
CURE HEART & BRAIN

*GUIDE FOR
APPLICANTS*

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WHAT CNIC CAN OFFER

The Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Cardiovasculares (CNIC), a world-class centre for translational cardiovascular (CV) research, is a strategic international centre for translational research.

The CNIC is funded through a pioneering public-private partnership between the Spanish Government and the Pro CNIC Foundation, a consortium of eleven major Spanish companies, most of them with an international presence.

The CNIC's international standing and research excellence has been recognized by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation with the award of the Severo Ochoa trademark, the highest distinction for Scientific Excellence in Spain.

The CNIC is supported by an external Scientific Advisory Board composed of leading international experts who provide guidance on strategy and regularly assess the center's performance.

CNIC research is dedicated to understanding the basis of cardiovascular health and disease and to translating this knowledge into improved patient care.

CNIC's mission is to improve cardiovascular health in the general population by generating scientific knowledge, efficiently translating that knowledge to the clinic, and providing new researchers with comprehensive training.

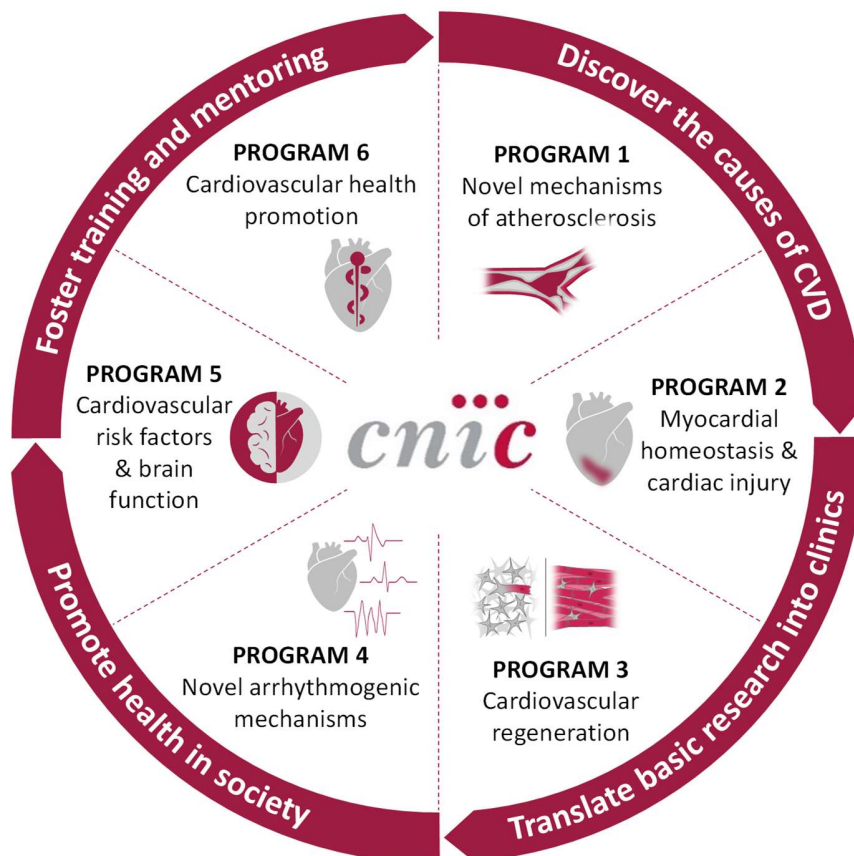
CNIC is based in a 24,000 m² building with a laboratory space totaling 6.000 m². CNIC's premises boast the most modern research infrastructure.

Currently, a total of 449 people work at the CNIC (62% women), with 321 researchers, technicians and trainees (63% women). The scientific area of the CNIC is organized in two departments oriented to Basic Research and Clinical Research, completely interconnected through six focused programs with 32 research groups (7 led by clinicians), and 11 technical units in one transversal technology development programme. In addition, 235 visiting scientists from different national and international centres completed stays at the CNIC lasting from one week to a whole year.

The CNIC research groups occupy positions in the highest ranks of productivity and international leadership.

SECTION 1: CNIC's RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

CNIC's mission is to discover the causes of cardiovascular diseases (CVD), translate frontline basic research findings into clinical practice, promote health in society & foster training of scientists & physicians. With a pioneering public-private funding formula in Spain, CNIC has consolidated itself as an internally influential CV research centre that fosters close collaboration between basic & clinical researchers and has established networks with hospitals to ensure that acquired knowledge can be efficiently translated into real health benefits for society. CNIC is organized in 6 scientific programs as depicted in figure below. Training is a core activity at the CNIC and the centre makes exceptional efforts to attract & train the brightest young people and to create a pool of excellent CV researchers.



