

1. Clinical Academic Groups - CAG

CAG is a model and a tool for professional collaboration between clinicians and researchers in hospitals, as well as academic staff at universities and colleges. Its overarching goal is faster implementation of new knowledge in the healthcare system. Within a CAG, new ideas for research, innovation, education, and competence are developed collaboratively.

The CAG Model

Professional development often requires collaboration across various professions and disciplines, which traditional organizational frameworks do not facilitate. The CAG model supports both network building and recruitment of PhD and Post Doc positions to create a flexible collaborative structure, allowing for quicker transfer of research-based knowledge to clinical practice, thereby delivering benefit to patients and the population.

The main goals of a CAG are to:

- Improve health outcomes, experiences, and equity for patients.
- Ensure that research-based knowledge is applied more swiftly in clinical practice, in patient education, and in the training of healthcare students and staff, as well as in broad community outreach.
- Gather and support professionals from various disciplines, career stages, and experiences.
- Work evidence-based and in collaboration with service users, with a clear focus on cost-benefit and reducing unwanted variations.
- Organize a high-competence and interdisciplinary team to address a specific yet significant health challenge in the region.
- Build strong competence environments capable of competing for international research funding.
- Help identify and overcome barriers to professional collaboration between sectors and hospitals in the region.
- Develop and implement health innovations that enhance practice and quality in the healthcare service.

Something Different than a Research Project

Being awarded CAG status is distinct from receiving funding for a research project. A CAG is a summation of ongoing and planned professional activities aimed at strengthening a specific field or topic. CAGs receive funding to establish an interdisciplinary team and collaboration that gathers professional activities, contributing to the development of new knowledge, translating that knowledge into clinical practice, and enhancing competence within the healthcare service.

Typically, a CAG consists of several sub-projects or work packages designed to strengthen the selected field or topic. The CAG receives salary funding for two Ph.D. or post doc positions in addition to funding for running the CAG structure, with an expectation that the CAG will seek external funding for its professional activities. Funding provided by Samarbeidsorganet should be utilized to establish and operate the group, and support activities such as meetings, workshops, networking in the region, salaries for CAG administrators, salary for clinicians to participate in networking activities, and the purchase of services to develop proposals.

Themes

It is essential for Samarbeidsorganet that the theme of the CAG addresses the needs and challenges faced by healthcare services in Central Norway. In evaluating applications, the strategic value of the chosen theme will be a significant consideration, alongside a thorough assessment of quality and feasibility. The CAG can be established based on a specialty, disease, or set of conditions. The call for applications may also be thematic (e.g., multimorbidity), focusing on capacity and purpose (e.g., quality improvement, prevention), or a combination of these.

The call is thematically open, but in 2025 Samarbeidsorganet particularly encourages applications focusing on the following themes:

- Digital Health Solutions
- Primary and Secondary Prevention
- Multimorbidity

Training and Dissemination

Training and competence development across organizational boundaries are crucial components of a CAG. The collaboration should enhance the quality of research, making results relevant and simplifying the dissemination of knowledge in the region. High quality and relevance will facilitate attracting research funding, both nationally and internationally. Knowledge generated by the CAGs should be communicated to and

utilized by healthcare employees, health care users, researchers, educators at universities and colleges, as well as decision-makers and authorities.

How to Become a CAG

To be established as a CAG, a regional professional environment must apply to Samarbeidsorganet through a formal call and application process. Receiving CAG status provides official recognition of the collaboration among the involved professional environments within various institutions.

Potential applicants are encouraged to review the already established CAGs in Health Mid-Norway to gain insight into the themes a CAG can encompass.

2. CAG Status

There are several advantages to being awarded CAG status. All institutions central to the collaboration commit to prioritizing and supporting the activities of the CAG. As part of a CAG, participants should gain access to additional support at the leadership level, both organizationally and administratively. While a CAG is not exempt from fees for services such as the use of core facilities, biobanks, and monitoring, it should receive priority access to these services within the collaborating institutions.

The leadership of the collaborating organizations should work to raise the visibility of the CAG in various contexts, but it is also expected that the CAG itself actively contributes to communicating its activities and results, both in public terms and through scientific publications.

3. Organization and Leadership

The organization of a CAG may vary somewhat based on the composition of partners, professional goals, and needs. However, certain elements remain consistent:

- A CAG must have a professional steering committee that includes representatives from all partner institutions and users.
- The CAG leadership consists of a CAG leader, a CAG deputy leader, and two junior leaders.
- Professional participation from Helse Møre og Romsdal HF, Helse Nord-Trøndelag HF, and St. Olavs Hospital HF is required, along with at least one university or college in the region.

