



CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Art therapy 2024

CALL FOR RESEARCH FUNDING ON ART THERAPY IN ALZHEIMER DISEASE and MCI

conducted in Italy by young researchers

Background

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder that affects the brain, causing cognitive problems affecting various functions such as memory, abstract reasoning skills, language, spatial orientation ability, and behavior. MA is the most common form of dementia and usually affects older adults, although it can also occur at younger ages. The exact cause of Alzheimer's disease is not fully understood, but involves a combination of genetic, environmental and lifestyle factors. The amyloidogenic hypothesis is currently the most widely accepted of the causes responsible for AD. Beta-amyloid is a protein that is normally produced in the brain and, under physiological conditions, is efficiently eliminated from the body. However, in Alzheimer's disease, beta-amyloid tends to accumulate in the brain in the form of insoluble aggregates known as amyloid plaques between neurons. Research has helped produce drugs directed at removing amyloid from brain tissue in the belief that reducing it could slow or halt the course of AD.

However, the various attempts at treatment by active and passive immunization directed against amyloid have proven to be of low efficacy and with numerous side effects. Currently, only one antibody-acting drug (lecanemab) remains commercially approved after Biogen announced to withdraw the development and marketing of aducanumab, allowing the various centers to finish the ENVISION study as required by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Thus, symptomatic drugs

such as anticholinesterases and memantine remain available at all times.

Nonpharmacological interventions for cognitive symptoms according to established and validated protocols such as Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) are an important aspect in dementia care. The Istituto Superiore di Sanità guidelines on dementia and Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) published in December 2023 emphasize the positive aspect of such techniques, which are superior to placebo, despite the presence of studies with low reliability. In particular, critical analysis of art therapy in both dementia and risk condition such as MCI was addressed in the text.

In the context of dementia, two studies analyzed art therapy interventions for the treatment of cognitive symptoms. The first study, on 40 participants with mild to severe dementia (Li 2017), did not report differences between groups in cognitive symptoms as measured by MMSE, and the second study, on 69 participants with moderate dementia (Johnson 2020), reports no differences in cognitive function as measured by MoCA.

Two studies evaluated art therapy interventions in people with MCI. One study of 90 participants (Lin 2022) reports an improvement in the treated group compared to the control group in cognitive symptoms measured by MMSE and MoCA and in *Rey Auditory Verbal Learning* (RAVL) test scores related to immediate and delayed recognition and recall. The second study (Mahendran 2018), on 44 participants, reports an improvement in the treated group compared to the control group in the memory-related domains of the RAVL (*Rey Auditory Verbal Learning*) test, while reporting no between-group differences in the recognition and delayed recall scores of the same scale. The two studies (Lin 2022, Mahendran 2018), with a total of 134 participants, report no between-group differences in depressive and anxiety symptoms.

Other studies show that the effectiveness of art therapy in the elderly with Alzheimer's disease may be limited by the measures used to assess its impact, which may not adequately capture all the significant changes produced by the intervention (May 2023). In essence, it is believed that further research through randomized clinical trials is needed to better understand the optimal mechanisms and strategies of art therapy to promote physical and mental health in people with dementia (Qian 2023).

Our Mission and Goals

Airalzh raises funds to finance research on Alzheimer's disease and other dementias in Italy. Thanks

to the donation of drawings by Mrs. Anna, who was affected by dementia, and the contribution of donations collected from the collaboration with Coop and Pigna, this research call aims to fund two two-year projects in the sum of €50,000.00 each, aimed at the study of art therapy techniques in the treatment of cognitive and behavioral symptoms in people with MCI or Alzheimer's dementia.

1. Eligibility Criteria

Subjects

The PI must meet the following criteria on the deadline of the call:

- **has not reached yet his/her 40st birthday**, at the time of the deadline to apply to the call, extended by documented career breaks,
- **has at least 3 publications** (published or already accepted and in press) **in the last 5 years**,
- **has one publication as first or last author** (also as co-first or co-last, published in the last 5 years) in peer-reviewed journals.

PhD, medical specialty (MD) awards and research experiences abroad, although not mandatory, will be also evaluated.

Hosting institutions

The research project must be conducted in research centers, public or private, located in Italy and which have in their statute the indication of no-profit research institutions. The PI hosting institution is the only scientific and administrative contact for Airalz, it must guarantee the independence and declare to support the proposer's research by providing spaces and tools, including administrative facilities, for its development.

In this regard, a declaration signed by the Legal Representative of the hosting institution is required, to be attached to the First Application Documents (FAD, see paragraph 6) in the first phase of request submission.

2. The research project

The project must be original, in English, and must refer to the following research area:

Study of art therapy techniques in the treatment of cognitive symptoms of people with MCI or Alzheimer's dementia.

N.B.: if the project requires the Ethics Committee approval, this may be requested following the possible assignment of the funding. In this case, a postponement of the beginning of the search may be accepted.

