

EULAR  
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## THE EUROPEAN LEAGUE AGAINST RHEUMATISM, EULAR, LAUNCHES VIRTUAL RESEARCH CENTRE

**Improving the lives of people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases through research**

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**Kilchberg/Switzerland: Chronic and often painful rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases disable millions of people in the EU and worldwide [1]. The causes of more than 200 of these conditions are still unknown, and there are no cures. Research and innovation are crucial to improve the understanding of the causes and characteristics of this disease group so that we can develop better prevention strategies and treatments. With this new Virtual Research Centre, the European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR) aims to provide a virtual hub to help accelerate research into rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases across Europe and worldwide by bringing together and mobilizing a multidisciplinary research community interested in pursuing research into rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases.**

Much research is needed, including better ways to prevent these conditions, identify risk factors, and diagnose these diseases earlier. Such improvements will also help to alleviate the effects of other chronic diseases that often concur with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, and depression.

"There are many barriers that make research into rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases across Europe difficult," says EULAR President Professor Dr. Iain B. McInnes from Glasgow, Scotland, UK. "Reducing the burden of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases on individuals and societies requires comprehensive and coordinated actions at EU, national and regional level, as well as in different policy areas such as public health, health care and employment and social affairs. Under the EULAR Virtual Research Centre, we will develop initiatives that aim to bring researchers, institutions, and organizations together to start a more coordinated dialogue," explains McInnes.

Other research challenges include the limited funding that minimises what researchers can accomplish. Scientific institutions that are willing to collaborate often depend on short-term project funding which narrows the research projects and questions scientists can take on. To help address these barriers, the new EULAR Virtual Research Centre facilitates collaborative basic, clinical, and translational research to improve the lives of people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases. The centre does this by providing a research roadmap that highlights unmet needs as well as research resources, infrastructure, services, and training to enable high-quality, interdisciplinary rheumatic and musculoskeletal disease research. Service examples include:

- **The EULAR Consultation Service** will provide expert advice to investigators with the goal of improving the quality of their research protocols. Researchers and health professionals can receive help with formulating research questions, methodology, and data analysis.

- The **EULAR Shared Technology Service** will help researchers to get access to the latest technology to perform innovative and high-quality research on rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases. The idea is to improve the quality of research and remove access barriers to innovative technology-driven research methods and equipment that researchers in low-resource settings may face.
- The centre will also offer **team science support** efforts by bringing together scientists, clinicians, health professionals, patient advocacy organisations, and other community members to solve interdisciplinary, system-wide scientific and operational problems in rheumatic and musculoskeletal disease research that no one team can overcome alone.
- Through the **EULAR School**, the Virtual Research Centre will further provide training opportunities for a highly qualified, diverse rheumatic and musculoskeletal disease workforce from researchers, clinicians and other health professionals to patient researchers. Topics will include research methods, digital health, and data science with a focus on research into rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases.

To advance its mission, the centre also develops broad coalitions and partnerships at the local, national, and international level to integrate existing resources, support research that addresses the needs of people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases, and foster innovation in the field. “Europe already has a number of excellent research networks and virtual research initiatives focused on other diseases or health topics. We look forward to forging partnerships with societies or organisations to integrate research efforts where possible across Europe and to leverage existing resources,” says McInnes.

Visit the centre’s webpage at [www.eular.org](http://www.eular.org).

### Additional Resources

- Factsheet on rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases in Europe  
EULAR RheumaMap

### Reference

[1] van der Heijde D, Daikh DI, Betteridge N, et al. Common language description of the term rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) for use in communication with the lay public, healthcare providers and other stakeholders endorsed by the European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR) and the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) *Ann Rheum Dis* 2018;77:829–832.

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