

Sex and Gender in Research – Policy Update

In light of NIHR launching their new policy on Sex and Gender on 10th November, it seems timely for the [Oxford Health BRC EDI Team](#) to share a key summary of this, the Wellcome Trusts existing policy, and other helpful resources. ¹

Both policies have been developed in collaboration with [The MESSAGE](#) (Medical Science Sex And Gender Equality) project – a joint initiative between The George Institute for Global Health and Imperial College, London, funded by the Wellcome Trust.

NIHR Policy (Effective from 10 November 2025)

Full Policy available here: [Sex and gender in research policy](#)

This policy applies to all NIHR funding opportunities that go live on or after 10 November 2025, except for those areas specifically stated as out of scope. This policy is a core component of our inclusive research funding conditions.

Applies to:

- Domestic research programmes
- Personal Career Development Awards with a research plan
- Publications reporting NIHR awards

Out of Scope:

- schemes using NIHR Research Infrastructure and/or Consortium standard application forms
- Global Health Research programme
- applications for Personal Career Development Awards without a research plan
- NIHR research that is funded prior to the policy launch date

Definitions

- **Sex:** Biological attributes (chromosomes, hormones, gene expression, reproductive organs). Includes intersex and variations in sex characteristics (VSC).

¹ These summaries have been generated by AI and checked for accuracy

- **Gender:** Social identity and roles, including gender identity, expression, modality (cis/trans), and perceived gender. Recognizes gender as non-binary and intersectional.

Requirements: Researchers must:

- Account for sex and/or gender across the entire research lifecycle:
 - Design, population definition, recruitment, data collection, analysis, dissemination.
- Disaggregate data by sex/gender unless strongly justified.
- Pre-clinical research must include sex-based sampling and analysis.
- Secondary data use must describe sex/gender distribution and limitations.
- Funding committees must assess sex/gender integration quality.
- Award holders must report findings by sex/gender.

Terminology Guidance, includes detailed definitions for:

- Cisgender, transgender, intersex, non-binary
- Sex assigned at birth, biological sex
- Hormone profiles, gene expression, phenotype/genotype

Wellcome Trust Policy

Full Policy available here: [Sex and gender in health research policy - Funding Policy](#)

Applies to: all Wellcome Trust funded research involving humans and animals, as well as human or animal tissues and cells

Definitions:

- **Sex:** Biological attributes (chromosomes, hormones, gene expression, reproductive organs). Includes intersex/VSC.
- **Gender:** Identity and social roles, including gender identity, expression, modality, and perceived gender.

Requirements: Researchers must:

- Integrate sex and gender where appropriate across:
 - Research design, recruitment, data collection, analysis, and outputs.
- Specify which sex/gender characteristics are relevant.

- Include representative samples of sexes/genders.
- Conduct disaggregated analysis by sex/gender.
- Justify if sex/gender is not considered.
- Report findings with sex/gender dimensions in publications.

Implementation

- Policy is part of Wellcome's broader EDI and responsible research conduct framework.
- Linked to other policies on human participants, animal research, and clinical trials.
- Offers resources from CIHR, NC3Rs, and other global best practices.

Other useful links

- [The MESSAGE](#) (Medical Science Sex And Gender Equality) project – a joint initiative between The George Institute for Global Health and Imperial College, London, funded by the Wellcome Trust - aims to improve the integration of sex and gender considerations across data collection, analysis and reporting in biomedical, health and care research in the UK.
- UKRI, Medical Research Council Statement of Intent for Integrating sex and gender considerations in research: [MRC-111223-StatementOfIntent-MESSAGE.pdf](#)
- The Health Research Authority (HRA) and Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) are currently drafting inclusion and diversity guidance. You can view the latest draft and get involved in the pilot here: [Increasing the diversity of people taking part in research - Health Research Authority](#)
- Equality Impact Assessments should be part of research design, this toolkit from NIHR ARC East Midlands is widely recognized and utilised: [Equality Impact Assessment \(EqIA\) Toolkit | ARC EM](#)
- The LGBT Foundation can provide support to researchers that want to have a positive impact on LGBTQ+ lives: [Conducting and Supporting Research – LGBT Foundation](#)
- This guidance from AdvanceHE, although not research specific, provides up-to-date (24th June 25) and inclusive guidance on how to capture diversity data: [Guidance on the collection of diversity monitoring data](#)