beyond supporting independent research, the Program will provide an international forum for researchers to share ideas on emerging cancer policy issues and identify new areas for policy study.

MSD's Independent Oncology Policy Grant Program seeks to encourage research around the following themes:

a) **What is the effect of cancer policies on patients?**

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<sup>1</sup> International Agency for Research on Cancer; Press Release No 292. 15 December 2020. Available at: [https://www.iarc.who.int/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/pr292\\_E.pdf](https://www.iarc.who.int/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/pr292_E.pdf) Accessibility verified on January 10, 2024.

Cancer treatment, for example, provide value to society beyond the clinical outcomes of individual patients.<sup>i</sup> Due to the emphasis on patient survival, the non-clinical gains of cancer treatment – such as economic and societal benefits – may currently be undervalued in policy discussions. Policies may not consider benefits such as productivity or efficiency gains<sup>ii</sup> when allocating funding to health even though these benefits are significantly important to patients and the broader community. What policies could support the faster adoption and uptake of new technologies including those that do not fit neatly into the current systems? It is also known that diagnosing and treating cancer early will lead to better patient outcomes. If lung cancer is diagnosed early when the tumor is still localized, more than 50 percent of the patients will be alive 5-year after diagnosis.<sup>2</sup> Diagnosed at late stage it is only 7 percent. What policies can improve patient outcomes? What is their impact on work, family, or care givers?

At a higher level, countries have taken very different approaches setting cancer-related policy goals. Some countries have developed ambitious and well-resourced national cancer control strategies, while other countries have not. It would be of interest exploring what drives robust approaches to national cancer policy, the role of policies for outcomes in general, implementation of early detection and timely treatment programs, and what characterizes national strategies that have had a greater impact on the quality of treatment and health outcomes.

b) **What policies can improve financing of and access to cancer care?**

Healthcare spending continues to rise globally.<sup>iii,iv</sup> Payers who are concerned with the high cost of healthcare are evaluating various approaches to financing medicines with the goal of containing costs.<sup>v,vi</sup> However, these have the potential to result in restricted access to treatment.<sup>vii</sup> Involvement of government stakeholders to ensure right resources are in the right places is critical, as well as other stakeholders and experts, including health economists, patient advocacy groups, medical societies and access policy specialists of industry.

In the context of access to innovative cancer treatments, multi-year, multi-indication-based agreements, and other innovative funding mechanisms have been used in ways that accelerate patient access while improving budget and price predictability and reducing the workload of evaluation agencies. Existing research has examined innovative pricing and contracting approaches to determine their effect on minimizing cost burden, while improving patient access<sup>viii, ix</sup>. In the near future, new treatment paradigms such as early-stage diagnosis and treatment where evidence is based on surrogate endpoints will pose new challenges to timely patient access.

What policies can create sustainable funding for cancer and improve patient access to treatment? Studies of interest may set out to find alternative and innovative solutions to reallocate resources and generate budget headroom. It would be of interest exploring the connects between the political will, healthcare budget and access, the complementary role of private health insurance and other innovative financing solutions, and how political will can influence financing and access.

c) **Equity in Cancer Care**

MSD is committed to working towards a world where every person has an equal opportunity to prevent, screen, detect, treat, and survive cancer. To achieve this, we need health care systems that are accessible,

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<sup>2</sup> CDC (2021), Incidence and Relative Survival; [Incidence and Relative Survival by Stage at Diagnosis for Common Cancers | CDC](#).

affordable, and free from discrimination and bias. Despite major advancements in cancer treatment these innovations are often not reaching patients due to underlying inequities in health systems. Social determinants of health (SDoH), including lack of understanding of patients' backgrounds and environments can lead to lower cancer screening rates, delayed diagnosis, and slow adoption or poor adherence to treatment.

Stakeholders must continue to think critically and creatively about how programs and public policy can be better designed to improve equity in health systems and ultimately meet the needs of diverse populations. We are therefore interested in supporting research in the field of health inequities in a given health care system. Research areas of interest could include: reducing disparities in women's cancers outcomes, addressing differential access to innovative therapies across racial/ethnic groups, strategies to reduce screening/diagnosis/treatment inequalities between or within countries, digital innovation and improved use of data to better target interventions, and innovative education and awareness programs to those vulnerable and marginalized communities who are underserved by health promotion and other key services, and the role of cancer literacy. Can also consider to the value of 'other supportive services' (e.g. psychological support, navigation) in addition to education and awareness programs for vulnerable communities (to overcome barriers to screening, diagnosis, treatment).

## **ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS**

The Project Lead will be responsible for the successful execution and timely completion of the proposed research. To be eligible, applicants must demonstrate the ability to:

- a) Complete original, high-quality, and independent research, consistent with the proposal submitted in applying for the grant.
- b) Maintain independence in completing the research –researchers are required to maintain full independence in completing and drawing conclusions from their research, from MSD and from any other third party.
- c) Participate in a discussion with other successful applicants to explore common themes and issues that arise across the different countries participating in this research.
- d) Execute local, researcher-led seminars open to policy makers, clinicians and other key opinion leaders to begin a community of discourse on policy changes needed to maximize the benefit from innovative cancer care no later than end of Q2 2026.
- e) Publish 2 or more opinion pieces or other publications to disseminate key insights from the primary research by the end of Q3 2026.
- f) Submit 1 manuscript to a relevant local or regional peer-reviewed journal no later than Q4 2025.
- g) Meaningfully disclose MSD's funding and project methodology.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Selection of grantees is based upon a competitive application and review process. This process is informed by the recommendations of a review committee which includes representation from various functions within MSD.

