

HEADS ON 



**Heads On
Futures
Fund
Guidance
2026–27**

Equity Through Innovation

Contents

Heads On	3
Futures Fund	4
Innovation	5
Who can apply? Core eligibility	6
Core Funding Priorities	7
What Futures Funds are available and how much can I apply for?	8
What our money can support and how to apply	9
What will we fund?	9
What will we not fund?	10
How do I apply?	11
When is the application deadline and when will I hear a decision?	11
How will my application be assessed?	12
Reporting requirements	12
Help with applying	12
Appendix 1	13
What do we mean by health inequalities?	14

HEADS ON

Heads On is Sussex Partnership's official NHS charity. Our vision is a world where people with severe mental illness are optimistic about the future and confident in their ability to manage their health.

Our strategy for 2025-30 focuses on disrupting inequity in mental health care. To achieve this, we have three core objectives:

- **Equity Through Innovation:** driving solutions that disrupt health inequalities, reducing the mortality gap for people with severe mental illness and learning disabilities.
- **Building Blocks:** tackling the unequal social and economic determinants of mental health in housing, finances and access to work.
- **Creative Recovery:** building confidence, quality of life and social connection through the arts, nature, sport and food & nutrition.

The Futures Fund is part of our competitive internal grant opportunities under Equity for Innovation in 2026-27.



A huge thank you to all our supporters who have made the Futures Fund possible, including the many staff whose passion and dedication has extended into raising money for Heads On.

Heads On Futures Fund

Futures Fund awards are open to services within Sussex Partnership to generate ideas, provide proof of concept and test and adopt new ways of working and new technologies. Futures Fund awards will fund direct project delivery.

Ideas can be developed by staff or service users within both clinical and support services. A named Sussex Partnership service must lead the funding application and project if awarded a grant.

A total grants budget of £105,000 is available with a maximum grant request of £40,000 for innovative future focused programmes supporting health equity that contribute to delivery of our 2025-30 strategy.

Heads On Futures Fund

2026–27



Sussex Partnership's Transformation and Improvement teams can support you in developing your project/improvement idea alongside Heads On. Please contact Michelle Eades, Deputy Director of Transformation and Change, at michelle.eades@nhs.net, or James Atkinson, Deputy Director of Improvement & Effectiveness, at james.atkinson14@nhs.net.

Innovation

Through the Futures Fund we will fund innovation within Sussex Partnership that finds better ways to deliver care, improves patient outcomes & enhances the overall patient experience.

We can support both Service Innovation and Digital Health Technologies.

Innovation supported by Heads On can be either:

- **Invention** (creating new ideas, services or models of care) or
- **Scaling Up** (bringing what has worked elsewhere to Sussex Partnership).

If you are applying for innovation that is Scaling Up we will expect that there is an existing evidence base for the work you want to introduce at Sussex Partnership, a business case that demonstrates confidence that it will succeed here and a sustainability plan for how the work would be continued beyond a Heads On funded pilot if the innovation were successful.

Please note that all Heads On Futures Fund awards are one-off innovation grants; we cannot support projects on an ongoing basis following a Futures Fund award.

Who Can Apply?

Core Eligibility

During 2025–30 Heads On is targeting our grant funding and programme delivery into the five most deprived areas of Sussex, directing our support to those who need it most.

We will only accept Futures Fund applications that will deliver work supporting communities in areas of deprivation within:

- **Hastings and Rother**
- **Brighton and Hove**
- **Bognor Regis and Littlehampton**
- **Eastbourne, Hailsham and Seaford**
- **Crawley**

The Futures Fund is only open to internal applications submitted by Sussex Partnership employees to deliver innovation within SPFT. Applications are welcome from both clinical and support services to deliver work that addresses the funding priorities and can demonstrate positive impact on patient outcomes.

Ideas can be generated by staff or service users, a named Sussex Partnership service must manage the application and project delivery if successful.

We are particularly keen to see applications that place the voice of lived experience at their heart and address our strategic objective of Building Blocks, addressing the social determinants of mental health, by offering voluntary and paid employment opportunities for those with lived experience.

A service can only submit one application to the Futures Fund.



