



SPRINT PROJECTS 2026

Call for proposals

CALL FOR SPRINT PROJECTS 2026

From next-generation ideas to real-world change

Healthy Start believes that every child and young adult deserves the best possible start in life. Tackling the complex challenges they face — from health inequalities to mental well-being and participation in society — requires speed, creativity, and collaboration across disciplines.

That is why we are launching the 2026 Call for Sprint Projects that connect researchers, practitioners, and partners in society to shape healthier futures for the next generation. **This year, you can apply for one of two project types:**

1. Conceptualization Projects

These projects are about exploration and creativity as well as strengthening transdisciplinary collaboration. Designed to expand the Healthy Start portfolio and community, and spark new ways of thinking.

Purpose: Conceptualization projects focus on generating fresh, transformative ideas that contribute to our six core ambitions. A proven link to at least one of the Healthy Start ambitions is essential, whilst simultaneously providing additional value.

Teams: At least two Convergence institutes (Erasmus MC, Erasmus University, TU Delft) and one external partner.

Outcome: A new concept, collaboration, or prototype that could grow into a larger project or funding application.

Examples:

- **Exploratory or feasibility studies:** Small-scale studies contributing to one of the six Healthy Start ambitions.
- **Co-creation workshops** with researchers, clinicians, youth and/or societal partners to generate innovative approaches.
- **Feasibility assessments:** Evaluating the potential of an innovative idea through literature reviews, stakeholder interviews, or pilot data collection.

2. Implementation Projects

Implementation projects aim to transform knowledge into solutions that bridge science with society. These projects should demonstrate clear pathways for translating research findings into practice, policy, or community solutions, or support the implementation or adoption of research findings. Strong partnerships with implementation stakeholders are key to success.

Purpose: Bring scientific insights into the real world to create measurable impact.

Teams: At least two Convergence institutes (Erasmus MC, Erasmus University, TU Delft) and one external partner.

Outcome: Tangible impact in healthcare, education, or policy — solutions that leave a footprint beyond the project.

Examples:

- **Piloting an evidence-based intervention** in schools, clinics, or communities
- **Scaling up proven solutions** to new populations or regions
- **Creating policy briefs, symposia, or training modules** for professionals
- **Developing digital tools or platforms** that empower children, families, or practitioners

Both project types share a common goal: to drive meaningful change through collaboration, innovation, and action. We encourage proposals that break silos, leverage diverse expertise, and deliver measurable contributions to the Healthy Start mission.

NB. External partners may include public, welfare and private organizations, government bodies and city councils

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Who can apply?

All academic staff from Erasmus University, Erasmus MC and TU Delft.

Budget and funding principles

- The maximum requested budget per project is € 20.000,- for a maximum duration of 12-months.
- Funding can be used for:
 - Direct project costs (e.g. materials, data collection, events, workshops).
 - Hiring or contract extension of a staff member if clearly justified and linked to the project goals.
- Funding cannot be used for:
 - Writing your own hours on the project.
 - Compensation for hours of tenured academic staff
 - Subcontracting consultancy firms.

Eligibility Criteria

- **Project types:** Applicants must clearly indicate in the application form whether the proposal is for a Conceptualization Project or an Implementation Project.
 - **Conceptualization Projects:** Focus on generating new ideas and concepts. Teams should emphasize transdisciplinary collaboration and creative approaches that strengthen the Healthy Start portfolio and community.
 - **Implementation Projects:** Focus on translating existing scientific insights into practice. Teams should demonstrate strong partnerships with implementation stakeholders (e.g., healthcare providers, policymakers, community organizations) and a clear pathway to real-world impact. In addition, applicants are strongly encouraged to involve an expert in this area, such as an innovation manager, communication specialist, policy advisor, or business developer—to maximize the project's reach, adoption, and sustainability.
- **Team composition:**
 - Project lead: Conceptualization applications must be submitted by an academic staff member from one of the Convergence institutes (Erasmus University, Erasmus MC or TU Delft). Implementation applications must be submitted by an academic staff member from one of the Convergence institutes, or a non-academic organization. Eligible academic roles include clinicians, tenure-track, lecturers, postdocs, and PhD candidates.
 - The project team should consist of at least two Convergence institutes (Erasmus MC, Erasmus University, TU Delft) and one external partner with a concrete contribution to the project. A Letter of Commitment (using the provided template) is required, detailing the external partner's role, (in-kind) contribution, and contact details.
- **Contribution to Healthy Start ambitions:**

