Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

NHMRC

Targeted Call for Research: Improving Indigenous maternal and child health in the early years 2022 Peer Review Guidelines

Opening date:	**9 March 2022**
Closing date and time:	5pm ACT local time on 1 June 2022
Commonwealth policy entity:	National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
Sapphire assistance and enquiries:	NHMRC Research Help Centre Phone: 1800 500 983 (+61 2 6217 9451 for international callers) Email: help@nhmrc.gov.au Note: NHMRC's Research Help Centre aims to provide a reply to all requests for general assistance within two working days. This timeframe may be delayed during peak periods or for more detailed requests for assistance.
Targeted Calls for Research enquiries:	Email: targeted.research@nhmrc.gov.au

Contents

Targeted Call for Research: Improving Indigenous maternal and child health in the early years 2022 Peer Review Guidelines **1**

1. Introduction **4**

2. Key changes **4**

3. Principles, conduct and obligations during peer review **5**

3.1. NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review 5

3.2. The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 5

3.3. Disclosures of Interest 6

3.3.1. What is an interest? 6

3.3.2. What is a Conflict of Interest (CoI)? 6

3.3.3. Disclosure of Interests in the Peer Review Process 6

3.3.4. Failure to disclose an interest 6

3.4. Freedom of Information (FoI) 7

3.5. Complaints 7

4. TCR IIMCHEY 2022 peer review process **8**

4.1. Overview of the TCR IIMCHEY 2022 peer review process 8

4.2. Roles and responsibilities 9

4.3. Reviewing **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** applications 13

4.3.1. Identification of applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus 14

4.3.2. Receipt and initial processing of applications 14

4.3.3. Disclosure of interests and peer reviewer suitability 14

4.3.4. Establishment of panels and assignment of applications to panels/ Assignment of applications to peer reviewers 14

4.3.5. Briefing 14

4.3.6. Assessment of applications 14

4.3.6.1. Relative to opportunity and career disruption 15

4.3.6.2. Mitigating bias in peer review 15

4.3.6.3. Use of Impact Factors and other metrics 16

4.3.6.4. Research Integrity Issues 16

4.3.6.5. Contact between peer reviewers and applicants 17

4.3.7. Panel meetings 17

4.3.7.1. Discussion of applications at panel meeting 17

4.3.7.2. Panel meeting process 17

4.3.8. Quorum/Minimum number of assessments 19
4.3.9. Principles for setting conditions of funding for NHMRC grants 19
4.3.10. Documentation 20
4.3.11. Funding Recommendation 20
4.3.12. Notification of Outcomes 20
Appendix A - Understanding the Principles of Peer Review 21
Appendix B - Guidance for Declaring and Assessing Disclosures of Interest 23
Appendix C - TCR IIMCHEY 2022 Assessment Criteria 28
Appendix D - TCR IIMCHEY 2022 Category Descriptors 29
Appendix E - Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria 37
Appendix F – Guidance for assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria 38
Appendix G – Peer Review Guidance for Community/Consumer Representatives 39

1. Introduction

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is responsible for managing the Australian Government's investment in health and medical research in a manner consistent with Commonwealth legislation, guidelines and policies. NHMRC has a responsibility to ensure taxpayers' funds are invested appropriately to support the best health and medical research. Expert peer review assists us in fulfilling this responsibility.

This guide outlines the overarching principles and obligations under which the Targeted Call for Research: Improving Indigenous maternal and child health in the early years 2022 (TCR IIMCHEY 2022) peer review process operates, including:

- obligations in accordance with legislation, guidelines and policies
- how to disclose interests and manage conflicts, and
- standards and best practice for the conduct of peer review.

NHMRC will publicly notify the sector of any change in peer review process via its communications, such as through NHMRC's website and newsletters.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the:

- TCR IIMCHEY 2022 Grant Guidelines, available on GrantConnect, which set out the rules, objectives and other considerations relevant to NHMRC funding.
- *Policy on the Disclosure of Interests requirements for prospective and appointed NHMRC committee members* (Section 39 Committees). This Policy outlines peer reviewers' responsibilities in order to ensure all disclosures of interests are addressed in a rigorous and transparent way throughout the period of a peer reviewer's participation in NHMRC Committees.

