



SarcomaUK
The bone & soft tissue
cancer charity

Living Longer Living Better

**Sarcoma UK's
Research Strategy
2026–31**





We are the only cancer charity in the UK focusing on all types of sarcoma

Vision

Where everyone affected by sarcoma cancer lives longer and better lives.

Mission

We work with patients, families, researchers, healthcare professionals and policymakers to enable earlier diagnosis, advance treatments, improve care and ensure no one faces sarcoma alone.

Sarcoma UK's Research Strategy 2026–31

Introduction from Research Committee Chairs

We are delighted to share our new research strategy, *Living Longer, Living Better*, to support Sarcoma UK's organisational strategy, *Closing the Gap*.

Despite the dedication of patients, clinicians and researchers, outcomes for people affected by sarcoma continue to lag behind those for more common cancers. We hear all too often how people face delayed diagnosis, limited treatment options and unequal access to clinical trials. Progress is not fast enough, and people want hope.

Living Longer, Living Better: Sarcoma UK's Research Strategy 2026–31 sets out how we will address these challenges.

Sarcoma UK has grown over recent years into a trusted and influential research funder, and the scale and complexity of the challenge means we must now go further. Through targeted funding, meaningful patient involvement and growing collaboration across the sarcoma community, the organisation has shown that driving progress through research can make a real difference.

In developing this ambitious strategy, we have spoken to people affected by sarcoma, researchers, clinicians and partners, and built on the lessons learned from our previous strategy.

Research is the most powerful tool we have to improve things for sarcoma patients. Today's treatments began as ideas, supported by funding for both people and projects, and over time,

translated into real-world benefit for patients. We will keep doing what works: funding research that accelerates progress towards earlier diagnosis, better treatments and improved quality of life for people living with and beyond sarcoma.

Looking ahead, we will do more to bring together and support the sarcoma research community. We can't tackle these challenges alone, which is why the next five years will focus not only on excellent science, but also on investing in people, collaboration and leadership to support the sarcoma research of the future.

This strategy provides a clear framework for action over the next five years, while remaining flexible enough to respond to a rapidly evolving field. We will make deliberate choices to maximise our resources and impact, focusing on areas overlooked by other, larger funders. Above all, we will ensure that people affected by sarcoma remain at the heart of everything we do.

Together, we are committed to enabling people with sarcoma to live longer and live better.



Prof Bernadette Brennan,
Chair, Research Strategy Committee

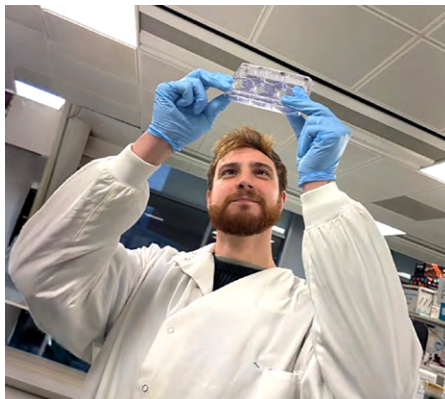


Prof Sam Behjati,
Chair, Grant Review Panel

Our research programme has funded work that has led to new discoveries and transformed outcomes for patients:

From pre-clinical research to clinical trials

In 2012, Professor Adrienne Flanagan's team at University College London was awarded £28,000 for research that identified a new treatment target in chordoma which led to a clinical trial of the drug afatinib and showed improved outcomes for subsets of patients. Work is now underway to find out which patients will benefit from treatment with afatinib with the hope it can be incorporated into treatment for chordoma.



Developing guidelines to support people during and after sarcoma treatment

In 2016, Mr Craig Gerrand's team at Newcastle upon Tyne NHS Foundation Trust were awarded £33,080 for research that informed the development of the UK's first clinical practice guidelines to support personalised rehabilitation plans for patients following surgery. The plans can be tailored according to the treatment received, complications and individual recovery, helping to improve mobility, physical activity and people's ability to return to everyday activities.



"Since 2009, Sarcoma UK has funded over 100 research projects, investing over £10 million in total to advance sarcoma research."