The following criteria will be used to select top grant requests to be considered for the due diligence process:

### **Policy and contextual relevance of the application.**

This criterion refers to strategic and policy relevance in terms of:

- a) Expected contributions and ability to advance existing knowledge,
- b) Added value and alignment to at least one of the policy areas outlined above; and
- c) Relevance to the local social, cultural and policy context.

#### **Innovation and technical quality of the application.**

This criterion considers the ability to meet technical quality in the areas of:

- d) Innovative ideas and nature of the research,
- e) Clear and thorough articulation of aims and objectives, methods, anticipated outcomes; and
- f) Full dissemination plan that defines how research findings would be most effectively disseminated.

#### **Ethics and management quality of the application.**

This criterion checks if the application is respectful with ethical values and checks if the proposal meets eligibility requirements as stated in the previous section.

*Grant disbursement is subject to successful completion of a two-month due diligence process for each of the selected applicants.*

### **APPLICATION PROCEDURE**

Letters of intent must be submitted, in English, using the LOI template to [globaloncpol@msd.com](mailto:globaloncpol@msd.com) by **April 17, 2025**. All portions of the LOI must be completed for the proposal to be considered.

Up to 8 selected proposals will be offered the opportunity to apply with a full proposal for consideration; up to 4 proposals will be awarded the grant. Submission of a full proposal will not be considered confirmation of funding. Instructions for this step will be communicated to selected applicants upon selection.

### **APPENDIX A: ORGANIZATIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

Organizations or projects that meet any of the following criteria are **NOT** eligible for support:

- Activities that include measuring or modeling of safety, effectiveness, or the clinical outcome of a tool, one of our products, or a class of drug/vaccine in which our company has a product;
- Activities that do not have a clear policy focus;
- Activities that include research, analysis, or modelling of (i) utilization of any of our Company's products or a class of drug/vaccine for which our Company has a product, and (ii) other non-interventional research;
- Organizations or other entities which purchase, recommend, use, reimburse, or prescribe MSD products or have the ability to influence the purchase, utilization, prescribing, formulary position, pricing, reimbursement, referral, or recommendation of or payment for MSD products, such as a patient, healthcare professional (HCPs) or payer. Note that academic centers in universities with hospitals may be eligible for support following local review.
- Projects that *directly influence* or advance MSD's business, including the purchase, utilization, prescribing, formulary position, pricing, reimbursement, referral, or recommendation of or payment for its products

- For-profit organizations
- Political organizations, campaigns, and activities
- Fraternal or labor organizations and activities
- Religious organizations or groups whose activities are primarily sectarian in purpose
- Organizations that discriminate on the basis of race, caste, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, religion, age, national origin, veteran's status, or disability
- Capital campaigns, including new construction and renovation of facilities, and endowments
- Basic or clinical research projects, including epidemiological studies, clinical trials, outcomes research, real-world evidence research or other pharmaceutical studies
- Purchase of supplies or equipment unrelated to the proposed project or program
- Direct medical care or services, including medical screening or testing, family planning services, purchase of medicines, contraceptive supplies, vaccines or medical devices
- Development of new products
- Fund-raising events, such as benefit dinners/galas
- Payment of staff salaries not aligned with the proposed project or program
- Organizations that request a grant greater than 50% of their current annual budget

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<sup>i</sup> Quinn, C., Palmer, S., Bruns, J., Borrás, J. M., Grant, C., Sykes, D., & Kaura S. (2015). Innovation in Oncology: Why focusing only on breakthrough innovation may be counter-productive. *Haematologica, Briel*, 1(100).

<sup>ii</sup> Hanly, P., Soerjomataram, I., & Sharp, L. (2015). Measuring the societal burden of cancer: The cost of lost productivity due to premature cancer-related mortality in Europe. *International Journal of Cancer*, 136(4). E136-E145.

<sup>iii</sup> PharmacoEcon Outcomes News (2016) 762: 11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40274-016-3387-4>

<sup>iv</sup> Ludwig, W. D. (2016). Current prices of innovative drugs are too high. *Oncology Research and Treatment, Supplemet 3*, 39(114).

<sup>v</sup> Gonçalves, F. R., Santos, S., Silva, C., & Sousa, G. (2018). Risk sharing agreements, present and future. *Ecancer*, 12(823).

<sup>vi</sup> Aggarwal, S., Topaloglu, H., & Messenger, M. (2013). Novel reimbursement models for cancer drug market access (2010-2013). *Value in Health*, 16(3). A153.

<sup>vii</sup> Colasante, W., Alexander, R., Clark, J., Hickson, S., & Li, X. (2014). The downward trend in oncology drug pricing, speed to market and access. *Value in Health* 17(3). A99.

<sup>viii</sup> Lawlor R et al. (2021), Accelerating patient access to oncology medicines with multiple indications in Europe; *J Market Access and Health Policy*. 9(1)

<sup>ix</sup> Rupasinghe, B., Gilbane, A., Schlegel, C. R., Walsh, K., & Degun, R. (2017). Launching combination therapies in rare diseases: Is high cost burden restricting access?. *Value in Health*, 20(9). A550.