2. Key changes

NHMRC recognises the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australia's health and medical research community and has updated assessment processes to reflect these impacts.

Peer reviewers must follow these updated processes:

- In track record assessment, peer reviewers must consider COVID-19 related circumstances, as outlined by applicants, as part of career disruptions or other relative to opportunity considerations under the provisions of NHMRC's Relative to Opportunity Policy.
- Peer reviewers should note that applicants have been advised that they may include information on any potential significant and long term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their proposed research, and proposals for managing such risks, as part of their research risk management plan within the grant proposal.
- Peer reviewers are not to let the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the proposed research affect the assessment of the research proposal of an application (e.g. the feasibility of accessing certain patient or population groups with social distancing restrictions in place).
- Peer reviewers must note that changes to the research proposal of a funded application, necessitated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. the commencement of a project needs to be delayed by six months until COVID-19 restrictions are eased) will be considered through NHMRC's Postaward management and grant variations processes. Such considerations do not form part of the peer review assessment of the proposal, particularly given that the long term impacts of the pandemic are still unknown.

Peer reviewers should note the following significant changes for the IIMCHEY TCR 2022 from previous TCRs:

- Track record assessment of publications track record no longer includes the list of all publications from the past 5 years (extracted from the Sapphire Profile), and will instead focus on up to 10 of the applicant's nominated best publications from the past 10 years (taking into consideration career disruptions). This change will help to ensure that assessment of publication track record focuses on the quality and contribution to science rather than the quantity of publications. Further information on this change, including a list of frequently asked questions, can be found on the NHMRC website.
- NHMRC will consider preprints in track record assessment. A preprint is a complete and public draft of a scientific document, yet to be certified by a journal through peer review. Preprints:
    - must be available in a recognised scientific public archive or repository such as arXiv, bioRxiv, Peer J Preprints, F1000 Research, etc
    - should be searchable via a digital object identifier (DOI). For preprints that are incrementally updated as work progresses, each version should have a unique DOI and only the latest version of the work should be included in the grant application.

3. Principles, conduct and obligations during peer review

The peer review process requires all applications to be reviewed by individuals with appropriate expertise. This carries an obligation on the part of peer reviewers to act in good faith, in the best interests of NHMRC and the research community and in accordance with NHMRC policies (outlined below).

3.1. NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review

NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review (the Principles) are high-level, guiding statements that underpin all NHMRC's peer review processes, and include:

- **Fairness.** Peer review processes are fair and seen to be fair by all.
- **Transparency.** Applies to all stages of peer review.
- **Independence.** Peer reviewers provide independent advice. There is also independent oversight of peer review processes by independent Chairs and Observers, where relevant.
- **Appropriateness and balance.** There is appropriate experience, expertise and representation of peer reviewers assessing applications.
- **Research community participation.** Persons holding taxpayer-funded grants should willingly make themselves available to participate in peer review processes, whenever possible, in accordance with the obligations in the Funding Agreement.
- **Confidentiality.** Participants respect that confidentiality is important to the fairness and robustness of peer review.
- **Impartiality.** Peer review is objective and impartial, with appropriate processes in place to manage disclosures of interest.
- **Quality and excellence.** NHMRC will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its processes to achieve the highest quality decision-making through peer review.

Additional details underpinning the Principles can be found at Appendix A.

3.2. The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research

The *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Code) requires researchers participating in peer review do so in a way that is 'fair, rigorous and timely and maintains the confidentiality of the content'.

The Code is supported by additional supplementary guidance, including *Peer Review: A guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.*

3.3. Disclosures of Interest

3.3.1. What is an interest?

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that interests of any kind are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour, in accordance with sections 16A and 16B of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014* (made under the subsection 29(2) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2013* (PGPA Act)).

In particular, under section 29 of the PGPA Act, "an official of a Commonwealth entity who has a material personal interest that relates to the affairs of the entity must disclose details of the interest". This obligation is ongoing and not limited to a particular point in time.

