

# Fund Stéphanie Willems

## CALL FOR PROJECTS 2024

The Fund Stéphanie Willems was created within the King Baudouin Foundation according to the will of the late Stéphanie Willems. The Fund aims at supporting research in Belgium in the field of polymyalgia rheumatica (PMR) and giant cell arteritis (GCA) in Belgium.

The Fund is managed by the King Baudouin Foundation with the help of an international scientific jury and a steering committee.

### Context

Giant cell arteritis is the most frequent form of vasculitis of medium and large vessels in people over 50 and presents with or without a syndrome called polymyalgia.

It touches men more than women and has a prevalence up to 50 out of 100.000 persons over 50. Its pathogenesis remains incompletely understood.

The clinical presentation can be local with severe headache, jaw claudication and visual symptoms sometimes leading to permanent visual loss. Systemic features include fever, fatigue, malaise, anorexia and weight loss but also a polymyalgia syndrome with inflammatory pain and stiffness in the shoulder and pelvic region that might be very incapacitating. The latter syndrome might also occur without severe vasculitis complications. Its occurrence at older age is a particular challenge for disease management. Timely diagnosis and appropriate patient management are important to avoid morbidity.

### Subject of the call

The Fund Stéphanie Willems is launching a first call for projects in the field of polymyalgia rheumatica (PMR) and giant cell arteritis (GCA) in Belgium. Projects improving insight into the pathogenesis but also into clinical issues in diagnosis and disease management will qualify for funding.

### Projects that would qualify for funding should lead to:

- a better understanding of the immuno-pathogenesis and eventual to novel therapeutics. Identifying prognostic markers predicting vascular complications or chronicity also qualifies for funding.
- clarifying and strengthening the position of GP's in the diagnosis and management. Recommendations and implementation of the use of red flags for referral to specialist care are needed in Belgium.
- more insight into correct glucocorticoid use and the place of disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) in a therapeutic strategy.
- a better understanding of the specific burden for the elder population and development and/or validation of PRO's in this population.

### Eligible applicants

#### Organizations

The Foundation will only fund not-for-profit organizations in Belgium. For-profit organizations (e.g. pharmaceutical companies) can be part of a research team but are excluded from funding.



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## Main applicant

The call is open to

- researchers in Belgium working in an academic centre, university hospital, university college or research centres who have obtained at least a doctoral degree.

## Location

- The project is initiated and coordinated in Belgium

## Collaborations

- Collaboration between clinicians and academic researchers is strongly encouraged. Proof of collaboration regarding task allocation and content of the research, inclusion of patients and logistical cooperation should be demonstrated in the application.
- Interdisciplinarity and multicentricity are strongly encouraged  
*Interdisciplinarity*: projects that include a collaboration between different disciplines and professional perspectives (e.g. neurology, psychiatry, psychology, behavioural sciences, educational sciences, neuroscience, etc.)  
*Multicentricity*: collaboration between different research centres.
- In the case of a collaborative project led jointly by teams from different research institutions, the project must be submitted by a single main applicant. If an award is made, the contract will be signed with the main applicant.

## Selection criteria

### Scientific quality of the project

- Design, including a timeline, statistics, sample calculation.
- Feasibility of the proposed study, including feasibility to complete the study within the proposed timing.
- Innovative approaches.

### Relevance/added-value of the research

- The project addresses clearly identified medical, allied health or psychosocial issues related to polymyalgia rheumatica (PMR) and giant cell arteritis (GCA).
- The proposal includes an assessment of the relevance of the study.
- The rationale why the patient perspective is taken into account (or not taken into account) in the design of the project, is clearly explained in the proposal.

### Involvement of stakeholders

- List of key stakeholders and clear description of how they will be involved in the research and how their expertise will be taken into account.

### Potential of the main applicant and research team

- Previous research achievements of the main applicant since the start of their career.
- Career potential of the main applicant (creativity, management skills, (inter)national visibility etc...)
- Potential of the research team & collaborating teams: scientific environment, competence, experience, added-value from the collaboration.



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## Potential impact

- of the results on diagnosis/prognosis/treatment
- of the research on quality of care/quality of life
- of the research for patients, their family and/or professionals
- of the research on society

## Perspective of implementation of the results

- the proposal has to include a clear plan for the implementation of the study results.
- contribution of data towards improving future care of patients suffering from this disease in Belgium will be valued.

## Dissemination of the study results

The proposal has to include a plan for the communication of the study results, including negative results. Communication to the scientific community and practitioners needs to be complemented with communication to patients and the broader public.

## Justification of the budget

### Ethical questions & gender issues

- A description of how ethical issues, if any, are taken into account. If the project has to be submitted to an Ethics Committee, researchers should send the ethical approval before the project can start (but not before the introduction of the application).
- A description of how gender/diversity issues, if any, are taken into account.

### Valuable assets

- Translational potential.
- Contribution of data towards improving future care of patients suffering from this disease in Belgium will be valued.

## Grant

### Amount, duration and allocation

- A total amount of €1,500,000 is available for this call. The Fund will fund up to 3 projects with a maximum of €500,000 per project and a time horizon of +/- 4 years.
- Each accepted project will receive half of the amount awarded at the start of the research.
- Pending a midterm scientific, financial and communication report, the second instalment will be credited.
- A final and complete report has to be submitted at study end by the awardee or supervisor of the consortium.
- Expenses may include personnel costs, running costs and costs for equipment.
- An eventual overhead cost cannot exceed 17%.
- The research lead will be invited to present the final activity report to the jury and Fund steering committee upon conclusion of the grant.



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## Selection Procedure

If you are interested, please submit **an online application** via the website of the King Baudouin Foundation [www.kbs-frb.be](http://www.kbs-frb.be). Applications should be submitted **in English** by **19/11/2024** at midnight at the latest. Candidates will receive an acknowledgement of receipt.

The call process consists of **2 steps**.

### Step 1: Introduction of an application file (deadline 19/11/2024)

The submitted dossiers will be read by the independent international scientific jury, which may formulate comments, proposals for improvement and/or recommendations for cooperation between research groups. The comments will be transmitted by email. The preselected researchers can then rework their application.

Timeframe: 17/02 - 13/03/2025.

### Step 2: Selection

An online meeting will be organized with the preselected researchers to give them the opportunity to present their reworked projects to the jury.

Timeframe: 17/03 - 21/03/2025.

The jury will propose one to maximum 3 projects for funding to the Fund Steering Committee managed by the King Baudouin Foundation, which will make the final decision.

Timeframe: 21/03 – 30/03/2025.

The decision will be published in April 2025.

## Contact

- For technical assistance during the application process:  
Contact centre – Tel +32-(0)2 500 45 55 – [proj@kbs-frb.be](mailto:proj@kbs-frb.be)
- For information regarding the call:  
Annemie T'Seyen – Tel +32-(0)2-549 03 03 – [tseyen.a@kbs-frb.be](mailto:tseyen.a@kbs-frb.be)

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## King Baudouin Foundation

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*The Foundation is an actor for change and innovation, serving the public interest and increasing social cohesion in Belgium and Europe. We seek to maximize our impact by strengthening the capacity of organizations and individuals. We also stimulate effective philanthropy by individuals and corporations.*

*The King Baudouin Foundation is a public benefit foundation. The Foundation was set up in 1976 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of King Baudouin's reign.*

**With thanks to the Belgian National Lottery and to all donors for their valued support.**

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