Core Funding Priorities – Futures Fund

Within the geographical areas listed in Core Eligibility, your project must address at least one of the following funding priorities:

1. Improving access to mental health care particularly for groups who face additional barriers to accessing healthcare.
2. Increasing the quality of care available for those accessing services, particularly for groups who experience poorer mental health outcomes.

We are especially keen to receive applications for projects that support people from racialised communities; neurodivergent people and people with a learning disability.

Projects supporting racialised communities must be strategically aligned with Sussex Partnership's delivery of the Patient Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF).

We welcome applications with Voluntary Sector Partners however a Sussex Partnership service must lead the project.

All projects submitted to the Futures Fund must:

- ✓ Be co-produced with project beneficiaries with lived experience - service users, carers and staff as appropriate to your project.
- ✓ Be for work delivered within one of the 5 geographical areas listed under Core Eligibility.
- ✓ Address one or both of the funding priorities, supporting achievement of **Heads On's 2025 – 30 strategy**.
- ✓ Meet the eligibility criteria for funding.
- ✓ Be strategically aligned with **Sussex Partnership's 2025 – 30 strategy**, the **Trust's 2026–27 annual plan** and have the support of your Service' Managing Director.
- ✓ Be new activities that will not start until after a funding decision (expected December 2026).
- ✓ Support project delivery. We expect applicants to be ready to start delivery within 3 months of a funding decision - by March 2027 at the latest.
- ✓ Be completed, including evaluation, within 2 years of a funding decision. The latest date to submit your evaluation will be January 2029. Failure to submit a project evaluation will mean your service is unable to apply for future Heads On funding.
- ✓ Have a sustainability plan for delivery beyond Heads On funding. Our money can only be used for innovation - piloting and testing new ideas. We cannot continue to fund projects beyond this stage and part of the application form will ask you to outline how you expect the work to continue beyond our award.



What Futures Funds are available and how much can I apply for?

- ✓ Heads On will award up to £105,000 in Futures Fund grants. There are two categories of Futures Fund available; Unrestricted and Restricted.
- ✓ You can choose whether your application is considered for an Unrestricted or Restricted Award or both. To be considered for a Restricted award your project must fall within one of the funding priorities of the Restricted funds listed.

The **maximum** Grant you can apply for is £40,000 across both categories.

The **minimum** Grant you can apply for is £10,000 across both categories.

- **Unrestricted Futures Fund Awards** - total grants budget of £42,000
Unrestricted Futures Fund awards are funded by the Heads On General Fund.
- **Restricted Futures Fund Awards** - total grants budget of £63,000
Restricted awards are available from the following restricted funds:



Fund	Fund Restriction	Total Fund
Heads On CAMHS	Projects within CAMHS services	£10,000
Learning Disability	Projects putting people with learning disabilities at the heart of their care	£27,000
AI in Mental Healthcare	Projects developing the skills and capabilities of data scientists in mental healthcare by working on real-world problems that address the Futures Fund funding priorities	£16,000
Racialised communities	Projects that improve mental health outcomes for racialised communities	£10,000
Total		£63,000

We welcome applications to the Futures Fund that are co-funded by Sussex Partnership and/or utilise your service's existing charitable funds to provide match funding.

What our money can support and how to apply

What will we fund?

Our funding can support:

- ✓ Direct project costs including salary costs. If you are proposing a project which has salary costs attached, these must have been fully costed by Sussex Partnership finance colleagues prior to application. Costs must include all overhead, pension and on-costs. Please email spft.fin.man@nhs.net to calculate this.

Please note we cannot fund the salary costs of staff who are already employed by SPFT unless they are seconded into a fixed term project role outside of their substantive post or taking on additional hours to deliver your project in addition to their substantive role. We can fund backfill costs to release a staff member to work on your project.

- ✓ Partner costs if you are working with a VCSE partner or another external provider to deliver your project.
- ✓ Capital costs up to a maximum of 20% of your total project budget (kit & equipment).
- ✓ Venue hire.
- ✓ Evaluation costs.



What will we not fund?