For the purposes of this document, the terms "material personal interest" and "interest" are regarded as interchangeable and whilst the term "interest/s" has been used for ease of reading, this policy includes guidance on each.

3.3.2. What is a Conflict of Interest (CoI)?

A CoI exists when there is a divergence between professional responsibilities (as a peer reviewer) and personal interests. Such conflicts have the potential to lead to biased advice affecting objectivity and impartiality. By managing any conflict, NHMRC maintains the integrity of its processes in the assessment of scientific and technical merit of the application.

For NHMRC peer review purposes, interests may fall into the broad domains of:

- Involvement with the application under review
- Working relationships
- Professional relationships and associations
- Social relationships or associations
- Collaborations
- Teaching or supervisory relationships
- Financial relationships or interests
- Other relevant interests or relationships

For further information, peer reviewers should consult the NHMRC *Policy on the Disclosure of Interests Requirements for Prospective and Appointed NHMRC Committee Members* (Section 39 Committees).

Researchers frequently have a CoI that cannot be avoided. Decision making processes in research often need expert advice, and the pool of experts in a field can be so small that all the experts have some link with the matter under consideration. An individual researcher should therefore expect to be conflicted from time to time, be ready to acknowledge the conflict and make disclosures as appropriate.

An outline of potential CoI situations and guidance is provided for peer reviewers at Appendix B.

3.3.3. Disclosure of Interests in the Peer Review Process

Peer reviewers must identify and disclose interests they may have with any of the Chief Investigators (CIs) and Associate Investigators (AIs) on applications they will be reviewing. After appointment as a peer reviewer, but before assessing any applications, peer reviewers are required to disclose their interests in writing. While interests must be disclosed at the beginning of the peer review process, new or previously unrecognised interests must be disclosed at any stage of the peer review process. Declarations must include details that substantiate when collaborations occurred (i.e. month and year). NHMRC will use these details to verify and determine the level of conflict. Any peer reviewer who has an interest that is determined by NHMRC to be a 'high' CoI will not be able to participate in the review of that application. However, they can provide scientific advice at the request of the Chair or NHMRC.

3.3.4. Failure to disclose an interest

A failure to disclose an interest without a reasonable excuse will result in the termination of the peer reviewer's

appointment under section 44B of the NHMRC Act (section 44B also covers failure to comply with section 29 of the PGPA Act).

It is important for peer reviewers to inform NHMRC of any circumstances which may constitute an interest, at any point during the peer review process. Accordingly, peer reviewers are encouraged to consult the secretariat if they are uncertain about any disclosure of interest matter.

