

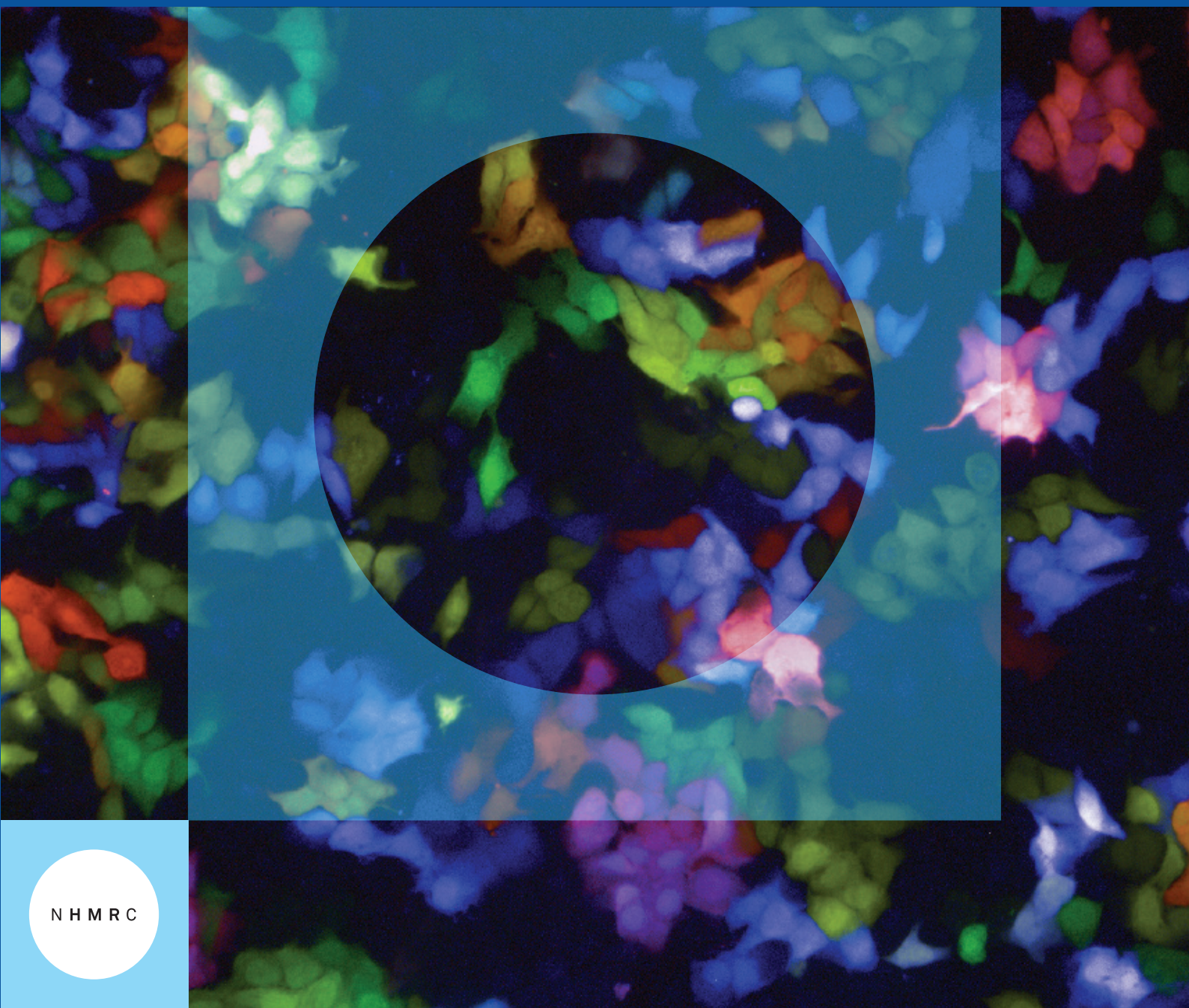


Australian Government  
National Health and Medical Research Council

BUILDING  
A HEALTHY  
AUSTRALIA

# Corporate Plan 2021-22

National Health and Medical Research Council



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P: (02) 6217 9000

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# Message from the CEO

Planning presents particular challenges during a pandemic. Eighteen months after the SARS-CoV-2 virus began to spread globally, we face continuing uncertainty about the future evolution and spread of the virus and about society's emergence from the restrictions the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on our activities.

Like most other parts of the community, the health and medical research sector has been profoundly affected by the pandemic. The closure of laboratories and other workplaces, juggling of family and work responsibilities in lockdown, new clinical, public health and teaching responsibilities, the inability to travel to undertake research projects – all have contributed to the interruption of research programs and heightened stress across the research community. While individual circumstances vary and different regions of Australia have been acutely affected at different times, the impact on research productivity and the research workforce will likely prove to be national and lasting.

It is striking that our pathway out of the pandemic – the development and delivery of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines – is the direct outcome of long-term broad-based research investment by governments. The speed with which vaccines have been developed, the multiplicity of successful vaccine technologies and the effective collaboration between the public and private sectors were only possible because of that investment. We must learn from this experience if we are to be prepared for the challenges of the future.

As a national government agency with a range of legislated responsibilities across our three themes of *Investment*, *Translation* and *Integrity*, NHMRC has a critical role to play during and after the pandemic in providing opportunity and continuity to the Australian health and medical research sector. An overarching focus for NHMRC in the year ahead is therefore to help provide the stability and support the sector needs to regain confidence and rebuild research programs as pandemic disruptions progressively diminish.

This year, NHMRC expects to commit more than \$1 billion in research grants for the first time, with the annual Budget appropriation of about \$860 million for the Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA) bolstered by funds held over from 2020 because of COVID-19. Together with approximately \$630 million to be disbursed by the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) in 2021–22, direct Commonwealth investment in health and medical research will be higher than ever before. While funded rates for NHMRC grant schemes are expected to remain under pressure, the extra funding available this year will be a welcome boost to a sector that is critical for Australia's future health and prosperity and has demonstrated such adaptability and resilience through COVID-19.

NHMRC will continue to contribute to the Australian Government's response to COVID-19, for example through support for the National COVID-19 Health and Research Advisory Committee and regular meetings of the national Vaccine Forum, for as long as needed. We will also continue to support investigator-initiated research on COVID-19 through all our major grant schemes to complement the targeted pandemic research funding delivered through the MRFF.

At the same time, the agency will pursue a range of initiatives to strengthen our support for research, research translation and the research sector more broadly – including continued evaluation and refinement of the grant program, additional Investigator Grants for early and mid-career researchers in the 2021 round, capacity building among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers, a new gender equality strategy, promotion of consumer and community engagement in research, progression of a new Open Access policy and the delivery of a Special Initiative in Human Health and Environmental Change.

By the end of 2021, NHMRC expects to complete deployment of its new grants management system, Sapphire, as an end-to-end system supporting the grant management life-cycle from application, through assessment to the award and management of grants. While Sapphire will require ongoing enhancement in collaboration with stakeholders in the research sector, its deployment will allow our ageing Research Grants Management System (RGMS) to be decommissioned and provide a reliable and functional system for the future.

Expert peer review underpins the allocation of grants from the MREA and will be an area of focus over this triennium, particularly the strengthening of peer reviewer training and support and the continuing evolution of assessment processes. This work will intersect with the next stage of development of our gender equality strategy, which is especially important at this time when the careers of female researchers have been disproportionately disrupted by COVID-19.

The relationship between NHMRC and the MRFF will be another important area of focus. NHMRC will continue to support the Department of Health by delivering MRFF grant schemes, drawing on our established expertise in peer review and grant administration. Opportunities for strategic alignment between the NHMRC and MRFF grant programs will be explored while recognising the fundamental differences between these programs – with NHMRC seeking to support a broad range of health and medical research activity and national capability and the MRFF focusing on priority-driven research.

