Co-funded by the European Union

Joint Transnational Call for Proposals (2027) for

Transforming the Health and Care Workforce for Sustainable and Resilient Systems *(THCS Grant* 101095654)

Guidelines for Applicants

Important Deadlines

Submission of pre-proposal: 21 January 2027 at 14:00 (CET)
Submission of full-proposals: 24 June 2027 at 14:00 (CEST)

For further information, please visit our website: https://www.thcspartnership.eu/

or contact the THCS Joint Call Secretariat (JCS)
French National Research Agency (ANR) THCS@anr.fr
Zorgonderzoek Nederland (ZonMw) thcs@zonmw.nl
Narodowe Centrum Badan i Rozwoju (NCBR) thcs@ncbr.gov.pl

1 Table of Contents

2 Background 3

3 Fostering multidisciplinary teams & intersectoral collaboration toward implementation 3

4 Stakeholder involvement 3

4.1 Patient and citizen involvement 3

4.2 Companies 4

4.3 Ecosystem approach 4

4.4 Project idea 4

4.5 Consortium 5

4.6 Additional actors 5

4.7 Workplan 5

4.8 Exploitation 6

4.9 Policymakers & health and care authorities 6

5 THCS Knowledge Hub 7

6 Building your proposal 7

7 Registration 9

8 Submissions 9

9 Eligible annexes 10

Annex I Excerpt of Strategy Document on Strengthening Ecosystems 12

What does an ecosystem-wide approach in funded projects entail? 12

2 Background

This document outlines additional guidelines for applicants to the Transforming Health and Care Systems (THCS) joint transnational call (JTC) 2027 *Transforming the Health and Care Workforce for Sustainable and Resilient Systems*.

3 Fostering multidisciplinary teams & intersectoral collaboration toward implementation

The rapidly changing and ageing society and the occurrence of health emergencies are urging countries to efficiently respond to increasing burdens on their health and care systems, and deliver on their common commitment to high-quality health and care services. Furthermore, health and care systems share challenges that require harmonised and coordinated solutions, devised through a process that allows all stakeholders involved to design, research and implement such solutions in an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable manner, while keeping people at the centre of the system process.

It requires a truly cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary collaboration, including stakeholders from clinical research, public health, bioinformatics, technology, digital health, Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects (ELSA) research, implementation research, health economics research, actors from the public and private sector, and end-users (or experts that can support research on the impact for end-users). Consortia funded in this THCS call are required to be interdisciplinary and intersectoral. Research teams forming a consortium should include investigators from a broad range of relevant scientific disciplines, research fields or sectors, and bring together the necessary expertise to achieve the objectives as well as expected impact of the research proposed.

4 Stakeholder involvement

In the dynamic landscape of healthcare, transformative solutions necessitate an ecosystem approach that extends beyond traditional boundaries. This call for proposals invites innovative projects that demonstrate a profound understanding of this approach, ensuring their alignment with existing policy contexts and the broader ecosystem of health and care.

Proposals must explicitly illustrate their integration within this ecosystem, showcasing effective cooperation and coordination among diverse stakeholders. This includes, but is not limited to, health and care professionals, system owners, and, crucially, the end-users. The emphasis is on transcending the confines of conventional health and care domains, fostering collaboration at local or regional levels.

4.1 Patient and citizen involvement

Patients and citizens are more than just beneficiaries of healthcare innovations; health and care systems are organised around and for them; they are key informants who provide invaluable insights into the actual needs and challenges faced in healthcare experiences. By actively engaging with this group, applicants can ensure that the projects are grounded in real-world experiences, leading to more relevant and impactful outcomes. Their involvement in e.g. dissemination activities enhances the reach and relatability of the research, while their participation in the utilisation of results ensures that the solutions developed are not only practical but also embraced by those they are meant to serve.

4.2 Companies

Enterprises, ranging from start-ups to established corporations in the health and care sectors, act as catalysts for translating research into practical, innovative solutions. Companies play a significant role in the health and care ecosystem by investing in research and development, thus driving forward the frontiers of what is possible in healthcare. Their participation in this ecosystem ensures a continuous flow of new ideas and technologies, which is essential for addressing the evolving challenges in healthcare. Likewise, their understanding of regulatory requirements and market conditions can guide researchers in shaping research agendas and policies that foster a conducive environment for health and care innovation.