The project must clearly demonstrate its alignment with at least one of the six Healthy Start ambitions, with a well-articulated explanation of how it contributes to the selected ambition(s) and how it offers a complementary or innovative approach compared to existing initiatives. If desired, applicants may discuss their plans with the relevant Ambition Lead to reflect on how their project provides additional value to the Healthy Start ambitions (see appendix for contact details).
- **Application limits:** Applicants may choose to submit proposals in both the Conceptualization Project and Implementation Project types. However, it is not permitted to act as the main applicant in both. This means that each applicant may serve as main applicant in only one proposal but may participate as co-applicant in another.
- **Previous grantees:** Conceptualization' proposals cannot be continuations of Sprint Projects funded in previous editions. However, previously funded projects are eligible to apply for an 'Implementation' project.
- **Budget:** The requested budget may not exceed €20,000.
- **Deadline:** Complete applications must be submitted by **Thursday, 30 November 2025, 11:00 CET**.

Evaluation Criteria

All eligible proposals will be assessed on the following aspects:

- **Impact potential**
 - Conceptualization: potential to grow into larger research, collaborations, or funding.
 - Implementation: clear pathway to adoption and measurable real-world impact.
- **Feasibility and quality of the plan**

The proposal should present realistic objectives, a clear and structured methodology, and a plan that is achievable within the sprint timeframe and budget.
- **Collaboration and team composition**

The strength and complementarity of the transdisciplinary team, including the involvement and commitment of new (external) partners.
- **Communication and dissemination strategy**

The quality of the plan for sharing results and engaging relevant stakeholders, including the involvement of experts such as innovation managers, communication specialists, policy advisors, or business developers.

Additional considerations

While all proposals will be evaluated on merit, the selection committee may give additional consideration to projects that establish strong new collaborations within the Healthy Start community, as well as those that aim to scale, sustain, or embed successful existing projects.

Selection procedure

All submitted proposals will first be checked for eligibility based on the criteria outlined in this call. Eligible proposals will then be reviewed by the Academic Leads of Healthy Start: Vincent Jaddoe, Renske Keizer and Jan-Carel Diehl.

In cases where a committee member has a conflict of interest, appropriate measures will be taken to ensure a fair and transparent process (e.g. recusal from discussions and decisions related to the proposal in question). Proposals will be assessed on their quality, relevance to Healthy Start ambitions, and potential impact.

The final selection will aim to ensure a balanced portfolio of projects across the two categories (Conceptualization and Implementation) and across the six Healthy Start ambitions.

Administration and obligations

The granted budget should be spent before **15 December 2026**, and all invoices submitted.

The following obligations apply if you receive funding:

- Upon request, applicants should make results and other project updates available to Healthy Start to be shared through our channels such as our website.
- Periodically Healthy Start will organize a get-together between the Sprint Teams and the Healthy Start Leads to answer questions, connect networks and give support where needed.
- Within 1 month after completion of the project (latest one month after 31 December 2026) we ask you for a written and detailed report on the budget and results. The format of the report will be shared with you and will follow the lines of the application.

How to Apply

Applicants should complete the official Application Form, including all required support letters, and submit the entire package **as one single PDF file** to: healthystart@convergence.nl

The application must include:

- **Completed Application Form** (download from the Healthy Start website).
- **Letter(s) of Commitment** from external partner(s).

Please ensure that your application is complete and submitted before the deadline. Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered.