3. Project Funding

Each project will be funded with an **amount of €50,000.00, to be used over the period of 2 years** from the start of the research, as listed below:

- 1st tranche 30,000.00 € at the beginning of the project
- 2nd tranche 20,000.00 € after 1 year, following a scientific report of the preliminary results obtained

The support will be in the form of a Liberal Donation; the host structure must have the possibility to accept this form and it must be declared in the FAD (see paragraph 6). Once the projects to be supported have been selected, Airalzh will issue a formal communication to the PI legal organization, declaring its willingness to provide a Liberal Donation; following this, the hosting institution will send to Airalzh a formal acceptance decision; after the transmission of the funds, the administrative management of the donation is entirely under responsibility of the receiving administration. After the first year from the beginning and at the end of the project, the the hosting institution financed with the Liberal Donation must transmit to Airalzh the reports; the hosting institution itself must also inform on which chapters the Liberal Donation was spent in (see section 4, fundable costs) The final scientific and administrative reports will be evaluated for the purpose of future funding requests to Airalzh. Winners may be called upon by Airalzh in outreach and/or communication initiatives that are an integral part of the Association's activities. Publications related to the funded project should make explicit in the funding/acknowledgment the reference to this call.

4. Fundable costs

The amount paid, administratively managed as mentioned above by the hosting institution, can be used to finance:

- Scholarship/research grant/staff contract, including PI (up to a maximum of 80%)
- Consumable materials
- Small instrumentation

- Publications/participation in Congresses
- Overheads or operating expenses (up to a maximum of 5%)

5. Evaluation and eligibility for project funding

Throughout the evaluation process, The CTS and CD will adhere to the rules of transparency and in opposition to conflict of interest, as established by Airalz regulations.

PHASE I - The participants to the call submit all documents indicated as FAD (First Application Documents, see paragraph 6). These will be evaluated for the attaining of the eligibility criteria by the Airalz scientific secretariat. The proposals admitted to Phase II will be selected for the relevance of the project to the research area of the call and to the objectives of Airalz by a commission nominated ad hoc by the Board. (CD).

PHASE II - The PIs of the selected proposals will then be invited to produce a Full Application Project, which will be submitted to the review process by at least two/three SC members of the Scientific Committee (CS).

SC may avail of the opinion of anonymous reviewers. This review process that will allow an impartial and competent scientific evaluation of proposals. CS members, in compliance with the rules of procedure, will examine the evaluations of the reviewers, draw up the merit ranking and assess the adequacy of the financial contributions requested.

The merit ranking will then be submitted to the attention of the Board which will establish the number of projects eligible for funding on the basis of the budget available for this call. The final ranking of the projects admitted to funding will be signed by both the CS and the Board.

All PIs will receive notification of the final decision from the Airalz scientific secretariat, with the reviewers' comments attached. The final judgment cannot be appealed.

CRITERIA FOR PHASE II

The merit evaluation of proposals will be based on the criteria below:

1. EXCELLENCE (weight 30%)
 - clarity of the project aims
 - quality of research strategies
 - originality and innovation of the project

- contextualization with respect to the state of the art
- preliminary data significance

2. OUTCOMES (weight 30%)

- Expected results and their impact on the scientific community
- potential benefits for human health

3. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR, TEAM AND ORGANIZATION (weight 30%)

- Adequacy of the skills expressed by the PI, co-PI and by any unit and members of the team involved in the research project.
- Impact of the project in terms of scientific and professional development of the proponents.

4. BUDGET and PROJECT DURATION (weight 10%)

- Budget suitability, coherence and duration of the project.

6. Submission process

PHASE I - First Application Documents (FAD).

All documents must be submitted, as one PDF (named FAD- name-surname-Arttherapy2024), by 5 p.m. on August 30th, 2024 by e-mail to the address: segreteria scientifica@airalz.it

The Application should include:

1. Curriculum vitae, reporting the date of birth.
2. Full copy of an article in which the candidate is first/last author (see par. 1.), published in the last 5 years.
3. List of Grants received and published papers of the last 5 years.
4. Synopsis. Description of the previous research experience and an abstract of the proposed project (the Synopsis should not exceed one, double-spaced page with a one-inch margin on each side, excluding bibliography)
5. Budget: a detailed description of the costs justified by their relationship to the project including: personnel, equipment, consumables, meeting and publishing costs, overhead.

The budget may be reshaped for justified requests during the course of the research.

6. Letter from Host Institute (see par. 1 for details)

PHASE II - Only PI that pass Phase I will be invited to submit a full project in Phase II. The notice will take place by October 30th, 2024. The final project must be submitted by **5 p.m. on January 13th 2025** on the Airalz website in the reserved area with the access methods that will be transmitted to the interested PIs

7. AVAILABLE BUDGET

The budget available for this call is 100,000 Euros.

Contacts: Call available on the website www.airalz.it

Email: segreteria scientifica@airalz.it

Summary

Call **Airalzh-Grants-for-Young-Researchers AGYR2024**

type	Two-step call
Deadline	Phase I August 30 th 2024 Phase II January 13 th 2025
Budget	€ 100.000
Goals	To support research projects aimed at studying art therapy techniques in the treatment of cognitive symptoms of people with MCI or Alzheimer's dementia.
Eligible subjects	Public or private non-profit institutions carrying out scientific research
Main funding limits	Maximum grant € 50.000
Contacts	Call on www.airalzh.it e-mail: segreteria scientifica@airalzh.it