Furthermore, companies can act as important disseminators of innovation. By leveraging their networks, they can facilitate the widespread adoption of new solutions, ensuring that the benefits of research and innovation reach a broader audience, including patients, healthcare professionals, and policymakers.

Companies bring the perspective of economic viability, which is crucial for the long-term success of any healthcare innovation. By integrating this perspective into the research and development process, the ecosystem approach ensures that the innovations not only address current healthcare challenges but also are sustainable and adaptable to future needs.

4.3 Ecosystem approach[1]

The transformation of health and care systems is dependent on the ability of numerous actors to align their goals and actions to ensure they are complementary. In short, it requires ecosystems to be active. In the THCS Partnership, we define the term ecosystem broadly, encompassing health and care stakeholders and other related entities, regulators and end users, funders and service providers, governing bodies and health and care professions, as well as NGOs, companies, and innovators.

Each and every project funded under the co-funded Transforming Health and Care Systems partnership should clearly contribute to the transformation process. An ecosystem-wide approach in funded projects has several dimensions, ranging from the project idea, consortium composition, and additional actors, to the workplan and exploitation of the project outcomes.

4.4 Project idea

The project idea should support the THCS goal of a meaningful and sustainable transformation of health and care systems. To that end, it is necessary to ensure that the project idea or approach is relevant to the key actors, including at the policy level. In complex health and care systems involving many stakeholders, all aspects relevant to the project idea should be addressed with an ecosystem-wide approach. Interacting with actors outside the consortium, but having the same aims and seeking to align activities and strategies, will contribute to achieving the common transformative aims. At the same time, it is important to anticipate future needs, together with the relevant policy and regulatory contexts, to guarantee the project relevance. This can be achieved through engagement across the boundaries of traditional health and care domains, and in cooperation with stakeholders. Transformation processes usually require the development and use of new and/or different organisational and business models. In parallel, changes in the mindset and behaviour of

[1] This section is an excerpt from the THCS WP9 Strategy Document on Strengthening Ecosystems. An excerpt from this document can be found in Annex I and the document in its entirety can be accessed here: https://www.thcspartnership.eu/kdocs/2200549/d_9-4.pdf

actors and users will support the uptake of new approaches. Consequently, both of these aspects should be addressed in the project idea. It might be useful to also consider other relevant activities or change processes that are planned, in progress, or already implemented. This includes national as well as the regional and local levels.

Finally, the objectives of the transformative project idea should be well embedded within the organisational strategies of the consortium partners, including end users. Normally, it should be the consortium partners who exploit the project results in terms of contributing to the transformation of health and care systems (HCS).

4.5 Consortium

Ideally, the consortium will take the form of a quadruple helix, which includes end users (health/social care providers; citizens), industry/enterprises, academia and the government/policy level. In selecting project partners, it is vital to choose partners with transformative potential, as well as a vital interest in the project idea and in seeing the results implemented. Ideally, the transformative outcome of the project fits in with the single partner's organisational strategies, so that they will continue after the project has ended. Embedding the endeavour into organisational strategies will raise the transformational power of the consortium.

At the same time, partners within the consortium should have complementary expertise from the ecosystem perspective in order to best understand and act on the challenges addressed within the health and care systems.

To ensure the economic and societal impact of the specific project solution, the consortium should incorporate all the partners essential to the specific solution value chain.

4.6 Additional actors

To ensure the project results succeed in contributing to the transformation of health and care systems, it is vital to not only focus on the work done by the project consortium, but to also actively endeavour to enter long-term collaborations with partners outside the consortium. By aligning the activities with partners who share the same aims, the chances of reaching them are increased. Also, policymakers and other stakeholders play a crucial role and can contribute to implementing the project outcomes by supporting them and making the necessary decisions.