- At least one of the PhD. or Post Doc positions should be filled at one of the local health enterprises, when this is practical and possible. The goal is to enhance research activity within hospitals outside of Trondheim.

The CAG Steering Committee

The steering committee's role is to provide strategic guidance and ensure that the progress and professional activities align with the intentions stated in the application. Participation from senior management across all partner institutions is necessary, this may include department heads, or equivalents with delegated authority. The steering committee should also include a user representative and may engage external partners from municipal healthcare services or other relevant organizations. The steering committee meets at least twice a year.

The Professional Leadership (CAG Leadership)

The CAG leader and deputy leader should be highly regarded professionals with significant standing in their respective organizations, possessing leadership experience and excellent collaborative skills. Representation from both sectors is essential—if the CAG leader's primary position is in a hospital, then the deputy leader must hold a primary position at a university or college, and vice versa. Additionally, the CAG leadership should include two junior leaders, such as those at the Ph.D. or postdoc level. It is desirable for the CAG leadership to represent participants from the entire region, not just Trondheim.

The leadership is responsible for:

- Reporting progress and anchoring significant strategic decisions within the steering committee, conducting regular follow-up meetings with the CAG director, and reporting annually to Samarbeidsorganet.
- Actively seeking external funding for the CAG's professional activities, particularly by promoting applications to the EUs framework programmes for research and Innovation.
- Ensuring that resources are allocated fairly among partner institutions, maintaining active participation from the entire region.
- Facilitating collaboration across organizational boundaries among the involved institutions and relevant external partners.
- Advocating for the CAG to be recognized as a center of professional excellence.

- Ensuring cooperation with technical and administrative support functions, committees, and approval bodies, as well as suppliers of various services and expertise.

Each CAG may have up to ten defined "key persons," representing regional, national and international central and active collaborators who possess core competencies vital to the group's field or topic.

Involvement of external partners from other regions, universities, health enterprises, municipal healthcare services, private companies, and international environments can enhance the quality of the CAG. Therefore, involving external partners is encouraged where relevant. A successful CAG is expected to establish scientific presence and quality at a high international level, attract external funding and build international networks in its area of expertise.

Professional Activity

The CAG is responsible for describing, planning, implementing, and evaluating its professional activities. It should be self-directed in its daily operations and take clear responsibility for developing the group and activities across institutions. The CAG must continuously document its results and promote new knowledge through professional reports, scientific publications, and broad dissemination.

A primary goal is for the CAGs to establish themselves as professional beacons in the region and integrate into strategically prioritized initiatives at partner institutions, both regionally and nationally.

Overall Leadership

Since the CAG is a tool established by Samarbeidsorganet, all CAGs are subject to the oversight of the regional CAG director. The CAG director is appointed by and reports to Samarbeidsorganet; since 2019, this position has been held by Professor Björn Gustafsson.

4. Funding

Funding (3 million NOK)

Samarbeidsorganet allocates basic funding to each CAG, amounting to an annual sum of 1 million NOK. This funding is intended to help establish and develop the group so that it can compete for external funding for its ongoing work.

Examples of how the basic funding can be utilized include workshops, seminars, networking activities, salaries for administrative support for the CAG, research nurses, and freeing up clinicians from clinical practice to participate in networking activities, as well as the purchase of services to develop proposals. However, basic funding should not be used for financing scientific equipment or consumables.

Two Positions for PhD or Post Doc

The CAG is also allocated funds for two three-year recruitment grants, which follow the rates set by Samarbeidsorganet. One of these grants is funded by Samarbeidsorganet, while the other is provided as a contribution from the applying university or college. A funding guarantee from the Dean level must accompany the application. Funding will be calculated with half-year effects in the first year and a total of three years overall.

It is possible to hire two Ph.D. candidates; however, one grant may be used to employ a postdoctoral candidate if preferred. Both candidates must begin their grant periods no later than the end of the CAG's first year.

External Funding

CAGs are required to seek external funding within the first three years. There is an explicit expectation that the CAG will seek funding from sources beyond regional ones, including the Research Council, the EU Framework Programme, or equivalent sources.

Opportunities for Extension

CAG funding extends for three years. If CAG leaders wish to continue, they may apply for further funding for an additional three years. Extensions can only be requested for basic funding, not for additional PhD or Post Doc positions. The distribution of basic funding after the initial three years will be as follows: 1 million NOK in year four, 1 million NOK in year five, and 0.5 million NOK in year six.

