

From Resilience to Success

Securing €7.3M in EC Funding

A Journey Through European Research Funding

Panel on my experience as Health project participant

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AND

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Panel Horizon Europe Cluster Health Calls 2026:
from idea to winning proposal

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My Research Journey

- **BSc in Microbiology (1992-1996)**

Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Escola Superior de Biotecnologia, Porto, Portugal

- **MSc in Molecular Medicine (1996-1997)**

Imperial College London, School of Medicine, London, UK

- **Research Assistant (1997-1998)**

Medical Research Council London, UK

- **PhD in Clinical Sciences, Biochemistry & Genetics (1998-2005)**

Imperial College London, School of Medicine, MRC, London, UK and INSA Lisbon, PT

➤ *Completed PhD while raising 3 children!*

Building Momentum - Two Decades of Projects

- **During PhD:** First competitive small project funded (10k)
- **2007-2010:** 3 competitive projects (~€200k each) – Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation (FCT)
- **2010-2014:** 2 projects funded by Portuguese Cardiology Society
- **2014-2022:** Multi small pharma-funded projects (~€50k each)
- **2022/23: €1M La Caixa Foundation project (after 4 unsuccessful attempts)**

The Breakthrough - €7.3M EC RIA Project

(FH EARLY - <https://fh-early.eu/>)

- **2024/25: Secured €7.3M RIA (Research & Innovation Action) funding**
- **Built from experience:** Previous €4M Pathfinder proposal (good evaluation but not funded)
- **Strategic decision:** Scientific lead role instead of coordinator
- **Large consortium: 15-institution** across multiple countries

The Winning Formula - Team Assembly

- **Strategic coordinator choice:** Portuguese clinician, former European Society of Cardiology President
- **Balanced expertise:** Clinical groups + scientific research teams
- **Professional support: Experienced medical writer interpreted EC expectations**
- **Innovation integration:** Added emerging areas like AI to strengthen proposal (suggested by the medical writer)

Why We Got Funded - Part 1

- **Resilience pays off: Multiple attempts, continuous improvement**
- **Strategic partnership:** Renowned coordinator with credibility
- **Complementary expertise:** Clinical + scientific teams working together
- **Professional proposal writing:** Expert who understood EC language

Why We Got Funded - Part 2

- **Built on previous work: Leveraged earlier project and evaluations**
- **Timely innovation: Integrated AI and emerging technologies**
- **Strong network: Years of conference connections and collaborations**
- **Clear role definition: Right people in right positions (based on experienced and good work, not on h-index)**

Lessons Learned - Your Action Plan

- **Be bold, not unrealistic - ambitious vision matters**
- **Never give up** - iterate, improve, add partners, resubmit
- **Hire expert writers** - they know what EC wants to see
- **NCP for advice** – they can help with expert advice and proposal revision
- **Choose partners carefully** - work with people you trust

Practical Takeaways

- **Network actively** - attend conferences, build connections
- **Stay up to date** - take note of emerging technologies in your field
- **Just submit - it's easier than you think to get started**
- **Learn from feedback** - even rejections teach valuable lessons