4.7 Workplan

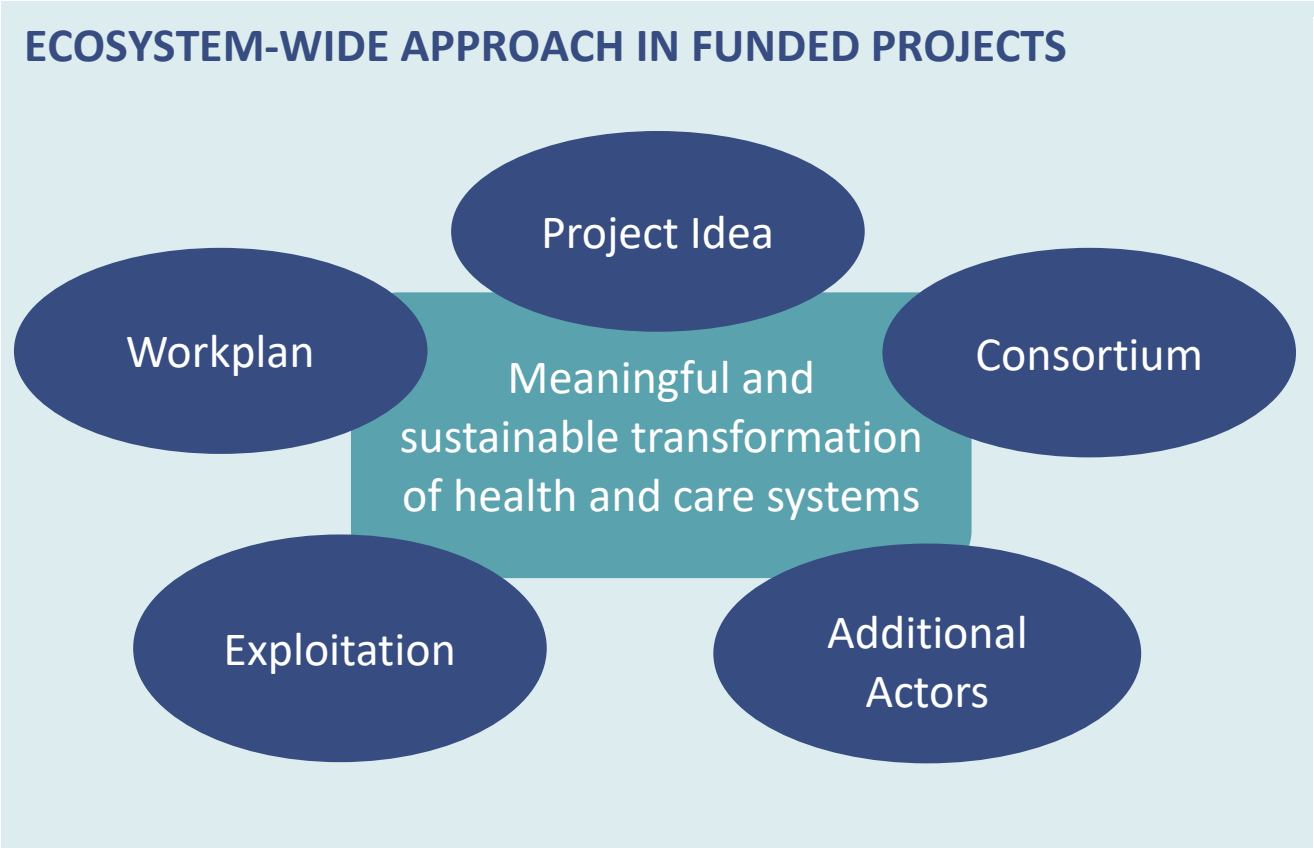
Past experience has shown that in allocating resources in consortia, there tend to be too few partners dedicated to the involvement of end users, health and care professionals, and/or other stakeholders, e.g. health and care system owners, while in fact these parties are essential to guarantee the creation of sustainable, user-centred solutions. Establishing meaningful collaboration with the ecosystem-wide actors, including iterative loops in co-design, efforts to increase understanding, and agreeing on synergetic activities, also requires the allocation of resources. The same holds true for the wider ecosystems, including at the policy level, to maximise the project's reach and impact. To prepare the future implementation of the project outcomes, the development of new/different organisational and/or business models should also be reflected in the workplan.

The installation of a strong strategic advisory board including decision makers, policy developers, early adopters, etc. helps facilitate solution uptake.

4.8 Exploitation

For the successful exploitation of the project results, it is vital the endeavours are embedded into the consortium partners' organisational strategies. To guarantee that the new solution or approach is sustainable, a business plan or business plans for the project outcome as well as an organisational model are needed.

Figure 1: Ecosystem-wide approach in funded projects.



4.9 Policymakers & health and care authorities

The impact of project outcomes on policymaking and healthcare authority regulations are crucial aspects of the research process and its subsequent implementation. Although policy-makers and healthcare authorities may not be directly involved in the day-to-day aspects of the projects, the outcomes of the research have the potential to significantly influence policy decisions and regulations. It is essential for the research to be designed with an understanding of current policy and regulatory contexts and an anticipation of future needs. This alignment ensures that the findings of the research are relevant and can effectively inform policy and regulatory changes or the creation of new policies or regulations.