- ✘ Work that is considered business as usual. The Futures Fund can only support innovation.
- ✘ We cannot support projects, equipment or items that should be covered by core NHS funds.
- ✘ We cannot fund the salary costs of staff who are already employed by SPFT unless they are seconded into a fixed term project role outside of their substantive post or taking on additional hours to deliver your project in addition to their substantive role. We can fund backfill costs to release a staff member to work on your project.
- ✘ We cannot fund projects that aid a singular individual, grants made must be to support multiple service users or carers.
- ✘ Capital costs that exceed 20% of your total project budget.
- ✘ We cannot accept projects that involve the purchase of live animals.
- ✘ Projects that do not have a clear evaluation plan in place.
- ✘ Applications for projects which have already started or will start before a funding decision.

How do I apply?

Futures Fund

- Please complete the **application form** and **project budget template**
- Please answer all the questions as fully as you can, this information will be used to assess and score your application for funding. We are sorry but incomplete applications will not be considered.
- Submit your application to **spft.grantsheadson@nhs.net** by 5pm Wednesday 30 September 2026.
- Once you have submitted your application you will receive an email acknowledging receipt.
- Futures Fund application deadline is 5pm Wednesday 30 September 2026. Applications received after this date will not be considered.

When is the application deadline and when will I hear a decision?



Fund	Application deadline	Decision date
Futures Fund	5pm Wednesday 30 September 2026	14 December 2026

How will my application be assessed?

Once we receive your application, we will check that you are eligible and have supplied all the information we need. Eligible applications will be taken forwards for full assessment; ineligible applications will be turned down at this point.

Applications for the Futures Fund will be assessed by a panel of assessors including Heads On, subject matter experts, people with lived experience and transformation & improvement colleagues. We may request additional information from you during the assessment process.

Final funding decisions for these funds will be made by the Heads On Charity Committee, a sub-committee of Sussex Partnership's board.

Heads On uses a weighted scoring system to ensure fairness in its grant making decisions; funding recommendations are then made using the results of the scoring process. Scoring will assess innovation, intended demonstrable outcome/impact, strategic alignment with Heads On and Sussex Partnership's strategies, collaboration/partnership working, utilising the voice of lived experience, value for money and learning & sustainability.

The Futures Fund is a competitive funding round and only the best applications will be offered a grant.

Reporting requirements

Successful applicants will need to work with us to develop a grant reporting schedule providing updates on key milestones for your project. Release of your grant will be linked to meeting the key milestones that we agree together.

All successful Futures Fund projects will be required to submit a minimum mid-point monitoring report and evaluation report at project close; quarterly reports may also be required dependent on the project length. Successful applicants will be required to work with Heads On to report project progress using the Heads On impact measurement framework. More information on this will be made available following funding decisions.

We expect project reports to include case studies on the impact of our funding.

Help with applying

Heads On are holding a webinar to introduce the Futures Fund and its priorities this year on Monday 15 June 2026 10-11am, explaining how to apply and answering any questions you have. We will also be sharing the learning from previous years of the Futures Fund including what makes a good application. **Please sign up here.**

If you need more support following the webinar you will also be able to book a 1-2-1 advice session with a member of the Heads On team.

Please email any questions you have about applying to **spft.grantsheadson@nhs.net**

Appendix



Appendix What do we mean by Health Inequalities?

Health Inequalities & the Social Determinants of Health

*Health inequalities are avoidable, unfair and systematic differences in health between different groups of people. Our focus for 2025-2030 continues to address health inequalities across Sussex, with a particular focus on disrupting those inequalities.

Please visit [The Kings Fund](#) for a further introduction and explainer to health inequalities.

**The Social Determinants of Health

The World Health Organisation defines the **social determinants of health** (SDH) as the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies and political systems.

The following list provides examples of the social determinants of health, which can influence health equity in positive and negative ways:

- Income and social protection
- Education
- Unemployment and job insecurity
- Working life conditions
- Food insecurity
- Housing, basic amenities and the environment
- Early childhood development
- Social inclusion and non-discrimination
- Structural conflict
- Access to affordable health services of decent quality.

Research shows that the social determinants can be more important than health care or lifestyle choices in influencing health. For example, numerous studies suggest that SDH account for between 30-55% of health outcomes.