

DZG Innovation Fund – Call 2027/2028

Background

The goal of the German Centers for Health Research (DZG) is to combat particularly common diseases more effectively. With the establishment of the DZG Innovation Fund (DZGIF), the DZG aim to strengthen networking between its members, facilitate collaborative research of its members and thus, within the German research landscape and to create interdisciplinary synergies in order to tackle the challenges posed by the widespread diseases.

Topic 2027/2028: Immune Dysregulation and Interorgan Mechanisms in Post-Infectious Conditions: Pathogenesis, Biomarkers, and Non-Pharmacological Interventions

Post-infectious conditions are chronic, multi-organ disorders marked by persistent and heterogeneous symptoms which can lead to disability, causing a high burden for health and social care systems. Current evidence implicates age-dependent dysregulated cellular repair mechanisms, sustained immune dysregulation, including neuroinflammation and autoimmunity as central drivers, with potential downstream effects on neuronal function, cardiovascular integrity, hormonal signaling, autonomic function, mitochondrial metabolism, and the microbiome. These interdependent mechanisms contribute to fatigue, cognitive dysfunction, autonomic instability, and exercise intolerance (incl. post-exertional malaise), underscoring the need for multidisciplinary research on pathogenesis, biomarkers and therapeutic targets.

This call seeks multidisciplinary research proposals that address:

- i) Mechanisms of immune dysregulation, autoimmunity, and (genetic/epigenetic) predisposition for specific post-infectious phenotypes
- ii) Impact on central nervous mechanisms including cognition, neuroinflammation, neurodegeneration, and overlap with mental disorders
- iii) Dysregulation of the autonomic nervous system and cardiovascular alterations including endothelial dysfunction and cardiac inflammation
- iv) Mechanisms of post-exertional malaise and mitochondrial muscle/cellular metabolic alterations
- v) Disturbance of the microbiome and gut-brain communication
- vi) Mechanisms, phenotypes, biomarkers, and therapeutic targets in children and adolescents.

All project proposals should focus on the identification of biomarkers, drug targets, central nervous mechanisms, and the development of more effective non-pharmacological therapeutic strategies. Proposals should integrate translational approaches, prioritize harmonized phenotyping, and leverage longitudinal cohorts for external validation. Interdisciplinary, multiprofessional collaboration is essential to advance mechanistic understanding and inform targeted interventions for post-infectious conditions.

Studies proposing or testing therapeutic or prophylactic interventions are outside the scope of this call.



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Eligibility

In every application at least 3 DZG must be represented with one principal applicant each. The following are eligible to be a principal applicant:

- DKTK: DKTK Faculty and DKTK Investigators
- DZD: DZD Scientists
- DZHK: DZHK Principal Investigators and DZHK Scientists
- DZIF: DZIF Principal Investigators
- DZL: DZL Principal Investigators
- DZNE: DZNE Principal Investigators
- DZPG: DZPG Scientists
- DZKJ: DZKJ Principal Investigators

Funding

1.600.100 € for a period of two years (prolongation not possible) are available under the 2027/2028 call for a maximum of two projects. The funds are to be used – unless individual centers decide otherwise – at institutions that are members of the respective funding DZG.

	Total provided by each DZG for 2027/2028 call
DZD	284.000 €
DZHK	415.000 €
DZIF	500.000 €
DZL	153.600 €
DKTK	247.500 €
Total	1.600.100 €

Since the DZNE as a Helmholtz center receives its funding within the framework of the Pact for Research and Innovation of the Helmholtz Association and can therefore not generally financially contribute to the DZGIF the DZNE will financially participate only in-kind.

Since the DZPG and DZKJ does not receives any funding for DZG-wide activities during the start-up phase it will financially participate only in-kind.

Basic criteria

The DZGIF seeks for applications that will exploit the unique potential of DZG's broad interdisciplinary expertise for highly innovative, disease-overarching translational research. The money from the DZGIF is intended to provide seed funding, i.e. the project should have a perspective to be financed later from other DZG sources or third parties.

- At least 3 DZG participating in the project
- Grantees will need to provide joint reports in the context of the annual DZG-Reporting as well as a joint funding report to all funding parties
- Participation in the online Partnering Day is obligatory



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- All publications resulting from the funded research must acknowledge all funders. Grantees are requested to inform the DZG media teams of upcoming publications or other public-facing activity relating to the grant

Application process

Please submit expression of interest (Eoi; see template) until **27.03.2026** to office@deutschezentren.de.

Everyone who has submitted an expression of interest will be considered for participation in the Partnering Day, provided they meet the criteria above and address the topic described. An optional project outline can also be submitted. We will provide you with further information on the organizational details of the Partnering Day in due time.

Partnering Day organisation and process

The virtual Partnering Day will take place online on **27.04.2026**

Evaluation process

Proposals will be evaluated based on the scientific quality and translational potential of the project ideas. The evaluation of the proposals is carried out by selected SAB members of each DZG. Based on the evaluations, the DZG board decide on the funding of a maximum of two applications.

DZGIF project schedule