SECTION 2: WORKING CONDITIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

CNIC was recently chosen one of the four best cardiovascular research institutes in Europe. With modern infrastructure and an open-minded philosophy, and consistent with the European Charter & Code for Researchers, the CNIC offers unique career opportunities in the area of cardiovascular and neurovascular studies:

- **Externally evaluated scientific track:** CNIC provides a clear postdoctoral career path. In line with the Spanish Science Act, postdocs are employed for up to 5 years within one of the official CNIC postdoctoral categories (level 0 [trainee], 1, 2, 3) according to their research experience, publications, awards, etc. CNIC postdocs typically move to another postdoctoral stay or start their independent research career at another institute. Outstanding postdocs with an exciting research proposal on a topic different to the supervisor's field are evaluated by the Scientific Advisory Board and can ascend to an independent PI position.

- A **consolidated network** has been created through agreements with hospitals, universities & research centres in USA, UK, EU and elsewhere. These partnerships support joint training programs & researcher exchanges.

- **Institutional administrative support:** CNIC offers all types of administrative support to its workers through the following units: (i) The *Research Office* supports CNIC's Research Groups and Technical Units in a wide variety of processes, from grant and fellowship application, justification, scientific documentation, budget monitoring, personnel recruitment, laboratory organization, basic laboratory techniques, laboratory equipment evaluation, and administrative tasks and in the organization of scientific activities, etc. The Research Office is a hinge structure composed by scientific managers, logistics technicians and research assistants, aimed as a communication channel between the researchers and the general administrative structures of CNIC. (ii) The *Technology Transfer Office* (TTO) ensures that scientific and technological developments generated by the CNIC are accessible to a wider range of users who can then further develop and exploit the technology into new products, processes, applications, materials or services. It handles IP, patent applications, licences and agreements such as MTA, CDA, RCA, etc.. (iii) The *Project Office* stimulates and supports the CNIC's research activities by identifying and supplying information about public and private sources of funding for research - grants, providing support in preparation and submission of proposals by CNIC researchers, administering research grants, preparing grant financial statements. (iv) The *Communication Office* handles press releases, news, the CNIC Pulse magazine and other outreach activities.

- **Services & Facilities:** The CNIC has outstanding facilities that include an 8-storey building fully dedicated to research (21,000 sq. f) and state-of-the-art infrastructure distributed in 11 technical units that provide specialised service to CNIC's researchers.

WHAT CURE HEART & BRAIN CAN OFFER

Cure Heart & Brain, the postdoctoral COFUND fellowship program run by CNIC is open to excellent researchers of any nationality to perform research on heart and brain and their connection, which are issues of utmost medical and social importance.

The selection and recruitment process will follow the European Charter and Code for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and will be merit based, independent and transparent. Applications will be evaluated based on merit-based principles and their scientific excellence by external evaluators.

Fellows are allowed to choose CNIC's host group and secondment options. Applicants are free to propose a research topic, as far as it fits within scope of the center and is it feasible to implement at CNIC.

Cure Heart & Brain program counts with participation of 24 Associated Partners from all over the world and from different sectors who will provide translational elements (see **Annex 3** to call: for list of Associated Partners offering secondments).

CNIC Offers:

- Employment contract for postdoctoral researchers according to art. 22 of Spanish Law on Science, Technology and Innovation ("Ley de la Ciencia") with duration of 36 months
- Access to state-of-the art infrastructures and advanced technologies.
- Integration into an excellent scientific environment.
- Incorporation adaptable to the candidate circumstances
- Implementation of the research project presented by the fellow
- Incorporation within the Cure Heart & Brain program
- Training: the programme will offer training to develop key transferable skills and competences, foster innovation, entrepreneurship, promote Open Science practices, FAIR data management, and public engagement. The fellows will acquire new skills through advanced training, international, interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility.
- Secondment options at Associated Partners premises or chosen by fellows
- Supervision by the CNIC's Group Leaders and co-supervision by PIs from Associated Partners.

EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS & SALARY

Salary offered:

Minimum gross salary to be offered to the researchers, as set out in Annex 1 (excluding employer's social contributions):

No family allowance: 38.600 euros / year

With family allowance: 39.500 euros / year

Employment contract for postdoctoral researchers will be made according to art. 22 of Spanish Law on Science, Technology and Innovation ("Ley de la Ciencia") with duration of 36 months.

