

~ REQUEST FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS ~

**The Connors Center Women's Health Interdisciplinary
Stress Program of Research (WHISPR)**

Investigating physiologic and psychological stress in women's health and disease

Coversheet Due: November 7th, 2025	Final Proposals Due: December 12th, 2025	Symposium: April 2026, Date TBD
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*Sponsored by the Mary Horrigan Connors Center for Women's Health Research
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The Connors Center for Women's Health Research is pleased to announce the 9th annual request for proposals (RFP) from the Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) research community.

Established in January 2018, the goal of the **Women's Health Interdisciplinary Stress Program of Research (WHISPR)** is to advance our understanding of how physiological and psychological stress (broadly defined) affect women's health and disease, and vice versa, by supporting pilot projects, facilitating interactions among WHISPR investigators and other stress researchers, and hosting an annual scientific symposium for the BWH academic community. The scope of proposed research includes women's health-focused clinical, translational, population, and basic research studies investigating interactions of physiologic indicators of stress (e.g., adrenergic, immune, neural, endocrine) and stress exposures (e.g., trauma, adversity, cognitive, affective). In addition, the WHISPR program welcomes submissions of studies which utilize interventional approaches (including, but not limited to, behavioral, physiological, and pharmacologic) to understanding the pathophysiologic mechanisms underlying stress and test therapeutic strategies linked to clinical outcomes. WHISPR aims to involve investigators from across BWH to develop new research and foster synergy among investigators in this interdisciplinary and cross-cutting field. As a mentored program of research, WHISPR awardees will receive scientific guidance and career development advice from Connors Center leadership and a group of scientific advisors via structured events and informal interaction. Please visit the [WHISPR page](#) of the Connors Center website for information about the previous WHISPR awardees.

One 1-year grant of \$50,000 (inclusive of 20% for indirect costs) will be awarded. The awardee will be asked to present their proposed research project at the 9th annual WHISPR Symposium, which will be held **in-person in April 2026 (date still pending)**.

Proposal Review Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed by a panel of established researchers. Applications will be judged on scientific merit, feasibility, potential for future funding, fit with WHISPR, and ability to contribute to the BWH research community under a collaborative umbrella of women's health and stress.

Proposals in two priority areas are especially encouraged:

1. **Stress and the health of aging in women:** Investigate how acute and chronic stress influence cardiometabolic, neurocognitive, and affective outcomes in midlife and older women, and elucidate the mechanisms through which stress accelerates age-related decline, aligned with the Brigham/Harvard ROSA Center U54 (see <http://connorscenter.bwh.harvard.edu/score/>).
2. **Stress and structural and social determinants of health:** Examine how factors such as individual's and/or community's identities (race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender) and context (neighborhood factors, discrimination, caregiving, access to care) shape stress exposure, appraisal, resilience and coping.

Timeline:

Request for Proposals Announced:	October 7, 2025
Coversheet Due:	November 7, 2025
Final Proposal Due:	December 12, 2025
Awardee Notified:	March 13, 2026
Symposium with Awardee Presentations:	April 2026, Date TBD
Earliest Start Date:	May 1, 2026

Eligibility:

You are invited to apply if you meet the following criteria:

- The focus of your research proposal is women's health and stress (where *stress* is broadly defined).
- You have a doctoral degree (MD and/or PhD or equivalent).
- Your primary appointment is at Brigham and Women's Hospital.
- You are an early-stage investigator. For the purpose of this award, "early-stage investigator" is defined below:
 - *HMS Assistant Professors up to 3 years from appointment*
 - *HMS Instructors appointed any length of time*
 - *HMS Research Fellows whose promotion to Instructor at HMS is pending and expected to be completed during the period of the Award will be considered if a written letter from the Division Chief or Department Chair confirms the status of the faculty appointment consistent with these criteria.*
- **You are available to present your work in-person at the WHISPR Symposium.**

The program is open to both US and non-US citizens. Each applicant may serve as the Principal Investigator on only **one** proposal. Projects must be ready to commence upon receipt of the award.

