

Hebrides Community Screening Project 2026-2030

Presenting genetic risks to Hebrideans began with the VIKING III study in 2025, with returns ongoing. Following publicity in 2025, impetus has grown to carry out community-wide screening in the Western Isles. This can protect the whole community and try to make everyone aware of their own health risks. We are raising funds to screen 5,000 Hebrideans for up to ten disease-causing variants covering the major risks that are increased in the Outer Hebrides.

The aim is to raise £1 Million, and already a number of private donors and fund-raisers have started us off.

We are currently working to secure enough funds to enable project delivery staff to be appointed for the expected 3-year term that will safeguard the overall delivery of the project.

We are grateful for any contribution or support you can provide.

How we plan to deliver the project

- Secure enough initial funds for full-scale project delivery
- Launch the screening using postal saliva collection of DNA and informed consent
- Samples undergo analysis in expert genetics laboratories
- Starting within three months of returning their saliva sample, volunteers log into their private “genetics health dashboard” to learn about any health risks they have and what steps they can take to reduce these
- Co-ordinate provision of NHS treatments for those who have concerning genetic variants

All work will be carried out with approval from the NHS Research Ethics Committee

What this will deliver for the Western Isles

The project aims to save lives in the Hebrides: it enables the identification of people who are at risk of life-threatening diseases. For some, the subsequent follow-up health checks may reveal they have already developed a heart or liver condition. The screening will allow early interventions, which hopefully will lead to long productive lives in the community.

We will need your help to make this screening a reality. We'll make the Western Isles the best example of preventative healthcare anywhere in the UK.



Torcuil Crichton, MP for the Western Isles supports the Hebrides Community Screening Project, saying *“This research writes the case for community-wide screening in the Western Isles. Early identification, which I was lucky to have, means a whole range of bad health outcomes can be avoided.”*



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VIKING GENES Hebrides Community Screening Project



Working with the Hebridean community to improve health and wellbeing and make future generations safer from genetic health risks



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Our health findings

The Viking Genes project revealed that Hebrideans have a much higher chance of carrying a number of potentially deadly disease-causing genetic variants than the UK mainland populations, sometimes hundreds of times higher for Hebrideans. This includes HFE causing haemochromatosis and LDLR causing inherited high cholesterol which can lead to fatal heart attacks.

From our Viking Genes data, we can estimate that about half of the affected Hebrideans DO NOT currently know that they carry this risk, and without this information they cannot access treatments that can potentially keep them well and save them from suffering from the effects of disease.

We have already returned information to volunteers with disease-causing variants among the 1000+ Hebrideans screened to date, allowing them to take action to protect their health. Offering more screening will benefit more people.



“Our findings have convinced me that community-wide genetic screening in the Outer Hebrides for all the disease-causing variants can save lives and directly impact the health of hundreds of people who currently don't know of the health risk they carry” - Professor Jim Flett Wilson



How a community-wide screen will improve the health of the Western Isles

A community-wide screen will provide a unique opportunity to advance the health and wellbeing of today's island population, while helping protect future generations.

It will move the Hebrides to the forefront of preventative medicine within the UK. This will result in improved community health, save individual lives across the Western Isles, avoid or prevent debilitating later stage conditions, and increase the quality of life and health for many Hebrideans. This can be achieved by a simple saliva-based sample analysis that will identify individuals and their specific genetic risk, allowing preventative healthcare thereafter to keep people well.



For the future, we aim to be able to move on to the devastating inherited diseases such as cystic fibrosis and alcohol-induced cardiomyopathy, some of which are incurable. Within two years we hope to start returning information to carriers of these genetic variants.

By screening adults of all ages, including young Hebrideans who have not yet had children, we will identify individuals who have the greatest risk of passing a potentially fatal condition on to their future children, and to take steps to reduce that likelihood through improved health support and medical interventions.



**Support
Viking Genes**