NHMRC plays a significant national role in the translation of evidence from research into health policy and practice through the development or endorsement of high-quality public health, environmental health and clinical practice guidelines. A major project over the next three years will be the revision of the 2013 *Australian Dietary Guidelines*, which has now commenced with the support of the Department of Health. Among other activities, NHMRC will revise the *CEO Statement on E-Cigarettes* and continue to support the Department of Health with the Natural Therapies Review. We will also continue to review, and endorse as appropriate, updates to the *Australian guidelines for the clinical care of people with COVID-19*, an example of ‘living guidelines’ that are frequently updated to reflect the latest evidence in a fast moving field of critical importance.

This Corporate Plan is the first for the new triennium, 2021–2024, and brings with it several new health priorities. Some long-standing priorities remain, notably to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health through research and to strengthen resilience to threats such as pandemics and environmental change. Among significant new priorities is multimorbidity, recognising that many Australians are affected by multiple, often chronic, health conditions that create complex health care needs and in many cases share risk factors.

The new triennium also sees the appointment of a new Council and Principal Committees, including the new Health Research Impact Committee (HRIC). The focus of this committee reflects a shift in emphasis in publicly-funded research, in Australia and globally, from an academic activity whose success is measured primarily in academic outputs and accolades to one that the community and governments expect to yield tangible benefits for society. HRIC has therefore been formed to advise the Council and CEO on how to enhance, measure and promote the impact of NHMRC-funded research and will build on significant steps already taken to foster research translation for societal benefit and to shift the assessment of researchers’ success from outputs to impact. The work of this committee will also support the new health priority to build capacity and innovation in research translation.

Research quality, integrity and ethics are core values and areas of significant activity for NHMRC. The Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC) will continue to review and update critical ethical codes, while also exploring the ethical implications of emerging technologies. NHMRC’s work for the Australian Government in 2019–20 on the scientific, ethical and social issues associated with mitochondrial donation was supported by AHEC and the Embryo Research Licensing Committee (ERLC), and was an example of the way NHMRC can bring together a broad range of expertise and perspectives to address complex issues in health and medicine. At the time of writing, the Parliament is considering whether to introduce mitochondrial donation into clinical practice, in the first instance with research and a clinical trial. If this legislation is passed, ERLC will have a central role to play in developing the licensing and regulatory framework for this work and approving relevant licences. New roles such as this one highlight the importance of NHMRC and its committees monitoring the emergence of new technologies in the life and medical sciences, and considering their potential implications and impact.

Against this background, NHMRC is well placed to undertake a review of gain of function research in Australia as requested by the Minister for Health, the Hon. Greg Hunt MP. Announced in July 2021, the review will report to the Minister on any gain of function research that could increase the harmfulness of an infectious agent to humans that has been funded or conducted by the Australian Government or its agencies over the last 10 years, as well as the regulatory framework that controls such research in Australia. NHMRC is working closely with other relevant areas of government in undertaking this work.

Issues such as mitochondrial donation, advances in human embryo research and new genetic technologies remind us that the frontiers of health and medical research can be challenging, not only technically but also socially and ethically. NHMRC occupies a unique position in Australia as a research funder, as a national advisory body on ethical issues in health and medical research, and as a regulator of human embryo research. As new challenges emerge at the boundary between research and society, NHMRC must be ready to consider these issues and provide advice to the public and government.

NHMRC's skilled and committed staff have demonstrated an impressive ability to meet changing priorities and challenges over the last two years through natural disasters and the pandemic, and we continue to rely on their motivation and hard work. With the advice of our Council, Principal Committees and other advisory groups, and in collaboration with the research sector and the wider community, we will continue to deliver on NHMRC's mission of *building a healthy Australia*.

## Statement of preparation

As the accountable authority of NHMRC, I present the *NHMRC Corporate Plan 2021-22*, which covers the four year period of 2021-22 to 2024-25. It has been prepared as required under paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) and section 16 of the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (NHMRC Act).

**Professor Anne Kelso AO**

Chief Executive Officer

National Health and Medical Research Council

# Purposes

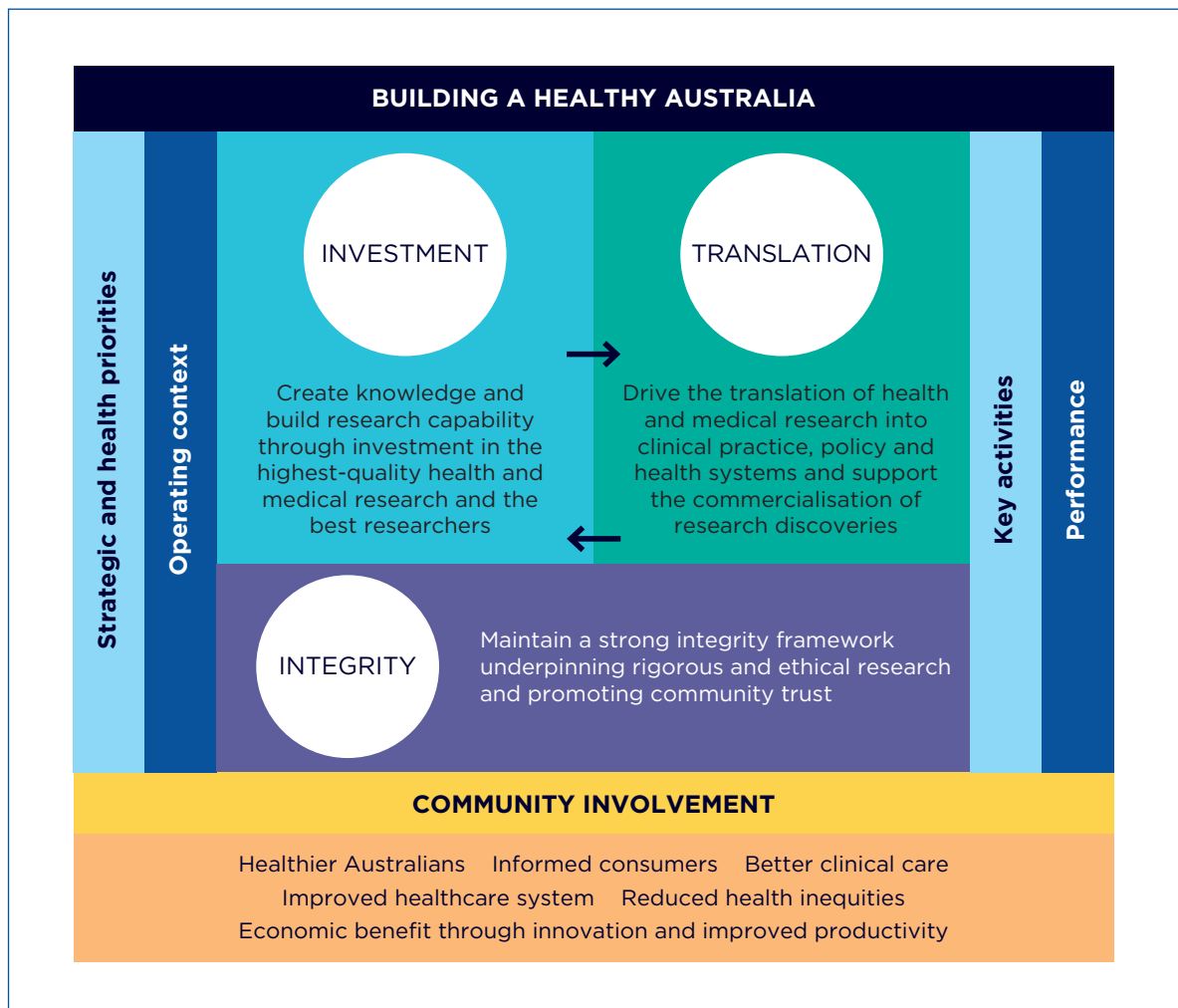
NHMRC’s purposes support our mission of *building a healthy Australia*. They reflect NHMRC’s legislated functions to fund health and medical research and training, and to issue guidelines and advise on improving health outcomes, through prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease and the provision of health care. They also reflect NHMRC’s role in promoting the highest standards of ethics and integrity in health and medical research.