3.4. Freedom of Information (FoI)

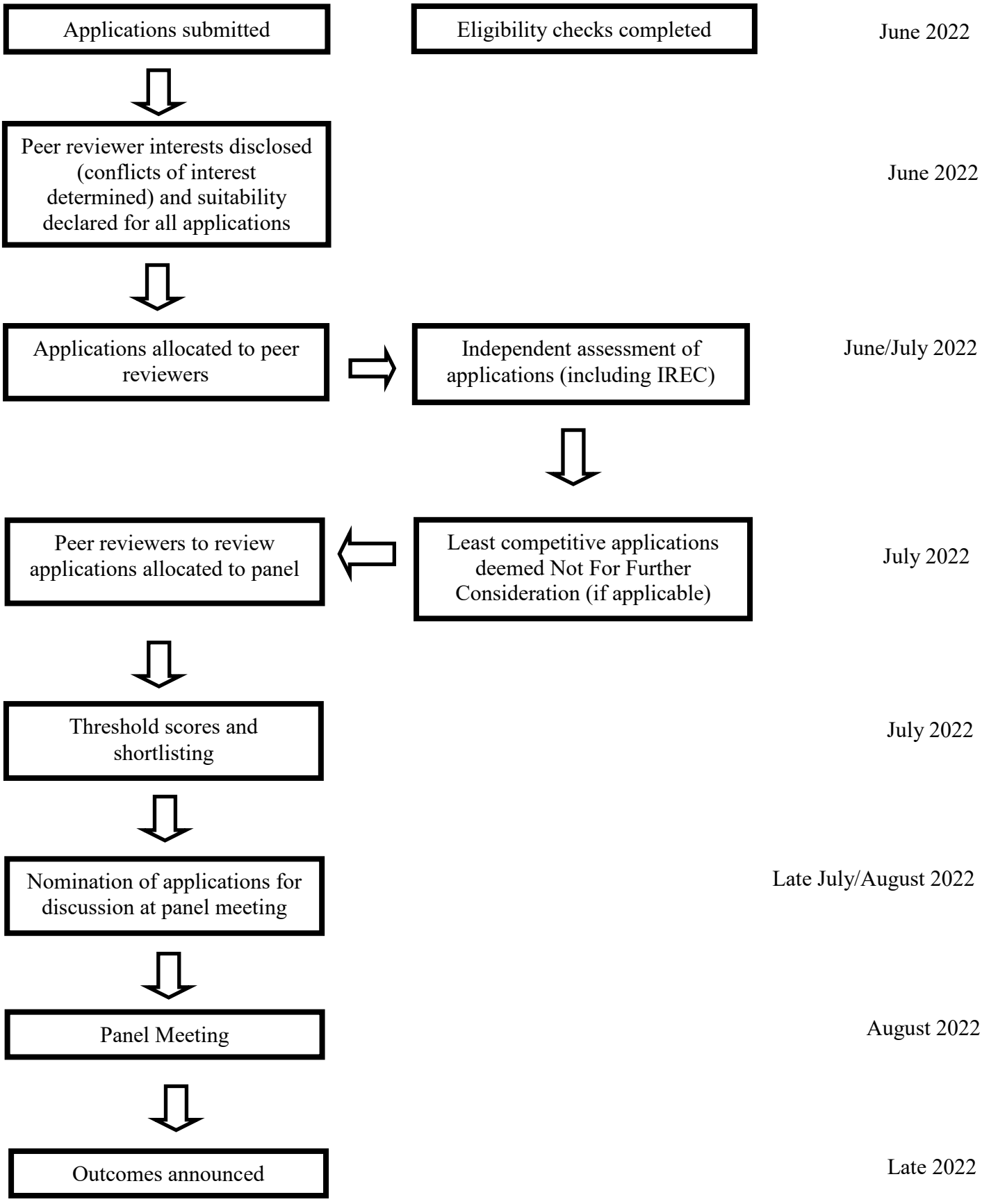
NHMRC is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* which provides a statutory right for an individual to seek access to documents. If documents that deal with peer review fall within the scope of a request, the FoI process includes consultation and exemptions. NHMRC endeavours to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

3.5. Complaints

NHMRC deals with any complaints, objections and requests for clarification on the peer review process. NHMRC may contact peer reviewers and/or Chairs involved to obtain additional information on particular application/s. Further information about the NHMRC complaints process can be found on the NHMRC website.

4. TCR IIMCHEY 2022 peer review process

4.1. Overview of the TCR IIMCHEY 2022 peer review process



Date	Activity
1 June 2022	Deadline for **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** application submission
June 2022	Application eligibility review and confirmation
June 2022	Peer reviewers disclose interests and suitability against applications
July 2022	Allocation of applications and members to panel/Allocation of applications to peer reviewers
July/August 2022	Peer reviewers review applications and submit scores against **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** assessment criteria for each allocated application
August 2022	Panel meeting*
Late 2022	Notification of outcomes*

*Date is indicative and subject to change.

Further information on the steps outlined in this process is provided in section 4.3 *Reviewing* **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** *applications.*

4.2. Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of those participating in the **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** peer review process are identified in the table below.