Our approach for the next five years



Our mission for the research programme

Funding and convening the research community to drive sarcoma research that enables patients to live longer and live better

Strategic goals

1

Accelerate sarcoma research towards earlier diagnosis, better treatments, and improved quality of life

2

Build a thriving, collaborative sarcoma research community

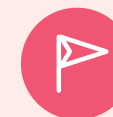
How we will deliver change



Fund innovative research



Coordinate research networks and partnerships



Support future leaders in sarcoma research

What we will do



Goal 1:

Accelerate sarcoma research towards earlier diagnosis, better treatments and improved quality of life



Over the last 15 years, we have supported the highest quality research across the sarcoma landscape, from laboratory-based studies to clinical research. Our £10 million investment has contributed to over 130 academic publications and £10 million of follow-on funding for further research. Research we have funded has helped identify new targets for treatment and informed guidance to improve diagnostic pathways in the UK.

But there's much more to do. Sarcoma UK is uniquely placed to plant the seeds of the next wave of impactful sarcoma research. As a lean organisation where every penny counts, we will take a more intentional approach to prioritise research that makes progress on the issues that matter most to people affected by sarcoma. To maximise our impact, we will also make clear choices about what we will not routinely fund. This includes untargeted discovery research without a clear route to patient benefit, core NHS service gaps, or large clinical trials funded by Sarcoma UK alone.

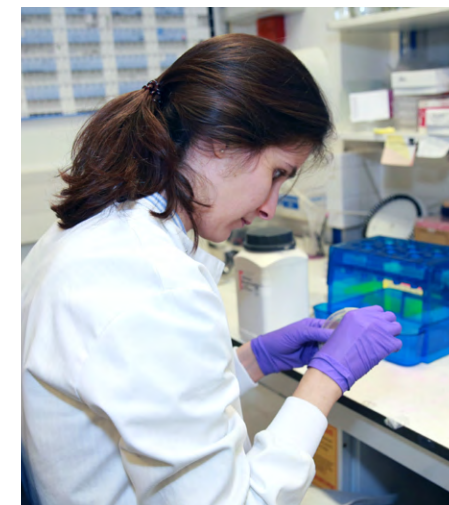
Our research priorities

Our three research priorities for the next five years have been shaped by people affected by sarcoma, alongside the research and clinical community.



Earlier, faster diagnosis and better diagnostic pathways

We will support research that reduces diagnostic delay and improves routes to diagnosis, balancing biological, clinical and systems-focused research. We will also commission research that addresses the most pressing unanswered questions, aligned with our policy and influencing efforts to strengthen referral pathways and ensure fast and accurate diagnosis for patients.