NHMRC’s purposes align with the three strategic themes of **investment**, **translation** and **integrity**.

Figure 1: NHMRC’s strategic themes and purposes

THEME	INVESTMENT	TRANSLATION	INTEGRITY
Function	Fund high-quality health and medical research and build research capability.	Support the translation of health and medical research into better health outcomes.	Promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity in health and medical research.
Purpose	Create knowledge and build research capability through investment in the highest-quality health and medical research and the best researchers.	Drive the translation of health and medical research into clinical practice, policy and health systems and support the commercialisation of research discoveries.	Maintain a strong integrity framework underpinning rigorous and ethical research and promoting community trust.

Figure 2: NHMRC’s strategy for health and medical research



# Governance

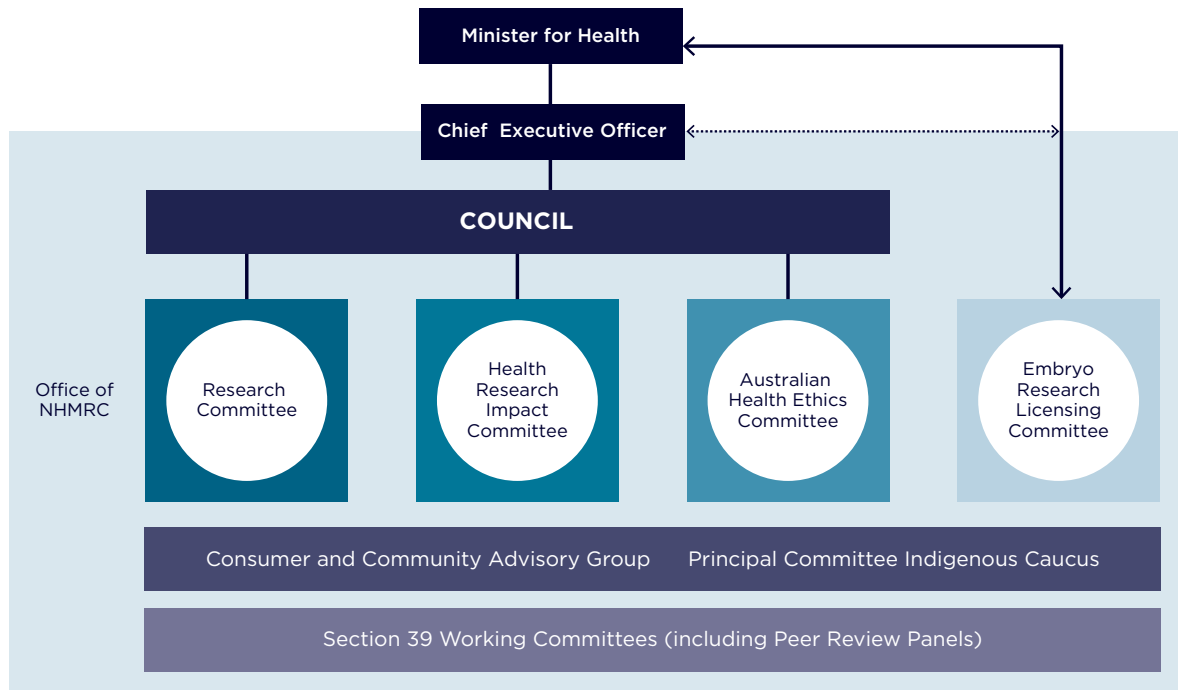
NHMRC operates within a strong governance framework that supports effective performance, integrity, efficiency and compliance with our legislated responsibilities under the NHMRC Act and the PGPA Act, as well as other relevant legislation.

The CEO is supported in fulfilling the legislative functions under the NHMRC Act by the expert and independent advice of NHMRC Council, Principal Committees and other committees and expert working groups. Through Council and its committees, researchers, healthcare professionals and consumers contribute to the work of NHMRC and provide a bridge to the community and the research and health sectors. They also help guide NHMRC’s strategy for health and medical research.

Figure 3 shows NHMRC’s key governance and advisory bodies under the NHMRC Act, including Council, the Principal Committees and select working committees.

NHMRC Council and Principal Committees are appointed every three years, with a new triennium from 1 July 2021 until 30 June 2024. This triennium sees establishment of a new principal committee, the Health Research Impact Committee (HRIC). HRIC will advise on policies and strategies to promote, communicate and measure the impact of NHMRC-funded health and medical research; strategies to facilitate the translation of research into clinical, public health and commercial outcomes; and strategies to foster embedding research in the health system.

Figure 3: NHMRC’s governance structure under the NHMRC Act





# Strategy for health and medical research

Under subsection 16(2) of the NHMRC Act, NHMRC is required to set out its strategy for health and medical research. This strategy is underpinned by our strong commitment to the highest quality and standards of research and health advice. The themes of investment, translation and integrity represent NHMRC's strategy for health and medical research for the period covered by this plan. We will:

- create knowledge and build research capability through **investment** in the highest-quality health and medical research and the best researchers
- drive the **translation** of health and medical research into clinical practice, policy and health systems and support the commercialisation of research discoveries, contributing to an Australian health system that is research-led, evidence-based, efficient and sustainable
- maintain a strong **integrity** framework, which underpins rigorous and ethical research, and relevant and evidence-based guidelines, thereby promoting community trust.

Community involvement is essential to, and underpins, NHMRC's strategy for health and medical research. All three strategic themes draw on the lived experience of consumers and the community.

NHMRC's strategy for health and medical research is depicted in Figure 2.

As part of NHMRC's strategy for health and medical research, the NHMRC CEO identifies priority areas of focus, goals or objectives that require detailed strategies or action plans over the triennium. Priority areas usually require sustained and/or targeted effort over a number of years. NHMRC sets its priorities, in consultation with its Council and Principal Committees, every three years to align with its triennial governance arrangements. The priorities are subject to annual review by the CEO.

There are two types of priority areas: **strategic priorities** and **health priorities**.

## Strategic priorities

Strategic priorities identify areas where NHMRC-led action can help ensure the highest quality and impact of health and medical research to build a healthy Australia, with a focus on how research is conducted and evaluated, and structural issues in the health and medical research sector.

NHMRC's strategic priorities for the 2021–2024 triennium are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: NHMRC's strategic priorities for the 2021-2024 triennium

STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREA	KEY STRATEGY DOCUMENT/S	STATUS	GOALS/OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIC THEME/S	KEY ACTION/S PLANNED IN 2021-22
Consumer and community involvement	Statement <sup>1</sup> and Toolkit <sup>2</sup> on consumer and community involvement in health and medical research	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote active involvement of consumers and community members in all aspects of health and medical research and care.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on promoting the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, rural and remote, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.</li> <li>Continue to involve consumer and community representatives in the scoping and review of targeted grant opportunities.</li> <li>Continue to seek advice from the <b>NHMRC Consumer and Community Advisory Group</b>.</li> </ul>
Diversity and inclusion	<i>NHMRC Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2021<sup>3</sup> and Road Map 3: A strategic framework for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health through research<sup>4</sup></i>	Under review Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote diversity and inclusion in the health and medical research workforce.</li> <li>Address structural issues in the health and medical research workforce.</li> <li>Support an increase in the retention and progression of women.</li> <li>Strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researcher workforce.</li> </ul>	Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and consult on actions under a new Gender Equity Strategy for 2021-2024.</li> <li>Allocate specific funding within NHMRC grant schemes to address structural issues in the health and medical research sector, with a focus on women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and early to mid-career researchers.</li> <li>Evaluate the career context approach piloted in the 2021 Investigator Grants round to assess track record relative to opportunity.</li> <li>Consider further opportunities to address disadvantages experienced by certain groups of researchers (e.g. researchers with disability).</li> <li>Continue to seek advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and other advisory committees.</li> </ul>
International engagement	<i>NHMRC International Engagement Strategy 2020-2023<sup>5</sup></i>	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote international collaboration in health and medical research to achieve better outcomes for the Australian community and build Australia's research capability.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage and promote international opportunities for NHMRC-funded researchers and facilitate cooperation and exchange.</li> <li>Build awareness and support NHMRC-funded Administering Institutions to counter foreign interference in health and medical research.</li> <li>Engage bilaterally and multilaterally with international research funding agencies.</li> <li>Engage in international fora that promote high quality open science and global health objectives.</li> <li>Continue to seek advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and other advisory committees.</li> </ul>