Application Materials:

Part 1; Cover Sheet and Project Overview: Due November 7, 2025, at 5:00pm:

1. The Research Proposal Cover Sheet including 100-word Project Overview submitted electronically by 5:00pm to Patricia Gallegos, Connors Center Project Manager, ConnorsCenter@bwh.harvard.edu

Part 2: Cover Sheet and Full Proposal: Due December 12, 2025, at 5:00pm (No Invitation to Submit Required):

1. The Research Proposal Cover Sheet, including mentor and admin signatures, and any changes if applicable from the Cover Sheet submitted with Part 1 materials.

2. A 2-page research statement with a maximum of 500 words describing the scientific work that you propose to undertake. Figures, tables, images, and a maximum of 10 references may be included within the two pages.
3. Brief description of plans for future grant applications and investigations using these pilot data (150-word max)
4. Brief description of project in lay language for a non-scientific audience, no more than 3-4 sentences.
5. Completed one-year budget template for a maximum of \$50,000 (inclusive of indirect costs) with budget justification (200-word max)
6. NIH biosketch
7. Early-stage investigators only (see definition above): Letter of support from your mentor (1-page max, on letterhead)

Application materials must be submitted electronically to ConnorsCenter@bwh.harvard.edu by 5:00pm on December 12, 2025. An editable Research Proposal Cover Sheet and Budget Template page can be downloaded from the [Connors Center Website](#).

Application text must be in Arial, 11-point font. Single-spacing is allowed, and margins must be at least 0.5 inches. **All items above must be compiled into a single PDF in the stated order.** You may make reasonable edits to your Project Overview when re-submitting the application cover sheet with your full proposal. Incomplete applications, applications submitted in multiple files, or multiple applications submitted by a single PI will not be considered.

Please include a line-item budget using the budget template provided. Budgets may not exceed \$50,000 in total costs. Include your effort as PI and indicate whether salary support is being requested. Please provide a brief written justification (200-word max) that addresses each requested expense.

The awardee will be notified by March 13th, 2026 and informed to present their proposal at the Symposium. The presentation will be limited to ten minutes and will be followed by a Q&A. Priority will be given to early-stage investigators. Decisions from the review committee will be final. No written feedback will be provided.

Other terms of the program:

Funding recipients will benefit from their engagement with an interdisciplinary community of BWH researchers studying women's health and stress.

- Attendance at the annual Symposium and 1-2 small group meetings with other stress researchers is expected.
- All recipients will be expected to attend 1-2 structured career development activities and meet individually with the Director of Research Training for the Connors Center for Women's Health Research during the course of the award.
- Recipients may be **required to present their project** at future annual WHISPR Symposia and at other Connors Center events.

- All recipients will be required to **submit a 6-month progress report** at the halfway point of the grant, a **final report** at the conclusion of the grant, and **post-award progress surveys** on research activity following the conclusion of the grant. These reports will be submitted via RedCAP surveys sent by the Connors Center. These reports must be submitted within 60 days of their due date.
- No-cost extensions are discouraged. If a no-cost extension is requested, the requested extension must be for a 12-month period and will be formally reviewed. Should a no-cost extension be granted, awardees will still be required to submit a progress report every six months of the project period.
- Recipients must **maintain their primary appointment at BWH for the duration of the funding period**. If an awardee leaves the BWH community, all unspent funds will be returned to the Connors Center for Women's Health Research.
- Any unspent award funds at the end of the project period will be returned to the Connors Center for Women's Health Research within 60 days of the project end date.
- Recipients are **expected to remain in touch with the Connors Center for at least 3 years post-award to report on publications, grants, and other outcomes from the award**.
- Recipients must cite the funding source on all publications and presentations related to this project.

For questions about the Connors Center Women's Health Interdisciplinary Stress Program of Research (WHISPR) and associated funding opportunities, please contact Patricia Gallegos, at ConnorsCenter@bwh.harvard.edu.