The research outcomes should aim to create synergies within the existing policy and regulatory framework, enhancing the efficacy and efficiency of health and care systems. By demonstrating the practical implications and benefits of the research findings, projects can support decision-makers in addressing current challenges and seizing opportunities for innovation in healthcare. The dissemination of research results could play a crucial role in that sense. By effectively communicating findings to policymakers and healthcare authorities, the research can contribute to an informed decision-making process, leading to evidence-based policy development.

In conclusion, these collaborations are essential not only for the development of the project but also for its successful implementation and sustainability. Proposals should demonstrate how they embed their objectives within the organisational strategies of these end-users, thereby amplifying the transformative potential of the consortium.

Furthermore, the workplan of the proposals must encompass the development of comprehensive sustainability strategies. These plans should reflect a clear strategy for engaging with relevant, wider ecosystems, ensuring that the project's reach and impact are maximized. This approach is anticipated to facilitate the creation of sustainable, user-centred solutions, leading to a meaningful transformation in health and care systems.

5 THCS Knowledge Hub

THCS requires its funded research and innovation projects to register a project page on the THCS Knowledge Hub. THCS further encourages and supports its projects to share and describe innovative health and care solutions in the Knowledge Hub. This includes both solutions developed within the projects and those created elsewhere and adopted by the projects. In addition to describing the solutions, projects are also encouraged to report the evaluation knowledge related to these solutions.

A dedicated section for this purpose will be opened in the Hub, and it can be used from the start of the projects. Sharing solutions in the Hub provides visibility for the solutions, and the descriptions support their transfer and implementation across countries, systems, and organisations.

THCS will organise webinars to support the description of solutions, and information about these will be communicated to the funded projects.

6 Building your proposal

Please take note of the references below that could be helpful:

- A partnering tool supported by THCS is available at https://partfinder.ncbr.gov.pl/
- Public engagement, open access, gender equality, science education, ethics and good governance should be considered. Please visit:
  - the **Responsible Research and Innovation** site of the European Commission: https://rri-tools.eu/
  - The Societal Readiness Thinking Tool – Guide for the steps of including RRI in a project: https://thinkingtool.eu/

- EC Guide "How to complete your ethics self-assessment": https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/how-to-complete-your-ethics-self-assessment_en.pdf

- Recommendations for patient engagement in research: https://patient-engagement.eu/
- Helpdesk for **Intellectual Property Rights** issues: https://www.iprhelpdesk.eu/
- Information about a **harmonised Data Access Agreement (hDAA)** for sharing and using controlled access data, can be found here (EU-STANDS4PM): https://www.eu-stands4pm.eu/data_access
- Support for the development of a **Data Management Plan**[2]:

  Proposals should explain how data gathered through their project would be available (findable, accessible, interoperable and re-usable) to the wider research community, even after the end of the project. In addition, THCS expects funded projects to develop data management plans (DMPs) according to international state-of-the-art standards for data security (following the **FAIR principles**[3]**, the General Data Protection Regulation**[4] **and in accordance with ethical principles**[5] **for data management)**. The project coordinator is responsible for sending the complete DMP to the JCS no later than three months after the official start of the project to the JCS.

  Compliance to the DMP must be reported in each annual scientific project progress report.

- Publication of scientific outcomes of the project are subject to **open access** and budget should be allocated for this in the proposal budget plan.

  Examples for guidelines:

  - Science Europe:
    https://www.scienceeurope.org/media/4brkxxe5/se_rdm_practical_guide_extended_final.pdf
    https://www.scienceeurope.org/media/411km040/se-rdm-template-3-researcher-guidance-for-data-management-plans.docx
  - Horizon 2020 FAIR Data Management Plan - Annex 1:
    http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/oa_pilot/h2020-hi-oa-data-mgt_en.pdf
  - The ELIXIR Research Data Management Kit (RDMkit): https://rdmkit.elixir-europe.org/
  - OpenAIRE How to comply with Horizon Europe mandate for Research Data Management:
    https://www.openaire.eu/how-to-comply-with-horizon-europe-mandate-for-rdm

[2] DMP template available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/temp-form/report/data-management-plan_he_en.docx

[3] http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/oa_pilot/h2020-hi-oa-data-mgt_en.pdf

[4] https://gdpr-info.eu/

[5] http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/h2020_hi_ethics-self-assess_en.pdf, http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/h2020_hi_ethics-data-protection_en.pdf

7 Registration

Research project consortia who intend to submit a transnational proposal should as first register at https://epss.proposals.ee/thcs/ and follow the further instructions. To register, please complete the different sections as soon as possible.