1 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/statement-consumer-and-community-involvement-health-and-medical-research/>

2 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/consumer-and-community-engagement/>

3 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/nhmrcs-gender-equality-strategy-2018-2021/>

4 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health/road-map-3/>

5 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/international-engagement/>

STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREA	KEY STRATEGY DOCUMENT/S	STATUS	GOALS/OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIC THEME/S	KEY ACTION/S PLANNED IN 2021-22
Peer review	<i>Principles of peer review</i> <sup>6</sup> and the CEO Communique on Ideas Grants 2021 <sup>7</sup>	In progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that NHMRC funds are invested wisely and fairly to support the best health and medical research.</li> <li>Evaluate and improve peer review processes, aiming for an appropriate balance between rigour of review and burden on reviewers.</li> </ul>	Investment Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to embed and refine a streamlined peer review process for the Ideas Grant Scheme to improve the matching of reviewers to applications and help identify the best research proposals.</li> <li>Expand training for peer reviewers.</li> <li>Continue to develop and enhance NHMRC's new grant management system, Sapphire, to support efficient and effective peer review.</li> <li>Maintain the highest standards of integrity and quality in peer review for both NHMRC and MRFF schemes.</li> <li>Continue to seek advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and other advisory committees.</li> </ul>
Research impact	NHMRC Evaluation Strategy, Impact Agenda, Translation Strategy	Under development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measure, evaluate and communicate the impact of NHMRC-funded research.</li> <li>Generate public benefits such as raising the standard of individual and public health in Australia.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to work with partners to demonstrate the longer-term impacts of NHMRC-funded research through Impact Case Studies.</li> <li>Monitor the impact of NHMRC special initiatives, including the Special Initiative in Mental Health and the National Network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Researchers.</li> <li>Develop, communicate and/or implement an NHMRC Evaluation Strategy, Impact Agenda and Research Translation Strategy, with advice from NHMRC's new <b>Health Research Impact Committee</b>.</li> </ul>
Research quality	<i>NHMRC Research Quality Strategy 2019</i> <sup>8</sup>	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the highest quality in research funded by NHMRC.</li> <li>Guide and support good research practices throughout the research cycle.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finalise the review of NHMRC's Open Access Policy to align with international developments.</li> <li>Progress development of core competencies for education and training to support research quality.</li> <li>Continue to seek advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and other advisory committees.</li> </ul>

6 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/principles-peer-review/>

7 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/news-centre/peer-review-ideas-grants-2021/>

8 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/nhmrcs-research-quality-strategy/>

# Health priorities

The *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (NHMRC Act) requires the CEO to identify major national health issues likely to arise in 2021–22 and during the four-year period covered by this plan. As outlined earlier, NHMRC operates on a triennial basis. The major national health issues outlined below have been identified by the NHMRC CEO as priorities for NHMRC for the new triennium from 1 July 2021 until 30 June 2024. NHMRC reviews its priorities with a longer-term outlook in the last year of each triennium.

In considering these issues, the CEO consults with the Council, its committees and the Minister, and considers the role of NHMRC within Australia’s health and medical research landscape, before determining the issues that are within NHMRC’s scope.

NHMRC’s longstanding approach is to deliver funding that builds the foundations of the national health and medical research system – high-quality research along the pipeline from discovery to implementation; an excellent biomedical, clinical, public health and health systems research workforce; national and international partnerships between disciplines and with the community, health providers and industry. Through a mix of investigator-initiated and targeted research, NHMRC supports research across the broad range of health and medical needs.

The introduction of the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) is rapidly and dramatically changing the health and medical research landscape. As a priority-driven research fund, its success depends on the foundations of research excellence and capability built with NHMRC funding. NHMRC will continue to support this broad base to underpin and complement the MRFF’s research missions and programs and to ensure Australia can meet its present and future health challenges.

Accordingly, NHMRC’s health priorities reflect broad health challenges and emerging issues where national capacity or capability in health and medical research is most needed, rather than specific diseases. They also reflect areas where NHMRC’s role in promoting the highest standards in health research and care can contribute to addressing major national health issues likely to arise.

The major national health issues, also called NHMRC’s health priorities, for the 2021–2024 triennium are outlined in Table 2. NHMRC Council and its committees will provide advice on the key actions to support implementation of the health priorities, informed by monitoring and evaluation of previous and existing investments and horizon scanning of these and other emerging health issues.

Table 2: NHMRC’s health priorities for the 2021–2024 triennium

HEALTH PRIORITY	KEY ACTIONS PLANNED OVER THE 2021–2024 TRIENNIUM
<p>Strengthening resilience to emerging health threats and emergencies, including environmental change, pandemics and antimicrobial resistance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider offering targeted research funding opportunities to build Australian capacity or capability to strengthen resilience to emerging health threats and emergencies.</li> <li>• Continue to offer flexibility to NHMRC-funded researchers to pivot their research to COVID-19 and encourage researchers to contribute to the national and international research response to COVID-19.</li> <li>• Participate in the Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness (GloPID-R) and other relevant fora.</li> <li>• Continue to support the National COVID-19 Health and Research Advisory Committee (NCHRAC) to provide advice to the Chief Medical Officer on the health response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> <li>• Seek and consider advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and the <b>Health Research Impact Committee</b>.</li> </ul>

HEALTH PRIORITY	KEY ACTIONS PLANNED OVER THE 2021-2024 TRIENNIUM
<p>Improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people including through research that addresses health inequities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the outcomes of the stakeholder and public consultation on research priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.</li> <li>• Consider offering targeted research funding opportunities with a focus on the health system and social and cultural determinants of health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</li> <li>• Continue to implement <i>Road Map 3: A strategic framework for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health through research</i>.</li> <li>• Seek and consider advice from the <b>NHMRC Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus</b> and <b>Research Committee</b>.</li> </ul>
<p>Building capacity and innovation in the effective translation of research into quality health policy, services and care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to recognise and accredit Translation Centres that bring together researchers, healthcare providers, policy makers, industry and education and training to improve the health and wellbeing of patients and populations.</li> <li>• Consider offering targeted research funding opportunities to build Australian capacity or capability to improve health care or policy, digital health services or innovations in the health system.</li> <li>• Seek and consider advice from <b>Research Committee</b>, the <b>Health Research Impact Committee</b> and the <b>NHMRC Consumer and Community Advisory Committee</b>.</li> </ul>
<p>Preventing and managing multimorbidity and chronic conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in the Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases (GACD).</li> <li>• Work with the Department of Health to consider actions to support the National Preventive Health Strategy.</li> <li>• Continue to allocate specific funding to support dementia research on prevention, early diagnosis, quality care and treatments.</li> <li>• Consider offering targeted research funding opportunities to build Australian capacity or capability to improve health care or innovations in the health system to prevent or manage multimorbidity and chronic conditions.</li> <li>• Seek and consider advice from <b>Research Committee</b>, the <b>Health Research Impact Committee</b> and the <b>NHMRC Consumer and Community Advisory Committee</b>.</li> </ul>
<p>Identifying emerging technologies in health and medical research and in health care, and promoting their safe, ethical and effective application</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the new regulatory framework for mitochondrial donation through NHMRC's <b>Embryo Research Licensing Committee</b>.</li> <li>• Review the <i>Ethical Guidelines for Assisted Reproductive Technology</i> to support the safe, ethical and effective implementation of mitochondrial donation in an Australian clinical trial.</li> <li>• Identify and advise on emerging technologies with potential impact on health and medical research and health care.</li> <li>• Consider and advise on the ethical implications and regulation of rapidly emerging technologies in research and health care, such as embryoids and organoids, stem cells and gene editing technologies, and the use of artificial intelligence and big data.</li> <li>• Seek and consider advice from <b>Research Committee</b>, the <b>Health Research Impact Committee</b> and the <b>Australian Health Ethics Committee</b>.</li> </ul>

