

**Embargoed until 0001 BST on 29 July 2021**

Coeliac UK joins pioneering charity initiative to end autoimmune conditions

A first-of-its-kind research charity research partnership has attracted further support in confronting the UK's high prevalence of autoimmune conditions.

Coeliac UK has joined the Connect Immune Research initiative, which includes the type 1 diabetes charity JDRF, the MS Society, Versus Arthritis, Alopecia UK, the Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Alliance, and supporting partner the British Society for Immunology.

The organisations will work together to accelerate research into autoimmune conditions, which see the body's immune system mistakenly attack healthy cells.

Autoimmune conditions affect an estimated four million people in the UK – equivalent to more than six per cent of the population – but are currently incurable.

This includes 670,000 with coeliac disease, caused by a reaction to gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye.

The Connect Immune Research initiative brings together researchers from across these autoimmune conditions to uncover the common threads in their work – meaning greater efficiency and hopefully new treatments, faster.

As well as accelerating research into new treatments for millions of people, the approach could also dramatically reduce costs. As a result, member charities believe this innovative approach could be key to helping the medical research sector adapt to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

**Dr Heidi Urwin, Director of Evidence and Policy at Coeliac UK said:**

“Coeliac disease is a common autoimmune condition which affects 1 in 100 people in the UK, but currently only around 30% of people are diagnosed. We are delighted to join the Connect Immune Research initiative as an associate member and look forward to working alongside a wider range of expert researchers and other charities.

“It's really important that researchers share knowledge and collaborate to advance understanding to achieve earlier discoveries. This initiative will hopefully accelerate progress in developing new and effective therapies for autoimmune conditions and may even reveal ways to prevent them!”

**Rachel Connor, Director of Research Partnerships at the type 1 diabetes charity JDRF, said:**

“The UK is a world leader in immunology research, but for too long teams have been working separately, focusing on specific conditions rather than the connections

between them. As more organisations join the Connect Immune Research initiative, bringing with them their experience and knowledge, we will come much closer to the research breakthroughs that will be transformational for people with autoimmune conditions.”

#### Notes to editors

### **About Coeliac UK**

For over 50 years, Coeliac UK has been the expert on coeliac disease and the gluten free diet. We are an independent charity helping people living without gluten to live happier, healthier lives. We do this by providing trustworthy advice and support, funding critical research into coeliac disease, working with healthcare professionals to improve diagnosis and fighting for better availability of gluten free food. And we do it all so that one day, no one's life will be limited by gluten.

For more information visit [www.coeliac.org.uk](http://www.coeliac.org.uk) or follow us on Twitter: [@Coeliac\\_UK](https://twitter.com/Coeliac_UK) and on LinkedIn: [@coeliac-uk](https://www.linkedin.com/company/coeliac-uk).

### **About Alopecia UK**

Alopecia UK is the leading UK charity working to improve the lives of those affected by alopecia through aims of support, awareness and research. We collaborate and work with clinicians, researchers and industry to provide hope and confidence to people with alopecia by funding research into its causes, with the aim of finding treatments, and ultimately, a cure. We keep those with alopecia at the heart of everything we do to ensure that the voice of those with alopecia is always heard.

For more information visit [www.alopecia.org.uk](http://www.alopecia.org.uk) or follow us on Twitter: [@alopeciauk](https://twitter.com/alopeciauk)

### **About JDRF**

JDRF is the leading global organisation funding type 1 diabetes research. Our mission is to accelerate life-changing breakthroughs to cure, prevent and treat type 1 diabetes and its complications. To accomplish this, JDRF has invested more than £1.5 billion since our inception. We collaborate with the most talented minds to develop and deliver a pipeline of innovative therapies to people living with type 1 diabetes. Our staff and volunteers around the globe are dedicated to campaigning for our vision of a world without type 1 diabetes.

For more information, please visit [jdrf.org.uk](http://jdrf.org.uk) or follow us on Twitter: [@JDRFUK](https://twitter.com/JDRFUK).

### **About multiple sclerosis and the MS Society**

Over 130,000 people live with multiple sclerosis (MS) in the UK

MS damages nerves in your body and makes it harder to do everyday things, like walk, talk, eat and think

It's relentless, painful, and disabling

It's unpredictable and different for everyone

The MS Society is here to make life better for people with MS, through research, campaigning, and support.

We have a free helpline - 0808 800 8000 and information can be found on our website [www.mssociety.org.uk](http://www.mssociety.org.uk)

We're driving research into more – and better – treatments for everyone

Together we're strong enough to stop MS

### **About the Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Alliance**

The Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Alliance (PAPAA) is an independently funded charity, which supports and advises people affected by psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. Our vision is to see psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis managed in a positive way, more effectively, by putting people affected at the centre of care. We act ethically, with integrity on behalf of our constituent group and advocate and represent them fairly. We support researchers via a small grants scheme and provide healthcare professionals with resources to support their patients, along with access to an accredited professional training programme.

For more information, please visit [www.papaa.org](http://www.papaa.org) or follow us on Twitter:

@PsoriasisInfo

### **About Versus Arthritis**

There are 18.8 million people living with a musculoskeletal (MSK) condition like arthritis in the UK. That's one in four people, with half of those living in pain every single day. The impact is huge as the condition intrudes on everyday life – affecting the ability to work, care for a family, to move free from pain and live independently. Yet arthritis is often dismissed as an inevitable part of ageing or shrugged off as 'just a bit of arthritis'. We don't think this is ok. Versus Arthritis is here to change that.

Find out more at: [www.versusarthritis.org](http://www.versusarthritis.org)

### **About the British Society for Immunology**

The British Society for Immunology is the leading UK membership organisation working with scientists and clinicians from academia and industry to forward immunology research and application around the world. Our friendly, inclusive community consists of more than 4,200 immunologists, giving us a powerful voice to advocate for immunological science and health for the benefit of society.

Website: [www.immunology.org](http://www.immunology.org) Twitter: [@britsocimm](https://twitter.com/britsocimm)