TCR IIMCHEY 2022 Peer Review Participants Table

Roles	Responsibilities
Chair	The Chair's role is to ensure NHMRC's procedures are adhered to and that fair and equitable consideration is given to every application being discussed at the panel meeting. Chairs do not assess applications but manage the process of peer review in accordance with this Guide. Prior to the panel meeting Chairs need to: • familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff • identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they have with applications assigned to their panel, and • familiarise themselves with ALL the applications assigned to their panel, excluding those for which they have been determined to have a high CoI. • assist peer reviewers with their duties and in understanding what is expected of them. During the panel meeting Chairs will: • take appropriate action for each CoI • keep discussions on time and focused • ensure NHMRC procedures are followed • promote good engagement by peer reviewers in all discussions • ensure that all peer reviewers consider 'relative to opportunity', including career disruptions, when discussing applications • ensure that any discussion and assessment is based on the **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** assessment criteria and associated

	category descriptors (Appendix C & D). • ensure the panel consistently considers the assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus • ensure peer reviewers are satisfied with the consistency and appropriateness of discussions for each application • record and notify NHMRC of any requests for clarification or advice, and • approve Meeting Attendance Record sheets. Chairs may need to: • fulfil the duties and responsibilities of a peer reviewer where required (e.g. to meet quorum requirements of the panel when assessing particular applications) – in such an instance a substitute Chair will be identified for relevant applications.
Assistant Chair	Prior to the panel meeting Assistant Chairs need to : • familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff • identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they may have with applications to be reviewed by the panel • familiarise themselves with all applications being considered by the panel. During the panel meeting Assistant Chairs will: • note the strengths and weaknesses of the application while discussion by the panel is underway • record budget changes and panel justification for adjusting the proposed budgets • ensure that budget discussions are consistent for all applications and inform the Chair if inconsistencies arise • act as Chair for applications where the Chair is unavailable or has a CoI • fulfil the duties and responsibilities of a panel member where required (e.g. to meet quorum requirements of the panel when assessing particular applications).
Peer reviewers	Prior to the panel meeting, peer reviewers need to: • familiarise themselves with this Guide and other material as identified by NHMRC staff • identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they have with applications assigned to them • provide a fair and impartial assessment against the **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (Appendix C and D) for each non-conflicted application assigned, in a timely manner • assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements 'relative to opportunity', including any career disruptions, where applicable • consider the assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Appendix E) for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus. Note - Peer reviewers will be provided with a report and a verbal summary

	from the 1SP at the panel meeting. • review scores/comments from all peer reviewers for all applications assigned to them, and • advise NHMRC of any applications they choose to nominate for discussion by exception at the panel meeting. • provide written summaries for each application assigned to them. During the panel meeting, peer reviewers will: • disclose interests they have with other peer reviewers • prepare for and participate in the discussion for each application where they do not have a high CoI. • Score each application using the NHMRC grant management system (Sapphire).
Primary Spokesperson (1SP)	Prior to the panel meeting: • assess the allocated applications against the TCR IIMCHEY 2022 assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (Appendix C and D) and the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria (Appendix E) • assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements 'relative to opportunity', including any career disruptions, where applicable • prepare speaking notes to present the application at the panel meeting • assess the proposed budget to ensure that requests for Direct Research Costs (DRCs) are appropriate for the project and fully justified. At the panel meeting: • lead the discussion using prepared notes detailing the application strengths and weaknesses relative to the assessment criteria and the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria • announce final scores for applications based on discussions • support the secondary spokesperson (2SP) in discussion about the appropriateness or otherwise, of the requested budget as required with reference to the individual elements of the budget ensuring PSPs, DRCs and equipment requests are appropriate for the project and fully justified.

Secondary Spokesperson (2SP)	Prior to the panel meeting: • assess the allocated applications against the **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (Appendix C and D). • assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements 'relative to opportunity', including any career disruptions, where applicable • prepare speaking notes to present the application at the panel meeting • rigorously assess the proposed budget to ensure that the DRCs are appropriate for the project and fully justified • prepare a recommendation for the panel to either: leave the requested budget intact, propose modifying the budget, or seek advice from the panel regarding specific budget requests. At the panel meeting: • add to the 1SP comments using prepared notes detailing the application strengths and weaknesses relative to the assessment criteria • announce final scores for applications based on discussions • discuss the appropriateness or otherwise, of the requested budget as required with reference to the individual elements of the budget ensuring the requested DRCs are appropriate for the project and fully justified.
Consumer and Community representatives	Prior to the panel meeting, Consumer and Community representatives need to: • familiarise themselves with this Guide and other material as identified by NHMRC staff, and • identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they have with applications assigned to their panel. • Complete a written summary of the strengths and weaknesses of how community and consumer involvement and engagement is included in the design, conduct and dissemination of outcomes of the research proposed. They will also give their perspective on the impact of the application in fulfilling the TCR's intended outcomes (please refer to Appendix G). During the panel meeting, community/consumer reviewers will: • participate in the review of applications by providing expert advice while taking into consideration the **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (Appendix C and D).
NHMRC staff	Under direction from the CEO, NHMRC staff will be responsible for overall administration of the peer review process and for the conduct of specific activities. Prior to the panel meeting, NHMRC staff will: • invite individuals to participate in the **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** scheme peer review process as required • determine whether disclosed interests pose a conflict and the level of that conflict.