# Operating context

## Environment

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the public health system and the research environment. 2021-22 will continue to bring uncertainty for the health and medical research sector, and for the office of NHMRC, with the global pandemic and risk of local outbreaks continuing to affect researchers, clinicians, our staff and the wider community. The widespread disruption by the pandemic is also affecting how we work, including how researchers engage with each other in Australia and overseas.

Factors in our environment that are likely to affect NHMRC's activities and performance in 2021-22 and over the four-year period of this plan include:

- the lived healthcare experience of consumers and the community, including the lived experience and impact of long-COVID
- trends and changes in the burden of disease and their impact on health service delivery
- advances in health technology and associated emerging ethical issues
- disparities in the health and medical research workforce and in the community, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on early to mid-career researchers
- disruption to everyday work practices and caring responsibilities for researchers and for our staff
- changes in research and training environments in a physically distanced or partially vaccinated community and as a result of continuing international (and occasional domestic) travel restrictions
- other changes in research and work practices, including innovations as a result of the pandemic
- the redirection of researchers in the clinical and public health response to COVID-19
- international action in health and medical research, health care and prevention
- ongoing scrutiny of research integrity and quality issues
- increasing attention to mitigating the risks emerging from foreign interference and cybersecurity threats
- the impact of the MRFF on Australia's health and medical research sector
- the role of the states and territories in delivering health services
- the broader Australian and global social and economic context.

Each of these factors has been taken into consideration in planning NHMRC's major activities, risks and performance measures, as set out in this plan, noting that the uncertain progression and impact of the global pandemic dictates regular review and adjustment.

## Cooperation

Our environment includes multiple domestic and international partners and stakeholders. NHMRC works closely with universities, medical research institutes, hospitals, professional colleges, other national and international funding agencies, peak bodies, consumer groups and the wider public and private sectors. Table 3 details some of NHMRC's major collaborative partnerships that contribute to achieving our mission and purposes. NHMRC does not have any subsidiaries.

Table 3: Cooperative relationships that contribute to NHMRC's purposes

ORGANISATION	NATURE OF COOPERATION	PURPOSE/S
Commonwealth Department of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We collaborate with the Department of Health on national strategies and priorities for health and medical research, including coordination between NHMRC and the MRFF.</li> <li>We work as a grants hub for the Department of Health to support the delivery of the MRFF, using NHMRC's expertise in peer review and grants management.</li> <li>Together, we simplify access for researchers, make efficient use of government resources and achieve our shared objectives to support Australian health and medical research and improve the health of Australians.</li> <li>We work with the Department of Health to undertake evidence-based reviews and develop guidelines that support public and environmental health and clinical practice.</li> <li>We support the Department of Health to implement national strategies to improve human health, including delivering targeted research funding to improve hearing health under the National Preventive Health Strategy.</li> <li>We collaborate with the Department of Health and the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator on social, ethical and legal issues in health and related regulatory frameworks.</li> <li>We work with the Department of Health and other Commonwealth portfolios to contribute to government policy affecting research, researchers and the research sector.</li> </ul>	<p>Investment</p> <p>Translation</p> <p>Integrity</p>
State and territory governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We work with state and territory governments to identify gaps and priorities for health and medical research investment.</li> <li>Together, we support the translation of research into policy and practice, work towards national consistency in health standards, and develop evidence-based public health, environmental health, clinical practice and ethical guidelines.</li> </ul>	<p>Investment</p> <p>Translation</p> <p>Integrity</p>
Other Commonwealth and Health Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We work with other government health agencies to invest in the highest-quality health and medical research (e.g. Cancer Australia) and to develop health advice and ethical guidelines (e.g. Organ and Tissue Authority).</li> <li>We collaborate with other Commonwealth agencies such the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to support the health and medical aims of Australia's development aid program.</li> <li>We engage with other Commonwealth agencies to support Australia's efforts to counter foreign interference in research and protect critical technologies for the future.</li> </ul>	<p>Investment</p> <p>Translation</p> <p>Integrity</p>

ORGANISATION	NATURE OF COOPERATION	PURPOSE/S
Administering Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We award funding to Administering Institutions, which include universities, medical research institutes and hospitals that meet defined research governance requirements.</li> <li>We collaborate with Administering Institutions both informally and formally on research policy and support for health and medical research.</li> <li>Administering Institutions implement policies and practices that support NHMRC objectives, including ensuring that NHMRC research is carried out in an ethical, responsible and competent manner.</li> <li>We work with Administering Institutions to increase applicant and peer reviewer understanding of funding scheme objectives and help ensure that the highest quality eligible research proposals are funded.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity
Peak bodies in the health and medical research sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We consult with universities, medical research institutes, academies and other peak bodies in the health and medical research sector to seek advice and evaluate our activities.</li> <li>We work with Cochrane Australia to support the translation of research into policy and practice and promote robust frameworks to support evidence-based decision-making.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity
Australian Research Council (and others)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We collaborate with the Australian Research Council (ARC) and Universities Australia to promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity in research in line with the <i>Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research</i>, the <i>National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research</i> and the <i>Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes</i> (also co-authored with CSIRO).</li> <li>Through the Australian Research Integrity Committee (ARIC), jointly established by NHMRC and the ARC, we undertake reviews of institutional processes used to manage and investigate potential breaches of the Code and contribute to public confidence in the integrity of Australia's research effort.</li> </ul>	Integrity
International organisations and funding partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We contribute to global health strategies and benefit from membership in international science programs, such as the Human Frontier Science Program, which promotes excellence and international collaboration in the life sciences.</li> <li>We contribute to and learn from international best practice to support the highest standards of research quality and integrity, peer review processes and evidence-based advice on improving health and preventing disease.</li> <li>We collaborate with international funding agencies to support high quality collaborative international research, through bilateral and multilateral joint funding schemes.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity
Philanthropic organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We collaborate with philanthropic organisations to support high quality health and medical research in areas of mutual interest, including supporting philanthropic funders to leverage NHMRC's excellence in peer review.</li> </ul>	Investment
Community and consumer groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We engage with health consumer or community groups to identify community representatives, consumers and/or carers to participate in our committees, in peer review processes, in guidelines development and in public consultation.</li> <li>We invite community and professional organisations to identify health issues that may benefit from targeted research funding, to ensure that health and medical research is meeting the needs of the Australian community.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity



# Risk oversight and management

NHMRC applies an integrated risk management framework, where all staff are aware of the risks inherent in the activities we undertake and proactive in their management. Our positive risk culture requires us to have a sound understanding of appropriate risk acceptance and to apply this to daily decision-making processes. Supported by our Audit Committee, we actively use risk information to improve business processes and achieve our purposes.

NHMRC's **risk appetite** recognises that it is not possible, nor necessarily desirable, to eliminate all of the risks inherent in our work. Accepting some degree of risk promotes innovation and recognises the limits of what we can control. Our appetite for risk varies by the type of risk, with a greater willingness to accept risks in pursuit of some of our strategic objectives than for operational matters.

