Four million people in the UK are living with an autoimmune condition - which can cause pain, difficulty, lost opportunities in work and in life, and in many cases place people at risk of early death.

Four million people. That’s almost one in every 16 of us.

And autoimmune conditions are on the rise.

Treatments to manage autoimmune conditions are already costing us billions. The rising costs will hurt the public purse further.

But the rise of these connected conditions is underreported.

The four million people affected by autoimmune conditions need your support. We need you to declare that you are #AutoimmuneAware.

And we need Parliament to help autoimmunity gain the recognition it lacks, so that it can stand on its own as a distinct research area – just like cancer, infectious disease and dementia.

Women are 3 times more likely to live with an autoimmune condition than men.

400,000 people with type 1 diabetes, 400,000 with rheumatoid arthritis and 100,000 with multiple sclerosis in the UK.

With public research funders working to connect immune research, we need you to harness the support of Government.

We want you to:

• Raise awareness: declare you are #AutoimmuneAware in the media and on your own social media channels.

• Support Connect Immune Research in Parliament and give autoimmunity the recognition it deserves as a distinct research area with the potential to help four million people.

• Write to Government ministers to highlight the need to help link up research across autoimmune conditions.

This activity has been financially supported by a grant from Roche Products Ltd, Roche Diabetes Care Ltd and Chugai Pharma Ltd. Roche Products Ltd, Roche Diabetes Care Ltd and Chugai Pharma Ltd have had no control over the organisation or content of this activity.
Autoimmunity occurs when the immune system attacks the body. The immune system, which normally protects you from infection, instead targets part of the body and destroys it or stops it functioning properly.

There are over 80 autoimmune conditions, each affecting different parts of the body.

In type 1 diabetes, the immune system destroys the cells that make insulin. In rheumatoid arthritis, the lining of the joints is attacked. In multiple sclerosis (MS), the coating around nerves is damaged.

Autoimmune conditions are poorly understood. In some cases, we know that certain genes or being exposed to certain environmental factors can make some autoimmune conditions more likely.

But that’s not the whole story – something is going wrong with the immune system, and we don’t know why.

At present, autoimmune conditions cannot be cured. This means that for most people who develop an autoimmune condition, a lifetime of daily management and potential health complications and pain lies ahead.

Autoimmunity can progress faster.

And there isn’t just a personal cost. The complex and chronic nature of autoimmune conditions means that there are significant financial costs to treating them.

Direct and indirect costs to the UK for type 1 diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis alone add up to more than £13 billion a year.

Over the last three decades, the incidence of autoimmune conditions has been rising. For different conditions these increases range from between 3% and 9% per year.

This could dramatically reduce costs and speed up development of treatments for millions of people with different autoimmune conditions.

That’s why we’re launching Connect Immune Research to bring together researchers from different fields to study the mechanisms of autoimmunity in a non-condition-specific way.

Professor Yanick Crow, from the University of Edinburgh, has been awarded the first ever Connect Immune Research grant to make this concept a reality.

He will work with researchers specialists from different conditions to understand the role of immune system protein interferon in autoimmunity. The sooner we understand autoimmunity more broadly, across a range of conditions, we could discover that one treatment could be used for many conditions.

By working with scientists with expertise in different fields, we can understand autoimmunity more broadly, across a range of conditions. It’s clear that autoimmune conditions are connected. So rather than study autoimmune conditions in isolation, wouldn’t it make more sense to study autoimmunity more broadly, across a range of conditions?

We believe that by working together, research into autoimmunity can progress faster.

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