8 Submissions

Please read carefully the call text including the relevant central eligibility criteria and the regional/national eligibility and budgetary criteria before starting your proposal in order to check if you will fulfil the call's formal requirements.

Deadline to submit pre-proposal: 21 January 2027, 14:00 CET

Deadline to submit full-proposals: 24 June 2027, 14:00 CEST

To submit a proposal on EPSS, the consortium coordinator (PI) creates an account on the EPSS (https://epss.proposals.ee/thcs/). The consortium coordinator can enter, edit, and save the electronic forms, add partners and self-funded partners to the consortium, upload the annexes as a single PDF, fills the required budget for each partner and submit the proposal. Partners can enter and edit their own data only. Each partner and self-funded partner must connect itself to the EPSS before the submission deadline, to validate its participation with the project consortium. Links and hyperlinks are not allowed. Information entered or uploaded on the platform can be updated until the submission deadline.

For applicants from some regions/countries it may be required to submit the proposal or other information, before the deadline of this call, directly to their relevant regional/national funding organisations. Therefore, applicants are strongly advised to verify the respective regional/country-specific funding organisation regulations and other specific information.

Please Note:

It is mandatory to meet the deadline and to follow the format of the proposal structure.

The Joint Call Secretariat will check the proposals submitted to ensure that they meet the call's formal criteria (e.g. date of submission; number of participating countries; eligibility of the coordinator; type of project partner; inclusion of all necessary information in English and appropriate limits on length). In parallel, the Joint Call Secretariat will forward the proposals to the relevant regional/national funding organisations that will perform a formal check of compliance with their respective eligibility criteria. Proposals not meeting the formal central or regional/national eligibility criteria will be rejected. Proposals passing both checks will be forwarded to independent international scientific experts for evaluation.

It is recommended for potential project consortium coordinators to read the THCS funding organisations' eligibility criteria when looking for potential project consortium partners.

Bearing in mind that most of the management activities take up most of the coordinator's time and given the complexity of the research projects and the number of regions/countries usually

involved, project coordinators are reminded of the importance of a well-designed and feasible work plan. Those actions will require that sufficient time is allocated to the project coordinator and also involved principal investigators even before the actual project starting date, e.g. for setting up the project consortium and recruiting the necessary personnel.

Project partners are strongly advised to read the eligibility criteria of their respective funding organisations (see Annex I of the JTC 2027 Call Text) and other requirements, and to contact their respective funding agency prior to submitting the application (see Annex I of the JTC 2027 Call Text).

Responsible use of AI

When considering the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools for the preparation of the proposal, it is imperative to exercise caution and careful consideration. The AI-generated content should be thoroughly reviewed and validated by the applicants to ensure its appropriateness and accuracy, as well as its compliance with intellectual property regulations. Applicants are fully responsible for the content of the proposal (even those parts produced by the AI tool) and must be transparent in disclosing which AI tools were used and how they were utilised.

Specifically, applicants are required to:

- Verify the accuracy, validity, and appropriateness of the content and any citations generated by the AI tool and correct any errors or inconsistencies.
- Double-check citations to ensure they are accurate and properly referenced.
- Be conscious of the potential for plagiarism where the AI tool may have reproduced substantial text from other sources. Check the original sources to be sure you are not plagiarising someone else's work.
- Acknowledge the limitations of the AI tool in the proposal preparation, including the potential for bias, errors, and gaps in knowledge.

9 Eligible annexes

There will be the possibility to add the following annexes:

Pre-proposal stage

- Annex 1 – List of references (max. 1 page);
- Annex 2 – Page with diagrams, figures, etc. To support the project description (max. 1 page).