Timeline

Milestone	Date
Call for proposals opens	13 October 2025
Submission deadline	30 November 2025, 11:00 CET
Eligibility check & evaluation	1 – 12 December 2025
Announcement of awarded projects	15 December 2025
Project start date	1 January 2026
Project end date (Financially)	31 December 2026
Final project report (on budget and results)	31 January 2027

Contact

For questions please contact Aniek van Vlaardingen (a.vanvlaardingen@tudelft.nl) and Georgia Taxiarchopoulou (georgia.tax@eur.nl).

HEALTHY START MISSION, VISION AND AMBITIONS

Children's early development is significantly influenced by factors such as parental health, family stress, and the quality of their living environment. Children growing up in socially vulnerable circumstances often experience disadvantages from the very beginning. A lack of coherence between the medical and social domains also hinders effective and integrated support.

At Healthy Start, we envision a society in which every child and young adult—regardless of background or circumstances—has the opportunity to develop to their full potential. We believe that equal opportunities begin with a healthy start in life. That's why we focus on targeted prevention, strong collaboration between science and practice, and a clear focus on the first 1000 days. By recognizing health disparities early, we work towards a healthier and more resilient life course for everyone. In this way, we contribute to a future in which health, well-being, and participation are not dependent on where you were born.

It is Healthy Start's mission to contribute to the development of innovative prevention and intervention approaches through co-creative research that give children and young people the best possible start in life, regardless of their background or starting point. We connect interdisciplinary scientific insights with practical applications and collaborate with young people, healthcare professionals, educational organizations, technological innovators, and regional partners to achieve meaningful, sustainable, and inclusive system changes.

Website: convergence.nl/healthy-start/

Ambition 1 - The 1st 1000 days

The first 1000 days of a child are crucial for the entire life course. The environment in which mother and child find themselves can have an impact on the health and well-being of the child, also later in life. Examples of environmental factors are the physical place of residence, a small social network, an unhealthy lifestyle and severe stress. Negative consequences of these factors increase the chance of poorer health at birth and can even be passed on to subsequent generations. In this way, inequality of opportunity is maintained intergenerationally.

To tackle intergenerational inequality of opportunity, we enlist social and medical support. Fragmented supply hinders timely care. Our goal is to give every child an optimal start and break cycles. We use integrated care, co-creation, education, and research. We promote reproductive and parenting appreciation, better leave arrangements, and childcare, while monitoring social impact of the activities.

Contact: Romy Gaillard r.gaillard@erasmusmc.nl

Ambition 2 - Pediatric hospital of the future

With a transdisciplinary and systems approach, we connect medical, technical, and social sciences with the experiences of healthcare professionals, parents, and children. Together, we develop innovative and feasible healthcare solutions that contribute to accessible, personalized, and sustainable care. We seek answers to crucial questions: Which healthcare services can be provided closer to home instead of in the hospital? How can we make care more targeted and personalized? How can we shorten hospital stays? How can we effectively integrate new technologies into healthcare systems? And in what ways can we improve the experience of children, parents, and healthcare providers alike?

By being smart and wise about our use of technology and organizing care efficiently, we create more space for personal attention and job satisfaction. This not only leads to better care for patients but also fosters a work environment where healthcare professionals can work with fulfilment and joy. In this way, we strengthen the healthcare system and build a future in which healthcare remains family-centred, sustainable, and affordable.

Contact: Saba Hinrichs-Krapels s.hinrichs@tudelft.nl

Ambition 3 - Digital empowerment of (children's) physical activity

Nearly half of the children in the Netherlands do not engage in enough physical activity. For children with chronic diseases, maintaining an active lifestyle is even more crucial, as it significantly improves their overall health and helps prevent complications of their disease. This project aims to explore how smart digital technology (e.g., wearable fitness trackers, mobile applications, and sensor-based systems) can create innovative ways to monitor, motivate, and enhance daily physical activity for children with chronic diseases in a home setting.