NHMRC's *Risk Management Policy and Framework* provides the foundations and organisational arrangements for risk management within the agency and supports officials to document and use risk information in their activities. NHMRC's enterprise risk register details strategic and operational risks. NHMRC continues to conduct regular risk assessments to test and adjust our response to the changing operational environment, including those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. We augment our enterprise risk oversight and management with project-level risk management plans.

Key **enterprise risks** and **risk tolerances** relevant to the four-year period covered by this plan are outlined in Table 4. Strategic risks, if realised, would have a significant impact on achieving one or more of NHMRC's purposes. Operational risks, if realised, would have a significant impact on the ability of NHMRC to operate and achieve all of its outcomes.

Our risk tolerances reflect the maximum risk that we are willing to take for each of our enterprise risks. A high tolerance indicates that we are prepared to accept exposure to the risk in order to achieve our strategic objectives, whereas a low to very low risk tolerance indicates NHMRC makes additional effort to minimise exposure to the risk and/or takes immediate corrective action where required.

Table 4: Enterprise risks and risk tolerances

PURPOSE / THEME	RISK DESCRIPTION	RISK TYPE	RISK TOLERANCE	PRIMARY CONTROL/S	CONTROL TYPE/S
Investment	Funding opportunities are not available to talented researchers to contribute to the improvement of human health.	Strategic	Very Low	Maintain delivery of grant schemes, with adjustments (e.g. to timing) as needed to respond to the pandemic or other major disruptions.	Preventative Corrective
				Identify the best researchers and research through robust, independent, expert peer review.	Preventative
	Grant application and review processes are an unreasonable burden on researchers and peer reviewers.	Strategic	Low	Undertake regular surveys of peer reviewers to assess the burden and opportunities to improve processes.	Detective
				Continue to enhance the grant management system, Sapphire, to support peer review processes.	Corrective
				Implement a streamlined process where appropriate, to reduce the workload, broaden participation and shorten the time needed for peer review.	Corrective
Poor fiscal control or financial management adversely impacts NHMRC's ability to operate.	Operational	Very low	Manage resources in accordance with agreed budgets, ensure oversight by the relevant governance body and make financial decisions at the appropriate level.	Preventative	
			Undertake regular independent review of the internal control and financial frameworks, including as part of internal and external audits.	Detective	
Translation	Health advice and guidelines are inaccurate, do not comply with national and international best practice, or fail to adhere to principles for evidence-based advice.	Strategic	Low	Use the best available scientific methods for rating the certainty of evidence and making recommendations and follow transparent development and decision-making processes.	Preventative
				Consider declarations of interests and carefully manage any perceived and actual conflicts of interest, both prior to appointments and during the term of expert committees.	Preventative
	Needs and feedback of stakeholders, including researchers and consumers, are not adequately taken into account which adversely impacts achieving the end goals for the community.	Strategic	Moderate	Promote, and provide resources to support consumer and community involvement in research at all stages.	Preventative
				Release guidelines for a period of public consultation to allow the Australian public to comment.	Detective Preventative
			Obtain advice from Council and Principal Committees on emerging sectoral concerns and issues.	Detective	

PURPOSE / THEME	RISK DESCRIPTION	RISK TYPE	RISK TOLERANCE	PRIMARY CONTROL/S	CONTROL TYPE/S
<b>Integrity</b>	Research misconduct is not adequately investigated and addressed and/or inadequate controls are placed on NHMRC-funded researchers.	Strategic	Low	Require funded institutions to investigate and appropriately manage allegations of research misconduct and notify NHMRC in specific circumstances.	Detective Corrective
	There is unethical, fraudulent or corrupt conduct, or systematic non-compliance by staff, service providers or contractors.	Operational	Very Low	Maintain a robust internal control framework, including fraud control, supported by regular education and resources.	Preventative Corrective
				Undertake regular independent review of the fraud control and assurance frameworks and ongoing compliance monitoring, including as part of audits.	Detective
<b>Capability</b>	Building innovative information and communications technology (ICT) to support business capability exceeds time or resource constraints.	Strategic	Moderate	Maintain an appropriate governance structure to oversee project management and budgets, including regular review of risks and issues.	Preventative Detective
	Core ICT platforms are ineffective or unstable.	Operational	Very low	Deliver, and where required stabilise and enhance, core ICT systems to provide reliable, highly available services to support NHMRC operations.	Preventative Corrective
	Sustainability of operations and/or security of information held by NHMRC is threatened by malicious cyber activity.	Operational	Very low	Maintain security controls within the ICT architecture, regularly monitor cyber threats and security risks, assess the effectiveness of existing controls and implement remediation actions promptly as needed.	Preventative Detective Corrective
	ICT solutions operate suboptimally or increase the burden on stakeholders.	Strategic	Moderate	Design and test ICT solutions with internal and external users and implement enhancements over time, as feasible and where most needed.	Preventative Detective Corrective
	A suitable, appropriately skilled workforce that enables the achievement of NHMRC's objectives is not maintained.	Operational	Low	Support staff with a range of learning options and professional development opportunities and undertake recruitment activities in a timely manner as required.	Preventative

PURPOSE / THEME	RISK DESCRIPTION	RISK TYPE	RISK TOLERANCE	PRIMARY CONTROL/S	CONTROL TYPE/S
	COVID-19 adversely impacts the health and wellbeing of NHMRC staff, contractors or visitors.	Operational	Very low	Activate and maintain the Business Continuity Plan and ensure NHMRC's COVID-19 response is in accordance with relevant health advice.	Preventative
	Staff behaviour is inconsistent with the core values of the Australian Public Service – ICARE (Impartial, Committed to Service, Accountable, Respectful, Ethical).	Operational	Very low	Uphold the APS values in everything we do, reinforced by a respectful work culture and leadership behaviours that model ICARE.	Preventative

# Capability

NHMRC aims to operate effectively within a strong governance framework that supports performance, integrity, efficiency and compliance. Key capabilities for NHMRC's effective operation include governance, workforce, business services, safety and security, and information and communications technology (ICT). Our core capabilities that ensure our effective operation are outlined in Table 5. Many of NHMRC's key capabilities support our ability to be flexible and agile, adapting to new circumstances and addressing emerging issues. In addition to the core capabilities, we will focus on the following operational priorities in 2021–22 to ensure we have the capability we need over the period of the plan and beyond:

- Foster operational resilience enabled by a safe, supportive, flexible and technologically equipped work environment.
- Continue to develop and deploy Sapphire to support NHMRC and MRFF grant programs and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of grant application, assessment and management processes, including reducing the application and peer review burden on health and medical researchers.
- Create and sustain a positive work culture underpinned by our values, goals, attitudes and work practices and supported by development and mentoring opportunities that help our people to perform, grow, lead and inspire.
- Strengthen data governance, manage agency data as an asset, and support data availability and transparency.
- Deploy ICT infrastructure to support the efficient and effective delivery of NHMRC operations, including optimising business processes and recordkeeping.