Full-proposal stage

- Annex 1 – List of references (max. 1 page);
- Annex 2 – Diagram which compiles the work plan, timeline and milestones (max. 1 page). The diagram must demonstrate the work plan, timeline, sequencing of work packages, milestones as well as the contribution of the partners to each work package and their interactions (i.e. time plan, Gantt and/or PERT or similar);

- Annex 3 – Figures. Page with diagrams, figures, etc. to support the project description (max. 1 page);
- Annex 4 – Letters of Commitment. Please remember that each collaborator must precisely describe the resources that he/she will dedicate to the project (personnel, material, in kind/in cash, …) and the origin of these resources in a letter of commitment. The letter of commitment has to be signed by the director of the institution (NOT by the researcher himself);
- Annex 5 – Description of interventional studies - to fill in case interventional studies are included in the proposal.

Annex I Excerpt of Strategy Document on Strengthening Ecosystems

The following is an excerpt draft of the THCS WP9 Strategy Document on Strengthening Ecosystems. This is included as a guide to applicants to what is meant by an eco-systems wide approach in context of THCS. The full document is available on the THCS website: https://www.thcspartnership.eu/kdocs/2200549/d_9-4.pdf

What does an ecosystem-wide approach in funded projects entail?

The transformation of health and care systems is dependent on the ability of numerous actors to align their goals and actions to ensure they are complementary. In short, it requires ecosystems to be active. In the THCS Partnership, we define the term ecosystem broadly, encompassing health and care stakeholders and other related entities, regulators and end users, funders and service providers, governing bodies and health and care professions, as well as NGOs, companies, and innovators.

An ecosystem-wide approach in funded projects has several dimensions, ranging from the project idea, consortium composition, and additional actors, to the workplan and exploitation of the project outcomes. In detail it entails:

Project idea

- Ensure the project idea or approach is relevant to the key actors, including at the policy level.
- In complex health and care systems involving many stakeholders, address all aspects with an ecosystem-wide approach.
- Transformation processes usually require the development and use of new and/or different organisational and business models. In parallel, changes in the mindset and behaviour of actors and users will support the uptake of new approaches.
- Embed the objectives of your transformative project idea within the organisational strategies of the consortium partners, including end users.
- When designing a project idea, focus on supporting the THCS goal of a meaningful and sustainable transformation of health and care systems.
- To guarantee project relevance, it is important to anticipate future needs, together with the relevant policy and regulatory contexts. This is achieved through engagement across the boundaries of traditional health and care domains, and in cooperation with stakeholders.
- Consider other relevant activities or change processes that are planned, in progress, or already implemented. In doing so, pay attention to local or regional levels.

Consortium

- Create a consortium composed of, at minimum, end users (health/social care providers; citizens), industry/enterprises, and academia. Ideally, it will take the form of a quadruple helix, which additionally includes the government/policy level.
- Collaborate with partners who have transformative potential. Ideally, the transformative outcome of your project fits in with their organisational strategies, so that they will continue after the project has ended.
- Embedding the endeavour into organisational strategies will raise the transformational power of the consortium.
- Assemble your consortium with partners who have a vital interest in the project idea and in seeing the results implemented.

- Seek complementarity in terms of expertise from an ecosystem perspective.
- Ensure your consortium incorporates all the partners essential to your solution value chain, to ensure its economic and societal impact.

Additional actors

- Throughout the duration of the project, endeavour to enter long-term collaborations with partners outside the consortium who share your aims, so that by aligning your activities you can jointly work towards reaching them.
- Throughout the duration of the project, establish contacts with policymakers and other stakeholders who play a crucial role in supporting and making the decisions needed to implement your project outcomes.

Workplan

- Dedicate sufficient resources to the development of new/different organisational and/or business models.
- Plan for sufficient resources to establish meaningful collaboration with the ecosystem-wide actors, including iterative loops in co-design, efforts to increase understanding, and agreeing on synergetic activities.
- Take into consideration the need for behavioural changes to successfully complete the testing phase and facilitate adoption of new approaches, including technological approaches.
- Establish links to wider ecosystems, including at the policy level, to maximise the project's reach and impact.
- Install a strong strategic advisory board including decision makers, policy developers, early adopters, etc. to facilitate the uptake of your solution.
- Involve end users, health and care professionals, and/or other stakeholders, e.g. health and care system owners, to guarantee the creation of sustainable, user-centred solutions.

Exploitation

- Embed the endeavours into the consortium partners' organisational strategies.
- Develop a business plan for the project outcome/solution. This might involve developing several business plans depending on the specific contribution of the consortium partners, and on the new solution or approach.
- Develop the organisational models needed to guarantee that the new solution or approach is sustainable.