

# Health Services Research in Oncology and Cancer Care

## 1 Background

The [»National Strategy against Cancer 2014-2020«](#) aims to identify and sustainably anchor novel approaches for the prevention and care of cancer and promote areas of research in need of development. The implementation of the strategy comprises seven fields of action and 15 projects. In the area of research one project specifically aims to strengthen health services research, a research field that is still underdeveloped in Switzerland.

The **Swiss Cancer Research Foundation** has taken the lead in this project and created a cancer-specific research programme for health services research in Switzerland. With the support of the **ACCENTUS Foundation\* (Marlies Engeler Fund)** the programme will be implemented from 2016-2020 with a total of 1 million Swiss francs awarded per year.

\*The ACCENTUS foundation is an umbrella foundation based in Zurich and devoted solely to charitable purposes. To date, it has supported worldwide more than 1000 projects in the areas of social & humanitarian work, culture & sports, nature & ecology and science & research.

## 2 Definition

In addition to basic and clinical research, health services research (HSR) is considered the “third pillar” of biomedical research. Basic research investigates biological processes and their importance for medical applications, clinical research examines the efficacy of new treatments in selected patients under defined conditions of study. In contrast, health services research explores how effective treatment becomes best available to patients or analyses the effectiveness of medical care under real-life conditions as these tend to differ from results and conclusions from clinical trials. Further, HSR provides important contributions to quality development and management in medical care. The US “Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality” (AHRQ) defines HSR as follows: “**Health services research examines how people get access to health care, how much care costs, and what happens to patients as a result of this care. The main goals of health service research are to identify the most effective ways to organize, manage, finance, and deliver high quality care; reduce medical errors; and improve patient safety**”. Due to demographic changes, reduced mortality rate and increased life expectancy health services research (HSR) is becoming increasingly important for health care systems worldwide.

## 3 Aim

The main goal of most clinical research endeavours in oncology is to improve treatment modalities to possibly cure cancer patients. However, apart from achieving successful treatment there are additional questions that become more and more important for cancer patients, their relatives and health care professionals. Most of these questions relate to psychosocial, medical, or economic aspects, which are addressed by health services research. The health services research in oncology and cancer care programme provides funding for research projects that aim at improving the quality of care and / or the quality of life for cancer patients in Switzerland at all levels of cancer care provision, starting from prevention and screening, over diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation, to palliative care and survivorship.

## 4 Eligibility criteria

The programme is open to researchers at universities, research institutions, hospitals, research and consulting agencies, and health service providers in Switzerland. Welcome are projects conducted in routine care that will lead to practical benefits in bringing greater value to health, healthcare or health services in the field of oncology and cancer care.

If possible, well-established concepts and procedures of HSR should be considered and adapted to local conditions.

### Eligible topics include:

- Effectiveness, efficiency and equity of cancer care interventions
- Comparative effectiveness research in cancer care
- Outcomes research in cancer care
- Quality of cancer care
- Relations between cancer patients and caregivers
- Access to cancer care
- Cancer care utilisation
- Health economics in cancer care
- Health technology assessments with a focus on cancer

Topics that are **not considered** relevant for the purpose of this programme are:

Pure data generation and registration, phase I-III clinical trials, clinical studies of efficacy, research using cell or animal models.

## 5 Funding

The programme to strengthen health services research in oncology and cancer care is planned over a period of at least five years. Funds of a total of **1 million Swiss francs** will be awarded once a year.

Every year, **up to four research projects** over a duration of two to four years will be supported with a maximum amount of 250 000.- Swiss francs (max. 125 000.- Swiss francs per year). In addition, **three to five smaller projects** e.g. aiming at the development of ideas, the evaluation of methods, literature reviews, pilot studies, etc. (max. 75 000.- Swiss francs) will be funded.

## 6 Timeline for application process

The application process will have two phases. Phase one comprises of a pre-proposal due on 15 September. After evaluation by the HSR panel, phase two will begin and the shortlisted principal investigators will be invited to submit a detailed research proposal until 15 January. Funding decisions will be taken in April / May.

## 7 Application and evaluation procedure

During phase one of the application process, applicants are invited to submit a pre-proposal. Each proposal will be screened and evaluated by two to three members of the HSR panel based on the following criteria: originality of the project and its alignment with the purpose of the programme, scientific quality of the proposed methods, relevance of the project to

improve health services in oncology and cancer care, previous achievements of the investigator or team, and feasibility. The detailed research proposals will be evaluated according to the same criteria. Each full proposal will be assessed by three members of the HSR panel as well as two to four external reviewers.

The **pre-proposals** and the **full proposals** must be submitted via the **Grant Application Portal**:

<https://gap.swisscancer.ch/>

Required information for the pre-proposals includes:

- the domain of research (outcomes research, health economics, nursing sciences, epidemiology, public health, quality of life, other)
- the project period (max. 4 years)
- the amount of financial support requested (max. 250 000.- Swiss francs)
- the principal investigator's short curriculum vitae and a list of up to 12 publications (2-3 pages)
- a title, summary of the project, brief description of the background and research plan including information on the study design, methods, study population, statistical analysis, etc. (3-4 pages) and
- a statement regarding the impact on improving cancer specific health services in Switzerland (1 page)

Questions? Please contact us: [healthservicesresearch@swisscancer.ch](mailto:healthservicesresearch@swisscancer.ch) or +41 31 389 93 63

Postal address:

Office of the Scientific Board of Health Services Research  
c/o Swiss Cancer League, P.O. Box 8219, CH-3001 Bern, Switzerland.