Table 5: Capabilities to support the effective operation of NHMRC

CAPABILITY AREA	CORE CAPABILITIES
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a strong governance framework.</li> <li>• Maintain an effective financial/resource management framework.</li> <li>• Uphold a robust risk oversight and internal control framework (including legislative compliance, risk management, privacy, fraud control and managing complaints and freedom of information requests).</li> <li>• Maintain an effective assurance framework, including supporting the NHMRC Audit Committee and internal audit function.</li> </ul>
Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustain workforce strategies to promote diversity, flexible work, learning and development, and performance management.</li> </ul>
Business services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver critical internal business support services, including human resources, secretariat services, travel management and other business services.</li> <li>• Maintain NHMRC properties and facilities.</li> </ul>
Security and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain and strengthen NHMRC's Business Continuity Plan.</li> <li>• Implement effective controls to meet the Australian Government's <i>Protective Security Policy Framework</i>.</li> <li>• Uphold the Emergency Management Framework and comply with <i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i> and relevant Australian standards.</li> </ul>
ICT and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support critical grant management systems (Sapphire and RGMS).</li> <li>• Support and strengthen NHMRC's ICT infrastructure and service delivery standards.</li> <li>• Protect NHMRC's data and resources by continuing to implement and maintain the Cyber Security Strategy.</li> <li>• Strategically manage NHMRC's stakeholder relations, digital communication channels, media relations and other communications.</li> </ul>

# Key activities

To implement the strategy for health and medical research and deliver against our strategic priorities, NHMRC has developed a set of key activities for the period covered by this plan. These activities are informed by NHMRC's operating context and incorporate a focus on the strategic and health priorities. These high-level activities will be implemented through specific tasks and projects, which are set out in NHMRC's internal business planning documents. As well as the activities under the three themes (purposes) of investment, translation and integrity, an additional set of operational activities is outlined in the capability section (see Table 5), which provide critical support across all three themes.

## Investment

**Purpose: Create knowledge and build research capability through investment in the highest-quality health and medical research and the best researchers.**

Our priority activities for 2021-22 are to:

- Continue to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health and medical research and researchers, including by ensuring funding opportunities are available and by offering flexibility and facilitating appropriate grant variations for NHMRC-funded researchers.
- Continue to optimise grant application and assessment processes, including streamlining and improving the quality of peer review processes and expanding peer reviewer training.<sup>9</sup>
- Measure, evaluate and communicate the performance of the NHMRC grant program and the impact of NHMRC-funded research.<sup>10</sup>
- Implement initiatives to support gender equity, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, and early and mid-career researchers in the health and medical research workforce.<sup>11</sup>

Over the period covered by this plan, we will:

- Fund the best researchers and research across the breadth of Australian health and medical research needs and invest in innovative and collaborative research projects.
- Fund research to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and build and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researcher capacity.<sup>12</sup>
- Fund targeted research that responds to unmet or emerging health needs and reflects national, state and territory, and consumer and community priorities.
- Fund priority-driven research that responds to identified health priorities.<sup>12,13,14,15</sup>

9 Strategic priority area: Peer review

10 Strategic priority area: Research impact

11 Strategic priority area: Diversity and inclusion

12 Health priority: Improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people including through research that addresses health inequities

13 Health priority: Preventing and managing multimorbidity and chronic conditions

14 Health priority: Strengthening resilience to emerging health threats and emergencies, including environmental change, pandemics and antimicrobial resistance

15 Health priority: Building capacity and innovation in the effective translation of research into quality health policy, services and care

- Continue to deliver MRFF grant schemes effectively and efficiently, leveraging NHMRC's grant processes and capability, and working with the Department of Health to achieve program outcomes.
- Work with domestic and international partners, including non-government and philanthropic organisations and other government agencies, to support health and medical research.<sup>14</sup>
- Recognise excellence and celebrate leadership in health and medical research in Australia.

## Translation

### **Purpose: Drive the translation of health and medical research into clinical practice, policy and health systems and support the commercialisation of research discoveries.**

Our priority activities for 2021–22 are to:

- Continue to support a research-led, evidence-based health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including supporting the National COVID-19 Health and Research Advisory Committee.<sup>14</sup>
- Maintain a leadership role in the development of evidence-based public and environmental health and clinical guidance, which is relied upon by jurisdictions, including progressing the revision of the *Australian Dietary Guidelines* and supporting the Department of Health with the Natural Therapies Review.

Over the period covered by this plan, we will:

- Drive translation of evidence into innovative and evidence-based health care and public health policy, including by recognising Translation Centres and developing the research translation strategy.<sup>15</sup>
- Fund research that focuses on translation into practice, policy and products, encouraging industry engagement and the commercialisation of research outcomes where appropriate.
- Engage with consumers and the Australian community on health and medical research, including increasing community involvement in research and access to the results of research.<sup>16</sup>
- Engage internationally to promote and support collaboration, open science and global health objectives, including participating in bilateral, multilateral and other international forums.<sup>17,13</sup>
- Promote best practice evidence development and standards, including *Guidelines for Guidelines* and approval of third-party public health and clinical practice guidelines.
- Develop and revise guidelines in public and environmental health and clinical practice to support consistent standards.

<sup>16</sup> Strategic priority area: Consumer and community involvement

<sup>17</sup> Strategic priority area: International engagement

# Integrity

## Purpose: Maintain a strong integrity framework underpinning rigorous and ethical research and promoting community trust.

Our priority activities for 2021–22 are to:

- Support the Embryo Research Licensing Committee to develop and implement the regulatory framework for the introduction of mitochondrial donation in Australia, including preparing to license research, training and a clinical trial.<sup>18</sup>
- Promote the highest quality in research, including guiding and supporting good research practices throughout the research cycle and promoting open access to publications and data from NHMRC-funded research.<sup>19</sup>

Over the period covered by this plan, we will:

- Promote the highest standards of research quality and integrity, including leading the development and revision of key statements, codes and guidelines.<sup>19</sup>
- Identify, explore and consult on ethical issues relating to emerging technologies in health and medical research, and develop ethical guidelines and advice as needed.<sup>18</sup>
- Monitor Administering Institutions' compliance with NHMRC's policies and requirements.
- Support the work of the Australian Research Integrity Committee.<sup>19</sup>
- Continue to promote best practice in research governance and ethics review processes.
- Administer the *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002* and the *Prohibition of Human Cloning for Reproduction Act 2002* through the work of the Embryo Research Licensing Committee.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Health priority: Identifying emerging technologies in health and medical research and in health care, and promoting their safe, ethical and effective application

<sup>19</sup> Strategic priority area: Research quality



# Performance

Performance criteria linked to each of NHMRC's purposes are presented in Table 6, with the reporting period/s in which each will be assessed over the four-year period of this plan. These measures are designed to capture NHMRC's overall success in achieving its purposes. As with the key activities, while each criterion appears under one of NHMRC's three purposes, some measure performance under more than one purpose.

For example, impact case studies are included under Translation because they demonstrate the translation of health and medical research into real world outcomes, but they are also measures of the effectiveness of NHMRC Investment over time. Research impact relies on the underlying quality of health and medical research, so it is also an indirect measure of the effectiveness of NHMRC's Integrity activities. Similarly, NHMRC's peer review processes contribute to Investment, Translation and Integrity. A new efficiency measure about streamlining these processes has been added for the 2021-22 year.

Across all three of NHMRC's purposes, we aim to achieve efficiencies in the way we work and for our stakeholders by making effective use of digital technologies, for example by implementing a new grant management solution, Sapphire, and other ICT solutions. A performance measure under the theme of Capability has been added to monitor our performance in achieving efficiencies through digitalisation.

NHMRC continues to develop methods and build its capacity to measure the impact of the research it funds, including by understanding the lived experience of consumers and the community. An Evaluation Strategy has been developed and will help to mature our performance information over time.

NHMRC's performance in achieving its purposes will be reported in the NHMRC Annual Report to Parliament at the end of the reporting period. The performance criteria in the table include those listed in NHMRC's chapter of the Health Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS) (marked in the table with an asterisk) and additional measures that supplement the performance criteria in the PBS.