In line with the most advanced trends in investigator training, the CNIC will offer to fellows full time employment contracts with full Social Security benefits and rights as established by the most recent Spanish labour law on Science, Technology and Innovation. The contract will include sickness, parental, unemployment and invalidity benefits, pension rights, benefits in respect of accidents at work and occupational diseases. Full-time work is established at CNIC as 37.5 h per week. The CNIC has an advanced policy on matters of **welfare benefits**, with the most modern flexible remuneration systems. Among others, the most significant are: **Flexible remuneration plan**: this is a personalized remuneration system that enables each employee to decide how to receive his yearly income so that it best matches their personal and family needs, allowing significant tax savings. **Life insurance**: all CNIC workers are covered by an insurance policy of approximately 37,000 € that covers (i) death or absolute permanent disability due to illness, (ii) permanent disability due to accident, (iii) double compensation in the case of accidental death, (iv) civil liability insurance so that Investigators and technicians should be safe and supported with regard to the possible repercussions their work may have on third parties. **Flexible working hours**: modern criteria for reconciling work and family life are taken into consideration when establishing flexible working hours. **Assistance for nursery care**: employees with children under three years of age receive a monthly check of 300 euros for day-care expenses. **Company canteen**: a heart-friendly menu, subsidized by the CNIC, as well as a canteen and vending machines, are available to the staff at the centre. **Training in English or Spanish**: CNIC organizes English courses for all interested staff members that take the form of personalized training for small groups with native teachers. Spanish classes are also offered to foreigners in order to help them become familiar with the language. **Work and family life balance plan**: CNIC incorporates the measures for work and family life in public regulations, including teleworking when possible according to CNIC's teleworking general agreement signed with the Unions. Physical and mental safety conditions at work as well as the workers' health are regularly monitored with an **annual medical check-up**.

CALLS & ELEGIBILITY CRITERIA

SECTION 1: CALL CALENDAR

Call 1: Call opening: 1 November 2023. Call deadline: 31 January 2024

Call 2: Opening 1 September 2024 / Deadline 30 November 2024

Call 2: 8 positions offered.

The foreseen duration of the contracts will be 3 years.

Foreseen start date for contracts in call 2: April 2025.

If any position remains unfilled, new call will be published.

SECTION 2: ELEGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

(1) Researchers must not have resided or carried out their main activity in Spain for more than 12 months in the 36 months immediately prior to the call deadline (reference date for call 2 is 30th of November 2024).

(2) Researchers must be in possession of a doctoral degree* at the deadline of the co-funded programme's call.

**A medical doctor degree will be accepted only when it corresponds to a doctoral degree or if the researcher can demonstrate his/her appointment in a position that requires doctoral equivalency (e.g. professorship appointment). Medical doctor degrees corresponding to basic medical training as defined in Annex V of Directive 2005/36/EC will not be considered a doctoral degree. Researchers who have successfully defended their doctoral thesis but who have not yet formally been awarded the doctoral degree will also be considered as postdoctoral researchers and will be considered eligible to apply.*

(3) Researchers who are already permanently employed by CNIC at the call closing date (reference date for call 2 is 30th of November 2024) are not eligible.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

The application process comprises of two steps:

SECTION 1: 1st STAGE OF APPLICATION PROCESS: COLLECTION OF EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST AND ELIGIBILITY CHECK

Applicants will be required to apply through CNIC's online application system at <https://www.cnics.es/en/convocatoria/cnic-cureheartbrain> where they will fill in their personal details and attach their resumes and PhD/MD title. During this step the candidates will also be asked to fill in a simple Application Form ([Annex 1 to the call](#)) where their preferences regarding the CNIC's hosting groups* and secondments** will be defined. Candidates that do not fulfil the eligibility criteria will be allowed two weeks for amendment of the submitted information. Eligible applications will be matched with the host groups at CNIC.

***Candidates will be able to present one proposal with one hosting group of their choice (detailed in [Annex 2 to the call](#)) and indicate 2-4 reserve groups within the CNIC.**

****Rules regarding the secondments**

Researchers can choose freely their secondment options. The number of secondments and their duration will be agreed between the fellow and the supervisor based on the need of the research work planned and the career development plan of each fellow.

The following requirements apply:

- The duration of all the secondments must not be longer than 30% of the duration of the employment contract.
- All researchers must undertake at least one inter-sectoral secondment during their fellowship.

