

Call for Applications: EKFZ Clinician Scientist Advancement Program

Supporting Clinical Research Competencies in Digital Health

1. General Information

The Else Kröner Fresenius Center for Digital Health (EKFZ) is launching open-topic Clinician Scientist centred funding opportunities. The program is aimed at physicians at different career stages who wish to build or further develop their academic careers in the fields of digital medicine, AI-supported healthcare, MedTech innovation, data-driven clinical research, or translational health technologies.

The program seeks to:

- introduce early-career clinicians to scientific work and digital methods (Beginner Level),
- support emerging Clinician Scientists in leading innovative, digitally supported clinical research projects (Intermediate Level),
- and strengthen experienced candidates in establishing an independent research profile (Advanced Level).

Research topics are not restricted but must clearly relate to the EKFZ agenda, i.e. digital health, artificial intelligence, sensor technologies or medical devices. Projects may cover any part of the entire value chain or product life cycle, ranging from idea development and proof of concept to the design of clinical studies and translational applications. All projects should be based on a proven clinical need that is addressed through innovative ideas. The program offers support for attending seminars, training courses and topic-specific conferences. In addition, participants are encouraged to associate with the Dresden School of Clinical Science.

2. Program Objectives

The program combines elements of classical Clinician Scientist training with innovation-focused EKFZ support structures. It aims to:

- facilitate protected research time (without extending speciality training)
- support clinical digital innovation by fostering translation of scientific discoveries, build bridges between clinical practice, technology, and (translational) research,
- strengthen methodological skills in i.e. computer science, engineering, project management and transfer and implementation
- foster the emergence of a new generation of technology-competent Clinician Scientists and research-oriented physicians,
- enable a unique clinical and scientific focus.

3. Eligibility

- Early-career physicians (in training) or board-certified physicians with an interest in digital health research
- In exceptional cases: psychotherapists in training
- Employment at University Hospital Carl Gustav Carus during the entire funding period is a plus
- Written approval from the clinic guaranteeing release from clinical duties as requested or upon personal invitation by an EKFZ Member

4. Funding Framework

- Duration: 12 - 24 months
- Start: flexible
- Approximately 400.000€ is available per year (for all projects)

- Funding includes:
 - Personnel costs (via PKE reimbursement model or TV-L)
 - Project-related consumables
 - Travel and education costs.
- Optional resources:
 - Costs of project-related personnel
 - Provision of methodological supervision (AI, data science, MedTech),
 - Collaboration (direct funding possible) for facilities or other TUD/UKD-groups,
 - Collaboration (no direct funding) with Fraunhofer institutes or HZDR,
 - Provision of administrative support (specifically Grant Management, Regulatory Affairs Support, Science Communication and Outreach)

5. Funding Tracks (Levels)

Both clinical and research experience should be considered equally important when determining the appropriate funding track.

Beginner Level (no to first research experience, typically already completed doctorate (Dr.med.), experience as student assistant in a research group):

For candidates who are new to clinical work and/or research.

Objectives: foundational skills in scientific work, digital health methodologies, and technology-enabled research.

Funding elements:

- Budget for own personnel costs: Partial clinical release (20–50 %) for a maximum of 24 months or 100% research (TV-L)
- Travel budget for conferences and training events
- Work on research project and own personal development/soft skills

Intermediate Level (2–5 years of clinical/research experience)

For Clinician Scientists with initial clinical and/or research experience (typically first publications after doctorate degree (Dr. med.), participation in a research group) and a clear project idea.

Objectives: independent execution of a focused research project; methodological deepening.

Funding elements:

- 50–100 % clinical release for 12 - 24 months
- Structured research project with defined milestones
- Budget for own personnel costs, a research assistant, master student or doctorate candidate (Dr. med.)
- Travel budget for conferences and training events

Advanced Level (>5 years of clinical/research experience)

For experienced Clinician Scientists (usually after completing specialist medical training) planning complex digital clinical research projects.

Objectives: preparation for external funding applications, leadership of interdisciplinary teams, development of proof-of-concept research.

Funding elements:

- 20–100 % clinical release for 12 - 24 months
- Structured research project with defined milestones
- Budget for own personnel costs, other project-related personnel (PhD Student) and consumables
- Travel budget for conferences and training events

6. Responsibilities of Awardees

- Compliance with good scientific and clinical practices
- Dissemination of research outputs via peer-reviewed publications
- Reporting of potentially patentable results to the EKFZ Project Office
- Submission of a final project report within 6 months after funding completion
- Awardees are expected to actively engage with the EKFZ (e.g. contribution to the EKFZ Spring School “Clinicum Digitale”), participate in meetings and conferences where appropriate, and maintain regular communication regarding project progress and milestones.
- Awardees are encouraged to associate with the DSCS and contribute to their mentoring programs

7. Two-stage Application and Selection Process

The selection process follows a two-stage procedure to ensure high-quality project proposals and efficient evaluation. A committee consisting of the following reviewers will evaluate the projects submitted: a member from the Faculty of Medicine at TUD Dresden University of Technology, a member from another EKFZ-affiliated faculty of TUD, an external reviewer (from outside TUD), an EKFZ professor, a head of an EKFZ research group, and a representative of the EKFZ administrative office

Stage 1 – Initial Submission (mandatory for all applicants)

Applicants must submit the following documents:

1. Curriculum Vitae (CV; including motivation, if applicable: list of publications and external funding)
2. Short project summary (1–2 pages), outlining:
 - a. a clearly defined clinical need,
 - b. planned innovative digital or technological approaches,
 - c. demonstrated potential relevance and benefit to digital health,
 - d. defined personal goal of research time (e.g. PhD, Habil., spin-off etc.) and appropriate mentorship per level.
 - e. close collaboration with an EKFZ-affiliated research group is a plus.
3. If needed: Written release statement from the clinical department confirming the agreed protected research time (12 – 24 months) incl. earliest starting date.

Only complete submissions will be considered for evaluation.

Selected candidates will be invited to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Full Proposal (upon invitation only)

Applicants invited to the second stage must provide a detailed project description, including:

- Scientific background and rationale,
- Objectives and hypotheses,
- Methodological approach and planned work packages (depending of funding track)
- Milestone plan with timeline (depending on funding track)
- Specification of required resources and support structures,

- Other planned collaborations (if applicable).

The full proposal forms the basis for final evaluation and funding decisions.

Evaluation Criteria

All project proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Convincing innovative digital or technological approach
- Clearly defined clinical need
- Convincing motivation and allocation of funding to achieve goal
- Appropriate scientific environment
- Appropriate length/amount of protected research time
- Completeness of submission
- Scientific track record and third party funding depending on research experience

8. Submission & Deadline

Submission deadline for Stage 1: 31.08.2026.

Submission: ekfz@tu-dresden.de

Candidates selected for Stage 2 will receive an invitation with further instructions and a deadline for submitting the full proposal.

9. Contact

EKFZ Project Office

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