Any extension of funding is subject to approval by Samarbeidsorganet based on annual reports and regular follow-up meetings. In the event of continued CAG status beyond six years, an allocation of 100,000 NOK may be available for regional networking for up to

three years. It is a condition that the funds are used to ensure and strengthen continued participation from the entire region.

5. Responsibilities of Applicant Organizations

The applying university or college commits to funding a recruitment position as a contribution to the CAG. Collaborating hospitals, universities, and colleges are committed to actively facilitating the establishment, operation, and further development of the CAGs. The institutions also commit to offering support—organizationally, technically, and administratively—so that the CAGs can carry out their professional activities effectively.

The management of the institutions is expected to promote the CAG as a tool to their employees and to communicate CAG activities in relevant contexts, both internally and externally. Institutions are also expected to contribute to the CAG with operational funding, time for clinicians to participate, support functions, infrastructure, and similar resources.

6. Reporting

CAGs are monitored through their individual steering committees, regular meetings with the CAG director, and, when necessary, the management of collaborating institutions. Professional reporting is required, similar to other awards from Samarbeidsorganet, which includes preparing an annual overview of the CAG's added value to the healthcare service.

Regular monitoring and reporting are crucial for identifying potential barriers to professional collaboration, whether they are of a professional, technical, or administrative nature. The reports will also provide the basis for any extension beyond the initial three years. Before a potential extension, the CAG will be invited to dialogue with Samarbeidsorganet to review progress and assess goal achievement, activities, and future plans.

7. Additional Information and Requirements for the Application

Both clinical practice, research and innovation, as well as teaching, training, and competence development, should be integral to the activities of the CAG.

The overarching criterion for CAG applications is that they involve research-based professional activities of documented high quality within a specific field or topic. The CAG's achievement of its goals must be closely linked to the expected positive impact

on healthcare services. This implies that traditional productivity measures such as publications and Ph.D. degrees are not sufficient as goals for a CAG. Expected measurable effects for healthcare services and society should thus be clearly articulated and time-bound in the application. Examples may include the establishment of common regional guidelines and agreed practices in the short term and new and improved treatment options in the longer term. Other potential goals could involve reducing unwanted variations in health care delivery, enhancing quality and patient safety, and initiatives that optimize the use of available resources in health care.

The CAG must present a clearly defined goal with an interdisciplinary focus that connects environments at universities/colleges with hospitals. The scientific approach should be comprehensive and interdisciplinary, while the health challenge being addressed should be precisely defined. Additionally, it is important to demonstrate that the CAG possesses the competence and resources necessary to implement the planned activities.

Requirements for Active Participation Across the Entire Region:

It is required that Helse Møre og Romsdal, Helse Nord-Trøndelag, and St. Olavs Hospital HF are represented and actively participate in the CAG alongside at least one university or college in the region. Active participation means that all participants are involved in planning and implementing the professional activity, going beyond merely having a passive role such as collectors of clinical data or specimens.

Requirements for Health Care User Involvement:

It must be specified who the users of the results from the CAG's professional activities are and how these users are involved in planning and executing the activities. Here, users refer to patients and their relatives. More information about user involvement in research is available on the Health Mid-Norway website.

Requirements for a Funding Plan:

In addition to a straightforward budget for the use of the basic funding, the application should include details of existing externally funded projects that are part of the CAG, along with a plan for future applications for external funding. There is a clear expectation that the CAG also seeks funding from sources outside its own region, such as from the Research Council and the EU.

Requirements for Description of Professional Activity:

The main professional activities within the CAG must be described in detail so that the evaluation panel can assess scientific quality, clinical utility, ethics, user involvement, educational activities, dissemination efforts, and feasibility. This includes clarifying the main hypothesis, objectives, and expected clinical impact, as well as the chosen methods and scientific strategies, anticipated challenges, and plans for implementation.

8. Evaluation and Awarding Process

An evaluation panel composed of three international experts with scientific expertise, knowledge of the health sector, and experience with similar mechanisms, such as CAG, will be appointed. The goal is to ensure that the panel members have complementary skills and experience, and to maintain some continuity within the panel. This will help ensure that the quality of awarded CAGs remains relatively stable.

After the application deadline, an administrative review of the applications will be conducted to confirm that all formal requirements have been met. The evaluation panel will assess the applications based on predetermined evaluation criteria. The leadership of the CAGs selected by the evaluation panel will then be invited for an interview. Interviews will be conducted in English.