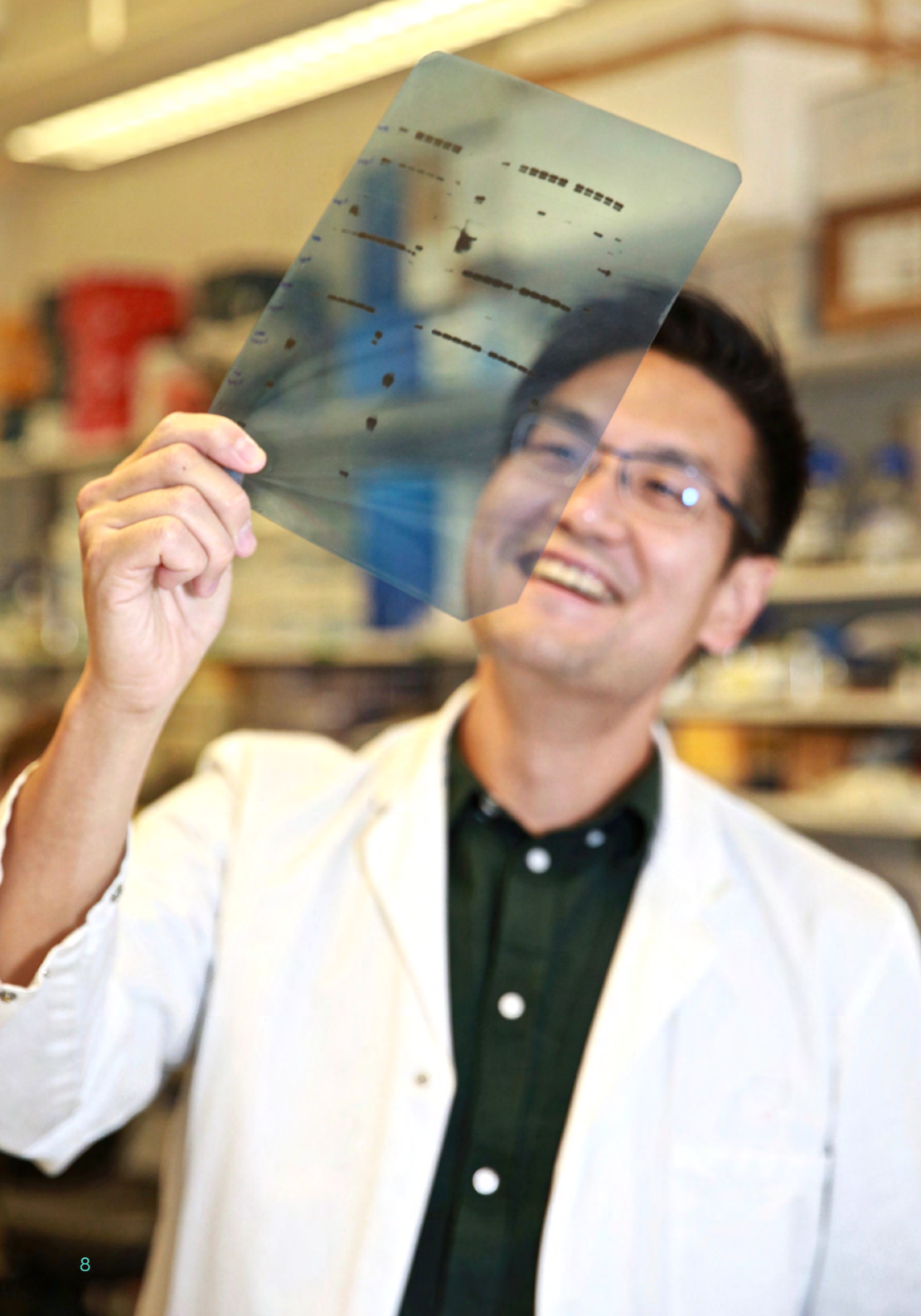


Better, kinder treatments and improved survival

We will prioritise translational research that accelerates promising science into patient benefit, including the development of precision medicines and new targeted treatments, better prediction of resistance, and kinder treatments with fewer side effects. To help us get there, we will maintain and catalyse support for foundational biology research where it has a clear pathway to improving outcomes.

Improved quality-of-life, survivorship and late effects

We will ensure quality-of-life research is a priority, focusing on living with and beyond sarcoma, rehabilitation, mental health, long-term effects of treatment and inequalities in care. We will actively support multidisciplinary teams and allied health professionals to lead and deliver this research.



Goal 2:



Build a thriving, collaborative sarcoma research community

A strong research community is vital to improve outcomes for people with sarcoma. However, the sarcoma research landscape is at times fragmented, and opportunities to share learning, coordinate effort and reduce duplication are limited. At the same time, the career pipeline for sarcoma is fragile, with the post-PhD stage a key drop-out point. This means that too often, promising ideas struggle to progress and talented researchers leave the field.

Sarcoma UK has a powerful role in bringing together and supporting the sarcoma community: academic researchers, clinicians, early career scientists, other funders and, importantly, people affected by sarcoma. Over the next five years, we will focus on building a stronger, more connected community that supports collaboration and invests in people. This will help create the right conditions for excellent research to thrive and enable patients to live longer and live better.