During the 1st stage of application process the candidates will be asked to fill in the Application Form ([Annex 1 to the call](#)). The Application Form includes a question about the secondment's preferences. As this field is not obligatory to fill in during the 1st application stage, the fellows can indicate their preferences for secondments if they are known. If not, these can be defined during the second stage of application (proposal preparation). The candidates can choose to carry on secondments at the premises of the Partners associated to our programme (see [Annex 3 to the call](#) for list of Associated Partners accepting secondments) or can indicate their own preferences. If the fellows choose the secondment options at Associated Partners, there is no action required from the candidates, as CNIC will carry on all the necessary arrangements for these stays. In case secondment options outside the Cure Heart & Brain partnership are chosen the candidates will have to make sure that the hosting institutions agree to host them and will be willing to sign a Partnership Agreement with CNIC.

SECTION 2: 2nd STAGE OF APPLICATION PROCESS—PROPOSAL PREPARATION

Candidates that passed the eligibility check will be asked to write a project proposal and prepare a Career Development Plan with the help of one of the CNIC’s Group Leaders of their choice. Templates and information for the second step of the application will be provided to the eligible candidates.

SELECCION & EVALUATION PROCESS

After the first stage the eligible candidates will be matched with the hosting groups and will prepare project proposal and Career Development Plan with the help of one of the CNIC’s Group Leaders.

The research proposal has to be submitted using a **predefined template**. The research proposal will be evaluated as described below. During the second stage of evaluation interviews will be performed.

SECTION 1: 1st STAGE OF EVALUATION PROCESS—EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT’S PROPOSAL

Evaluation scores are presented in the table below. Evaluation scores will be awarded for the criteria, and not for the sub-criteria (maximum 5 points). The threshold for individual criteria will be 3.5. The overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual scores, will be 70%. The top candidates in the ranking list will pass to the interview phase (Evaluation Stage 2).

Evaluation criteria for research proposal			
Criteria	Sub-criteria	Weight (%)	Ex aequo priority
Excellence	Quality of the research and innovation objectives (ambition, state of the art)	50%	1
	Methodology (interdisciplinary approaches, gender dimension and other diversity aspects, open science practices)		
	Quality of proposed training and secondments (internationality, interdisciplinary, inter-sectoral relevance, career development plan)		
	Quality and appropriateness of the researcher’s professional experience, competences and skills		
Impact	Measures to enhance the career perspectives and employability of the researcher and contribution to his/her skills development	30%	2
	Suitability and quality of the measures to maximise expected outcomes and impacts (dissemination, exploitation, communication)		

	The magnitude and importance of the project's contribution to the expected scientific, societal and economic impact		
Implementation	Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks, appropriateness of duration of the contract in respect to chosen research in case of choice of shorter period of implementation than 3 years	20%	3
	Quality and match of research proposal and the CNIC group (facilities/infrastructure, scientific coherence)		

SECTION 2: 2nd STAGE OF EVALUATION PROCESS – EVALUATION OF THE INTERVIEW

Evaluation scores for the interview phase are presented in the table below.

Evaluation criteria or the interview	
Criteria	Weight (%)
Academic background and achievements	25%
Presentation of the proposed research project	25%
Match between call objectives and candidate long-term goals	25%
Potential for long-term achievement	25%

The top 6 candidates that pass the threshold and who have solved the ethical issues will be invited to sign the employment contracts with CNIC.

TRAINING & PERSONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT PLAN

SECTION 1: TRAINING PROGRAMME

Given the mission to “improve CV health”, a key strategy of CNIC is to train the next generation of translational researchers endowed with knowledge of both basic and clinical/applicable aspects of research so that they will be in a position to shorten the timeframe to ‘translate’ fundamental research results into practical applications.

Training will be delivered through 3 main actions, as detailed below: (i) Training through research; (ii) Training through training activities, delivered both locally and through network-wide events; and (iii) Career development actions. Several training modules will be delivered via eLearning platforms to minimise interference with laboratory work and to reduce the Network's carbon footprint. eLearning modules will be shared freely.

Training options will be adjusted on individual bases within each Career Development Plan.

Training through research

- *Research Projects*: All researchers will carry out an original research project at CNIC.