Applicants will be notified to reserve the specified date for their interview with the evaluation panel. During the interview, applicants are expected to present their CAG and respond to questions from the panel. Following this, the panel will rank the applications and submit their assessment to the CAG director. The CAG director will then prepare a reasoned recommendation for Samarbeidsorganet, which will review the recommendation and make the final decision on awarding CAG status.

9. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria that will be considered in the application assessment include:

Quality

- To what extent is the proposed CAG ambitious, innovative, and future-oriented?
- The quality of the professional activities.
- Scientific quality with regard to the hypothesis, methodology, and planned execution.
- The quality of the professional network and key project collaborators.

Impact

- What is the expected effect on the healthcare service resulting from the planned professional activities?
- What is the plan for how results from the professional activities will translate into competence development, education, dissemination, and innovation?

Feasibility

- Does the CAG possess the necessary prerequisites, skills, and resources to implement the planned activities according to its timeline?
- How well is the organization structured, and what is the quality relevance of the composition of the management and the core group?
- Is there a realistic plan for financing the activity?
- Is there sufficient support and backing from the participating institutions?

Relevance to the Call

- To what extent does the application align with the call's purposes and guidelines regarding impact on healthcare services, professional collaboration between sectors, and improved quality of research, innovation, education, and competence development?
- How significant is the expected benefit of a CAG status for the application environment? This implies assessing whether becoming a CAG will significantly benefit the applicants and included partners and potentially generate substantial positive effects and added value.

10. How to Apply for CAG in Mid-Norway

Applications can be submitted by:

- Individuals employed at hospitals (helseforetak), including Hemit and Sykehusapoteket in Mid-Norway.
- Individuals employed in the university and college sector in the region who have collaborative ties with hospitals in Mid-Norway.

Projects must be relevant to the healthcare service and must be carried out with participation from hospitals in the region.

Formal Requirements for the Application:

- The application, registration form, and all attachments must be written in English.

- The application must align with the CAG requirements in Mid-Norway.
- The CAG application must receive clear support at the leadership level (e.g., clinic managers and department heads), at least from the two institutions where the CAG leader and deputy leader hold their main positions. Support letters from all key collaborating institutions must be attached, showcasing a commitment from management to prioritize and support CAG activities. Support letters should also be written in English.
- A commitment to provide a three-year Ph.D. or Post Doc grant from the co-applying university or college, is required. The grant must comply with the current rates set by Samarbeidsorganet, and a funding guarantee from the Dean level must accompany the application.

The application must detail:

- A genuine regional collaboration among professional environments across sectors and institutions.
- The anticipated added value for healthcare services and specific plans on how and when new knowledge will be utilized.
- Active user involvement.
- Any ethical challenges and how they will be addressed.
- How the CAG will contribute to competence development, training, teaching, and dissemination within its field.
- The potential for innovation, including technological advancements, service innovations, establishment of businesses, or similar initiatives.
- A budget and plan for obtaining external funding, including planned applications for EU funds.

Applications should be submitted via an electronic registration form for CAG. Be mindful of any character limitations that should not be exceeded.

The application should include:

1. CAG Registration Form
2. CAG Application
3. Mandatory Attachments

11. Mandatory Attachments

1. CAG Application Form (Template A): The summary must be written in Norwegian.
2. Budget Plan (Template B)
3. Plan for External Funding (Template C)
4. Organizational Chart (Template D)
5. CAG Leadership and Key Members Form (Template E)
6. Letters of Support from the Heads of the Relevant Departments (or equivalents) of the CAG leader and co-leader (see example).
7. CVs of the CAG Leadership Group: Each CV should not exceed two pages.
8. CAG Leadership Group's List of Publications: Publications should include works from the past five years.
9. Financing Guarantee for a Three-Year Ph.D. Position from the Dean at the applicant institution (university or college).

You can find the templates here: <https://www.helse-midt.no/samarbeidsorganet/clinical-academic-groups-cag/#obligatoriske-vedlegg>

12. Practical Instructions for Applicants

Please begin by filling out the electronic Registration Form. Ensure that you save your progress so you can return later. A link to the registration form will be sent to your email, allowing you to complete the form and upload the necessary templates and other documentation at a later time.

Continue the application process by completing the necessary templates, obtaining letters of support, and adding the required CVs and publication lists. When you have collected all necessary documentation, please return to the last page of the electronic Registration Form and upload your attachments. Once you have completed all steps, click the Submit button, and you will receive an email confirmation indicating that the application has been finalized.