**National Children’s Hospital Foundation**

**Research Strategy**

**2016 – 2020**

**February 2016**

**To improve children’s health by supporting and funding high quality research for the patients and community of the National Children’s Hospital now and into the future.**

**Background**

Each year the National Children’s Hospital treats over 70,000 children at Tallaght. The NCH Foundation raises funds to enable the hospital to provide the highest standard of care for these children and their families. Monies raised each year contributes to improvements in the hospital through refurbishment, purchase of necessary equipment as well as the provision of accommodation and support services for children and their families. Funds are also invested into new treatments and cures for childhood illnesses.

The NCH Foundation’s Board now recognises the importance of ensuring that emphasis is placed on research to improve diagnosis and treatment as well as the development of strategies for prevention of childhood disease. As part of a recent strategic review in agreeing a new overall strategy for the next five years, the Board has identified three key pillars or themes on which they will focus their efforts with research being one of these pillars of work. Education and leaving a “lasting legacy” are the other two key pillars of work identified as part of the plan. The establishment of the new Paediatric Hospital in a five to seven year time-frame provides the NCH Foundation with a great opportunity to contribute to all three pillars in advance of its opening.

The discipline of paediatrics at University of Dublin, Trinity College has a long history of expertise in the training of clinical professionals. The major paediatric teaching hospital (NCH) of the University of Dublin is the oldest paediatric teaching hospital in Ireland and the UK. The hospital was founded for the training of medical students. It has a recognised tradition of excellence in paediatric teaching. It is recognised for senior registrar training in paediatrics by the Royal College of Physicians. The NCH has a long association with the University of Dublin, back to 1921 with the discipline of Paediatrics located on the campus at Tallaght.

Against this background it is appropriate for the NCH to work closely and in collaboration with Trinity College, Dublin in furthering and strengthening its research agenda over the coming years.

It is evident that much work has been carried in the area of research but none of this work has been formally documented. There is a clear need to make this work more visible to the wider research community, ensure that outcomes are disseminated widely adding to the body of knowledge already existing and most importantly, to create a strong sense of solid expertise in this area, in advance of the opening of the New Paediatric Hospital. Importantly, the development and implementation of a solid research strategy provides the platform for a meaningful NCH role in research beyond 2020 in the new world of paediatrics.

Underpinning the work of the next five years should be the development of a longer-term strategic approach in defining the Foundation’s role beyond 2020. Choices will inevitably emerge which will shape the Foundation’s role or contribution beyond 2020.

**Research Priorities / Goals**

The Board, through its Research sub-committee is mindful of the body of knowledge already in existence in the area of paediatrics and has invested in many and varied projects over the last number of years. The NCH has many major accomplishments as part of its research agenda, with the establishment of a national register for childhood diabetes, specialist skills and expertise gained in the treatment of among other illnesses, cystic fibrosis, diabetes and respiratory conditions. The NCH is close to recognition as a national centre for Prader-Willi syndrome and more recently has undertaken to develop a multi-disciplinary clinical treatment service for children with Neurofibromatosis.

Therefore the focus of work over the next number of years will be to build on the success of the past in the area of research, gather and disseminate all work previously and currently being undertaken and ensure that all work over the coming years has the potential to add significantly to existing knowledge in the cause, cure, care, treatment, impact and effect of childhood illness. The focus will be to improve clinical outcomes as well as to deliver benefits / outcomes to the lives of children and their families as NCH patients, the Tallaght community and the wider community as we approach the establishment of the new National Children’s Hospital over the coming years.

In line with this focus it seems appropriate therefore, to encourage proposals for all types of research including basic, clinical, and psycho-social and health services research in the general area of paediatrics with specific emphasis on those areas of specialism already developed at the NCH.

**Key Strategies identified**

* The NCH Foundation Board is committed to fund hospital based research projects each year 2016-2020.
* The Board, through its established Research sub-group will work with the hospital and wider research community to define the key priority areas of research for funding annually.
* The Board will fund research that delivers the biggest impact on the health of sick children today and into the future in line with the NCH Foundation’s mission to help the patients of the NCH Hospital.
* The Board will strengthen strong systems of research governance including peer review and external evaluation of all research projects as well as regular monitoring and scheduled progress updates. Clear policies on ethics, intellectual property rights will be developed.
* The Board will foster a strong sense of collaboration with emphasis on “partnership” approach with academic institutions, patient organisations, the research community and families engaged in projects – in order to bring together a balance of clinical, scientific expertise to encourage translational research which will benefit patients in a timely manner – “from bench to bedside”.
* The Board will ensure “value for money” is achieved in ensuring funds are used to best use and in line with donor expectations. Opportunities will be sought and expected for “co-funding” of projects, indirect costs such as consumables, pension costs will not be included in funding grants.
* The Board will ensure sustainability with all funding by ensuring applicants demonstrate next stages on completion of all projects – what happens next or how work used to lever additional support from other sources, how any intellectual property rights arising from research are protected. Sustainability will be at the core of the Board’s decision-making process in deciding on projects supported annually.
* The Board will maximise on the exposure for the NCH Foundation in all dissemination of research projects to include an annual research study day, impact report, development of marketing tools to support research work and development of case studies to support.
* The Board will identify and encourage corporate and other third-party support for specific research projects which lend themselves to such an approach.

**Funding Streams**

From 2016 and annually the Board will direct research funds through key funding streams.

1. **NCH Hospital Based Research Projects**

The NCH Foundation will continue to support hospital based research projects carried out at the hospital for the benefit of its patients. Through two formal calls for funding annually, the Foundation will support a number of projects to a maximum of three years and selected through a rigorous process, to include peer review, formal presentation to the Research Committee and overall approval by the Foundation Board.

1. **NCH National Research Projects**

In conjunction with the Health Research Board and through a national call for applications the Board will make funds available through open competition, for specific themed areas of research agreed by the Board which address key areas of patient activity or need at the NCH and which will have a lasting effect on both patients of the hospital and nationally. These projects should be completed within a three year time-frame and a formal external review should be undertaken to assess viability for further support.

1. **NCH PhD Fellowship**

Funding will be made available through NCH competition for projects which translate research to real patient benefit with the focus on helping improve the lives of those at NCH and beyond. Funding themes to be agreed by the Research Committee and stated by the Board in open call. Proposals should include basic, clinical, psycho-social and health services research as stated in the research priorities. This Fellowship programme provides a grant for a three / four year period to include a stipend and fees.

1. **Partnership-approach Funding**

Funding will be made available to encourage “partnership” approach to research projects.

The overall aim of this funding stream is to develop strategic partnerships with other organisations, hospitals, research institutions who wish to make a significant contribution to child health research and whose ambitions “fit” with the NCH Foundation research strategy.

**Management / Oversight**

All hospital funded projects will be directly overseen by the NCH Foundation’s Research Committee with regular updates provided to the Board on progress.

An on-going review mechanism to be built into each of the other streams with a more formalised review to take place at mid-point stage.