Table 6: Performance measures

<b>INVESTMENT</b>							
<b>Purpose:</b> <i>Create knowledge and build research capability through investment in the highest-quality health and medical research and the best researchers.</i>							
				<b>Measurement year/s</b>			
<b>Performance criteria</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Assessment methodology</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2024-25</b>
Research grants in basic science, clinical medicine, public health and health services research meet the health needs of Australians, and include national, state and territory and community priorities.*	NHMRC grants cover the full spectrum of health and medical research and NHMRC-funded research is focused on achieving better health outcomes for all Australians. The impact of NHMRC-funded research is wide-reaching, with numerous examples showcased on the NHMRC website. NHMRC funds both researcher-initiated and priority-driven research. Priority areas are identified in a range of ways, including through engagement with community members and state and territory governments and through consideration of proposals submitted through our online pathway.	Quantitative assessment and analysis of the distribution of grant expenditure and new grants awarded in the financial year. The analysis will draw on the new evaluation framework for NHMRC's grant program. The analysis may be supplemented by select qualitative cases studies and/or researcher profiles of top grants awarded.	Grants are awarded, based on expert peer review, across the full spectrum of health and medical research areas and focus on achieving better health outcomes.*	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Qualitative assessment of how targeted and priority-driven funding meets a research gap and how the unmet need was identified.	Targeted and priority-driven research funding calls are initiated that address areas of unmet need.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Research funding is invested effectively and efficiently through expert peer review.	NHMRC identifies the best health and medical research to fund through robust, independent, expert peer review. NHMRC has introduced a streamlined peer review process for the Ideas Grant Scheme to improve the matching of reviewers to applications and help identify the best research proposals.	Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the peer review process, including level of suitability matching of peer reviewers to applications, feedback from reviewers and measurement of time spent on peer review (by individual reviewers and total time).	Better matching of peer reviewers to applications, reduced burden on reviewers and shorter time needed for peer review in the Ideas Grant Scheme.	✓			

**INVESTMENT****Purpose:** *Create knowledge and build research capability through investment in the highest-quality health and medical research and the best researchers.*

Performance criteria	Context	Assessment methodology	Targets	Measurement year/s			
				2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Research grants are provided to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	NHMRC is committed to contributing to better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, through a range of initiatives and guided by NHMRC's Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus. NHMRC has a longstanding commitment to expend at least five per cent of the Medical Research Endowment Account annually on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research.	Quantitative assessment of grant expenditure and new grants awarded in the financial year. Funding is categorised as 'Indigenous health research' by reviewing each funded grant against a range of investigator-provided data classifications including fields of research, keywords, grant titles and media summaries.	More than 5% of NHMRC's annual budget is expended/awarded on research that will provide better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*	✓	✓	✓	✓
Build and strengthen capacity by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers.	NHMRC supports research career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers by providing competitive funding opportunities and mentoring through participation in NHMRC committees.	Quantitative assessment based on the number of chief investigators currently funded across all NHMRC schemes who identify as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.	Report on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander chief investigators.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increase the retention and progression of women in health science.	NHMRC is committed to gender equality in its research funding. Success rates for women in many NHMRC schemes have historically been below those of men. NHMRC's Gender Equity Strategy aims to achieve a gender-equal health and medical research workforce and foster gender equality in research funding through NHMRC policies and processes.	Quantitative assessment of the funded rates for men and women, and whether or not structural priority funding has been applied to equalise or reduce the gap in funded rates for men and women. The assessment covers all NHMRC grant schemes (collectively) and key schemes (Investigator, Ideas and Synergy Grants) and considers distribution across career stages.	The gender gap in funded rates across NHMRC grant schemes is reduced.	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*These performance criteria are included in the Portfolio Budget Statements.

**TRANSLATION**

**Purpose:** Drive the translation of health and medical research into clinical practice, policy and health systems and support the commercialisation of research discoveries.

Performance criteria	Context	Assessment methodology	Targets	Measurement year/s			
				2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Support an Australian health system that is research-led, evidence-based, efficient and sustainable.*	NHMRC's Translation Centres Initiative recognises leading centres of collaboration in health and medical research, research translation, research-infused education and training, and outstanding health care.	Qualitative assessment of the outcomes from NHMRC-accredited Translation Centres, as evidence that the accreditation process is effective in supporting improvements in these areas.	Improvements in clinical care, health service delivery and clinical training achieved by Translation Centres are identified and promoted.* <sup>20</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓
	NHMRC develops and endorses high quality guidelines for clinical practice, public health, environmental health and ethics. NHMRC's guidelines and advice supports other Commonwealth entities and states and territories in preventing, detecting and treating poor health or illness as well as fostering consistent standards in public and environmental health and clinical practice.	Qualitative assessment of NHMRC's role in revising, developing and approving guidelines that are timely, based on a review of the available evidence, follow transparent development and decision-making processes, and will promote health, prevent harm, encourage best practice and reduce waste.	Development and/or approval of public and environmental health and clinical practice guidelines.*	✓	✓	✓	✓
Report on the impact of the research funded by NHMRC.	NHMRC acknowledges the critical importance of measuring and recognising the impact of NHMRC-funded research where it has benefited or made broader contributions to society, as reflected in the Australian Government's National Innovation and Science Agenda and the <i>Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy 2016-2021</i> .	Qualitative and in-depth assessment of the impact of NHMRC-funded research using a case study approach.	Seven case studies (per year) are developed that demonstrate the impact of health and medical research funding.	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*These performance criteria are included in the Portfolio Budget Statements.

<sup>20</sup> Published in the Portfolio Budget Statements as "Improvements in clinical care, health service delivery and clinical training achieved by Advanced Health Research and Translation Centres and Centres for Innovation in Regional Health are identified and promoted."

**INTEGRITY****Purpose:** *Maintain a strong integrity framework underpinning rigorous and ethical research and promoting community trust.*

Performance criteria	Context	Assessment methodology	Targets	Measurement year/s			
				2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Research is conducted responsibly, ethically and with integrity in Australia. <sup>21*</sup>	The <i>Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research</i> is co-authored by NHMRC, the Australian Research Council and Universities Australia. The Code is supported by a series of Guides on specific topics to facilitate its implementation.	Quantitative assessment using NHMRC's annual survey of Administering Institutions (Institutional Annual Compliance Report) to ensure that the Code and its supporting Guides have been implemented in institutional processes.	Research integrity matters are managed appropriately by Administering Institutions in line with the requirements of the Code.*	✓	✓	✓	✓
Good research practices are supported by appropriate guidance.	The quality of NHMRC-funded research is critical to ensuring that public funds spent on research deliver the highest possible value. Rigour, transparency and reproducibility in research are key foundations for research integrity.	Qualitative assessment of the guidance developed to confirm that it focuses on critical issues including rigour, transparency and reproducibility and addresses previous gaps.	Guidance is made available to the research sector to support research quality.	✓			
Research involving human embryos is conducted ethically and legally in accordance with appropriate licence conditions.	The NHMRC Embryo Research Licensing Committee oversees the RIHE Act and PHCR Act and regulates research activities that involve the use of human embryos. NHMRC conducts inspections of licence holders to ensure compliance with the legislation and licence conditions.	Qualitative assessment through licence inspections, which include an assessment of the licence holder's processes in relation to activity under each licence and whether these processes meet legislative and licence requirements.	Compliance with regulatory requirements is demonstrated through outcomes from inspections and six-monthly reports.	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*These performance criteria are included in the Portfolio Budget Statements.

<sup>21</sup> Published in the Portfolio Budget Statements as "Promote and monitor the revised *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* and supporting guides."

**CAPABILITY<sup>22</sup>**

*Operate effectively within a strong governance framework that supports performance, integrity, efficiency and compliance.*

Performance criteria	Context	Assessment methodology	Targets	Measurement year/s			
				2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Digital technology supports the effective and efficient delivery of NHMRC activity.	NHMRC aims to make effective use of digital systems to support its core operations. For example, NHMRC's new grant management solution, Sapphire, aims to use enhanced data linkage and process redesign to make the health and medical research sector's engagement with NHMRC grant processes intuitive and reduce the time taken on grant administration.	Progressive refinement of electronic workflow processes to measurably reduce data entry, collection and validation throughout NHMRC's grant application and administration processes.	Digital technology reduces administrative burden.	✓	✓	✓	✓

<sup>22</sup> The Capability theme underpins achievement of all three of NHMRC's strategic themes or purposes: Investment, Translation and Integrity.