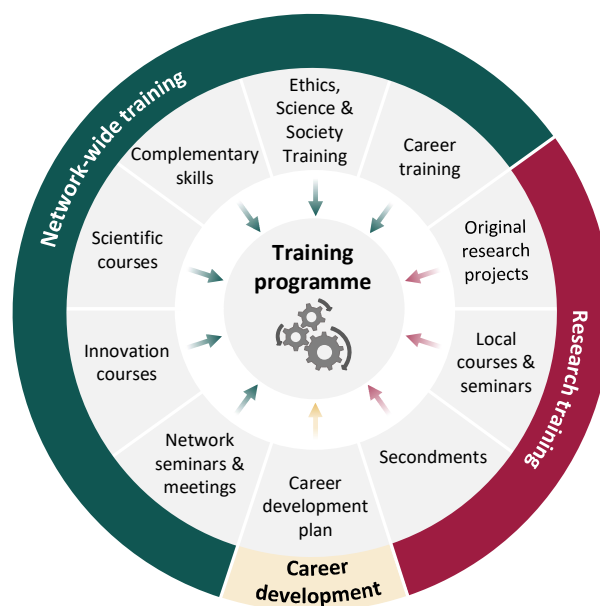
- *Local courses*. Researchers will undertake basic specific research courses. The typical courses include:

Experiment design and data analysis: Researchers will be trained in the basics of designing research experiments, analysing the data and interpreting the results, and data protection.

Language and Health and Safety issues: Researchers will also be offered Spanish language courses at CNIC.

- *Local Seminars*: Researchers will participate actively in local seminars and lab meetings in which they will present their work, thereby improving their presentation skills.

- *Secondments*: all researchers will undertake at least one inter-sectoral secondments that will be meaningful for their projects and will broaden their research perspective and increase their employability.



Summary of CURE HEART & BRAIN's training programme.

Network-wide training

Network-wide training events will be attended by all researchers, to ensure broad training skills across different domains. There will be 6 event types: Annual Meetings, Monthly Seminars, Scientific courses on cardiovascular pathophysiology, Innovation courses, Leadership skills, and Responsible research and innovation training.

SECTION 2: CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Supervision arrangements

CURE HEART & BRAIN has devised a complementary supervision scheme that ensures comprehensive supervision of the fellows at different levels in their host groups and during secondments. Each fellow will be assigned a **supervisory team**.

- **Primary supervisors** (*Supervisor 1*, the PI in the group selected by the researcher) will (i) Facilitate access to resources and background results; (ii) Ensure equal treatment and raise awareness about Code of Ethics, European Code for Research Integrity, and Green Charter; (iii) Ensure the researcher acquires the necessary technical and transferable skills; (iv) Supervise daily research progress, providing constructive feedback and guidance; (v) Review and update the career development plan (CDP) together with the Training Committee and the researcher; (vi) Encourage the researcher to gain autonomy and acquire leadership and MGMT skills; (vii) Provide career counselling and networking opportunities; (viii) Raise awareness to ensure the researcher's wellbeing. The primary supervisors will meet researchers in formal weekly meetings and more informally on a daily basis to discuss research progress and training, and receive feedback.

- **Co-supervisors** (*Supervisor 2*) will be **from non-academic sector**, to ensure cross-sectoral supervision. This role will be handled by the PIs from the Associated Partners, and, if necessary, each CNIC's PI will arrange for their external collaborators to act as **co-supervisor**. They will act as the supervisor during the inter-sectoral secondment and, in addition, they will (i) Provide a complementary view of the researcher's research project, including the cross-sectoral perspective and needs; (ii) Provide career advice complementary to that of the primary supervisor; (iii) Expand on the networking opportunities provided by the primary supervisor; (iv) Contribute to the CDP preparation and review. Meetings: monthly with researcher and primary supervisor.

- A **Mentor** will be assigned to each researcher. They will (i) Provide general guidance and counsel to the researcher; (ii) Encourage the researcher to dedicate time to their wellbeing and a healthy work-life balance; (iii) Contribute to the researcher's integration into the research community, providing community-building opportunities; (iv) Help to solve potential disagreements between researcher and supervisor(s). Fellows will interact with their mentors regularly in person or by email/TC and will meet more formally with them in 1 h slots every 6 months.

Future career perspectives

CURE HEART & BRAIN has a very thorough career development programme. In addition to training through research projects, secondments and courses, the following actions will be implemented:

- **Career development plan:** The CDP will be the framework for planning, promoting and supporting the personal, professional and career development of the fellows.
- **Key performance indicators:** Specific KPIs tailored to the researchers' individual needs will be designed and included in the CDP.
- **Networking:** Researchers will be personally introduced to key actors in academia, industry or the health sector that can provide advice and further contacts to improve the fellows' acquisition of missing skills, know the field in which they aspire to work and meet potential future employers.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Equal Opportunities: CNIC ensures strict compliance with legislation and principles promoting equal opportunities, the programme design ensures gender balance among the consortium bodies and supervision and equal opportunities for the fellows.