By integrating insights from diverse stakeholders (e.g., families of children with chronic disease, healthcare professionals) and multiple disciplines (e.g., family sociology, health psychology, industrial design), we will investigate how to effectively use technology to empower not only the children but also their families and broader support networks. Initially, we will focus on children with congenital heart defects, who often face greater physical and mental barriers to participating in sports and exercise. Subsequently, we will expand our approach to benefit children with other chronic conditions. Our ultimate goal is to create a smart, adaptive digital platform that supports children with chronic diseases and their parents in achieving an active, healthy lifestyle.

Contact: Arend van Deutekom a.vandeutekom@erasmusmc.nl

Ambition 4 - Mental well-being of youth

The mental well-being of young people is under growing pressure, and preventive solutions are urgently needed. Universal school-based interventions are often proposed, since schools reach nearly all adolescents and young people themselves express a wish to learn about mental health in these settings. Yet, it remains unclear which approaches truly fit the developmental needs of youth, and evidence suggests that “one-size-fits-all” strategies may not be equally effective for everyone.

Our ambition is to identify and strengthen the conditions that foster mental well-being in adolescence and early adulthood. Using youth participatory research, we investigate what mental health means to young people themselves and what they see as necessary to thrive. We study promising supportive factors such as the role of teachers and other role models, and explore how digital tools and early detection technologies can contribute. By linking insights from schools, higher education, youth mental health services, and policymakers, we aim to create preventive and scalable strategies that help build a mentally resilient generation.

Contact: Danielle Remmerswaal remmerswaal@essb.eur.nl

Ambition 5 - Tackling juvenile delinquency and addiction

Adolescents and young adults with antisocial behavior and addiction problems struggle to function in a variety of areas, including employment, education, income, social relationships and mental health. Prevention and intervention strategies have been developed to, but there are limitations in their effectiveness – for example, we know little about long-term effects and approaches focused on individual differences.

Moreover, these strategies often focus only on juvenile delinquency or addiction, while research shows that some of these behaviors stem from the same mechanisms and influence each other. For example, youth use both drugs and delinquent behaviors to reduce negative feelings or increase positive feelings of control. Therefore, it is important to develop strategies that support young people and give them control, based on their motivation and long-term goals. In this project, we examine how effective these strategies are and how they can be optimized using existing knowledge and technologies such as smartphones.

Contact: Reshmi Marhe marhe@essb.eur.nl

Ambition 6 - Youth participation and involvement

Our ambition is to empower the next generation of youth to feel confident in their ability to shape the future society and address its inherent challenges. We do this by deep diving into the needs of youth through collaborating and co-creating with young people and societal partners (such as youth organisations).

Despite the growing number of youth participation initiatives in both research and policy, significant groups of young people remain underrepresented. Our work addresses this gap by exploring how to meaningfully engage diverse groups of youth.

In our transdisciplinary work, we deliver innovative and inclusive participatory insights and tools, as well as promote the development of skills and supportive environments for youth. Our projects are designed to make participation accessible, relevant, and impactful for all youth, helping to build a society that reflects their voices and aspirations.

Contact: Lysanne te Brinke tebrinke@essb.eur.nl

APPENDIX 2

LETTER OF COMMITMENT BY EXTERNAL PARTNERS

The letter of commitment provided by all external project partners should specify the following:

- The role of the partner in the project
- The contact person (and details) dedicated to this project
- The specified in-kind contribution provided by the partner
- If applicable: agreement on use and ownership of project results, output (foreground) and existing knowledge (background)

[Date]

Dear members of the evaluation committee,

On behalf of [name of external partner], we hereby express our commitment to [name of main applicant] in their application for [name of project].

[A two-sentence description of the organization who is offering the letter of commitment]

[A two-sentence description of why the organization is choosing to join this sprint project]

[The agreed role of the partner during (and if applicable after) the project]

[The agreed in-kind contribution of the partner in the project (e.g. man hours, facilities, materials, etc.)]

Item/resource	Description (incl duration and quantity)	Estimated value

If you require more information about [name of partner offering support], please contact us via [email].

Sincerely,

[Name of individual],

[Position or title within organization],

[Name of partner]