The ACE programme: accelerates progress, coordinates implementation and consistently evaluates best practice and innovative approaches to early diagnosis of cancer.

About ACE

ACE was established following an early diagnosis of cancer summit on 4 June 2014 convened by NHS England and held at the Royal College of General Practitioners in London. The summit was attended by a variety of stakeholders including leading clinicians, Public Health England, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Medical Royal Colleges, Macmillan and Cancer Research UK.

The ACE programme issued a call for projects in June 2014 with a deadline to respond of 31 July 2014. NHS England, Macmillan and Cancer Research UK all disseminated the call as widely as possible. The call asked for projects addressing the following areas:

- Straight to test and one-stop clinics
- Merging of referral routes – urgent and standard pathways
- Multidisciplinary diagnostic centres (MDC or ‘Danish model’)
- Self-referral for diagnostic tests
- Pro-active approaches to high risk patients
- Improving screening uptake generally and/or specifically in vulnerable adults
- Use of IT in primary care to identify and/or flag high risk patients
- Pathways for patients with vague symptoms
- Lowering the thresholds for two week wait referrals
- Greater role for pharmacists, opticians and other healthcare professionals in cancer referrals
Many NHS organisations across England submitted applications to have their projects included in the ACE programme. In total 89 expressions of interest (EOIs) were received and 60 projects were initially accepted into the ACE programme. The projects accepted into the ACE programme were grouped thematically into eight clusters as follows:

- Lung cancer pathways
- Proactive approach to patients at high risk of lung cancer
- Colorectal pathways
- Bowel screening uptake
- Screening uptake for vulnerable groups
- Vague symptoms pathways
- Pharmacy/other primary care
- IT tools

**Funding for ACE**

The ACE programme receives funding from NHS England, Macmillan and Cancer Research UK. Up until March 2016, around £3 million was invested centrally. ACE provided only limited funding to projects, so most were funded locally, meaning overall investment in the ACE programme is much higher.

NHS England has provided funding for the Department of Health Policy Research Units (PRUs) to undertake the evaluation of the programme. Cancer Research UK has provided funding to cover the cost of programme team staff and for individual projects.

Macmillan funded the cost of one programme team member, Macmillan GP time spent providing primary care input to the ACE programme (where necessary), and for individual projects.

Projects accepted into the ACE programme were able to apply for funding to cover project management costs. In addition, ACE has funded modest one-off set-up costs for some projects.

Throughout the programme, ACE has not funded project running costs, so projects were required to obtain such funding elsewhere. Project funding was provided via grant agreements with Macmillan or Cancer Research UK. Not all projects in the ACE programme applied for ACE funding.