“Sarcoma UK’s funding has been pivotal in my work. From my first grant in 2012 that provided seed funding to identify a potential therapeutic strategy for chordoma that is now in clinical trials, to funding for wide-scale genomic analysis and development of AI models to help diagnosis across sarcoma.”

Prof Adrienne Flanagan, University College London



How we will do it



Fund innovative sarcoma research

As an influential funder in sarcoma, we will actively shape the research landscape rather than responding passively to it. By providing seed funding, we will enable researchers to test ideas before securing larger grants in the future. Open funding will continue to support new ideas and fresh thinking, while targeted and commissioned funding will increasingly guide research towards the areas of greatest unmet need, so that research is more likely to lead to meaningful improvements for people with sarcoma.



We will:

- Fund high-quality research through pilot and project grants
- Use targeted and commissioned funding to steer research towards priority areas and improve the progress of research from laboratory to clinic
- Ensure that patients and their families shape our research programme and wider sarcoma research initiatives, through a Research Involvement Network

Coordinate research networks and partnerships

Over the next five years, we will bring together the sarcoma community so that research can move faster, people can share learning more effectively and ultimately unlock better outcomes for patients. We will continue to work in partnership, where working together helps achieve more than any one organisation could alone.



We will:

- Foster research collaborations by funding and hosting workshops and national meetings that allow researchers to tackle shared challenges and develop new research ideas
- Mobilise more UK-led sarcoma clinical trials by bringing researchers and clinicians together through a Sarcoma Clinical Research Network
- Invest in the collection and use of sarcoma patient data to improve care and outcomes
- Strengthen UK research and improve access to trials and treatments for patients in the UK through international collaboration
- Partner with other funders, charities and organisations to unlock greater impact for people with sarcoma

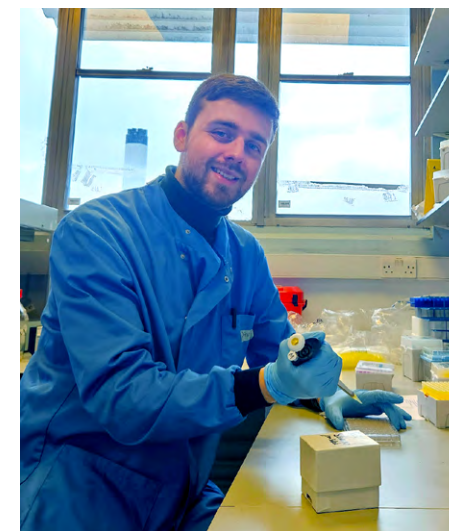
Support future leaders in sarcoma research

We need to ensure the best research can continue to develop for sarcoma in the years to come. Over the next five years, we will support the sarcoma research leaders of the future. We have supported 24 PhD students over the last 15 years, and we will sustain support for early career research. Looking ahead, we will address the mid-career bottleneck and explore opportunities for clinical academics and allied health professionals. In addition, we need to balance sustaining excellence in the sarcoma community with bringing in new perspectives.



We will:

- Invest in PhD students and early career researchers
- Explore grants to attract and retain high-potential researchers, clinical academics and allied health professionals
- Support leadership development and independence through our Sarcoma Early Career Research Network and other mentorship initiatives
- Develop multidisciplinary funding and networking opportunities to bring new perspectives and expertise into the sarcoma field



“Sarcoma UK funding has been pivotal in shaping my career. It has allowed me to establish new research directions, secure further funding, and build a strong team dedicated to improving outcomes for people affected by sarcoma. Importantly, their support has also created opportunities for early-career researchers in my group, ensuring we are developing the next generation of scientists in this field.”

**Professor Zoë Walters,
University of Southampton**

“Every subtype is important and they all need as much awareness and support as possible. Any awareness, any research, any funding that goes towards any type of sarcoma is a step in the right direction for every sarcoma patient.”

Chris Whellams

Research is the most powerful tool we have to improve things for sarcoma patients. Help us enable people affected by sarcoma to live longer and live better by supporting Sarcoma UK.



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Sarcoma UK

sarcoma.org.uk/our-research