	• act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers • provide briefings to peer reviewers • determine eligibility of applications • assign applications to the appropriate peer reviewers, and • prepare a Not For Further Consideration list (if required) for peer reviewers consideration At the panel meeting NHMRC staff will: • support the operation of Sapphire • assist the Chair in running the discussions • implement appropriate management plans for peer reviewers with 'high' interests or conflicts with applications and ensure that all participants (including community observers) are aware of disclosed interests • ensure that all peer reviewers are provided with the necessary information to review each application, and assisting and advising on the peer review process as required • maintain scoring records for each application • act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers and community observers, and • seek feedback from participants in the peer review process on improvements for future processes.
Community observers	NHMRC invites respected members of the general community to observe whether NHMRC policy and procedures are being adhered to during the peer review process. Observers assist NHMRC in ensuring that the assessment of all applications is fair, equitable and impartial. Observers will be briefed on the processes and procedures of the peer review of **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** applications. They will not participate in the review of any application. At the panel meeting, observers will: • identify and advise the Chair of all interests they have with applications to be discussed • monitor the procedural aspects of the meeting, and • provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of procedures across meetings. Observers may raise issues of a general nature for advice or action as appropriate with NHMRC staff. Observers are subject to the same disclosure of interest requirements as peer reviewers. Where a high CoI exists, the observer will not observe discussions of the respective application(s).

4.3. Reviewing TCR IIMCHEY 2022 applications

All **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** applications are assessed against the **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** *Assessment Criteria* and the associated *Category Descriptors* at Appendix C & D. Applications that are accepted by NHMRC as relating to the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health (see section 3.3.1) are also assessed against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* as set out at Appendix E.

4.3.1. Identification of applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus

Applications relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health will be identified by information provided in the application. Researchers with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health expertise will check whether these applications have at least 20% of their research effort and/or capacity building focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

As each application submitted to this grant opportunity specifically relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, NHMRC will obtain an assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Appendix E) by the assigned 1SP who will possess expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. For further information on assessing applications that have a focus on the health of Indigenous Australians, see *Guidance for Assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* at Appendix F.

The assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* will be considered by peer reviewers when scoring the assessment criteria at Appendix C.

4.3.2. Receipt and initial processing of applications

NHMRC staff will verify that **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** applications meet eligibility criteria. Applicants will be advised if their application is ineligible. However, in some instances these applications will remain in the peer review process until their ineligibility is confirmed. Eligibility rulings may be made at any point in the peer review process.

4.3.3. Disclosure of interests and peer reviewer suitability

Peer reviewers will be provided with a summary of each application and disclose their interests within Sapphire, in accordance with the guidelines provided at Section 3.3 and Appendix B.

Some peer reviewers may have a disclosure of interest for which they require a decision. In this case, NHMRC will assess the information provided by the peer reviewer and provide a ruling on the level of CoI.

Peer reviewers are also required to select their level of suitability to assess each application, based on the information available to them in the application summary. Further information and tutorials are available from Sapphire.

4.3.4. Establishment of panels and assignment of applications to panels/ Assignment of applications to peer reviewers

Taking into account CoIs and peer reviewer suitability, NHMRC staff will assign applications and peer reviewers. It is expected each panel will be assigned an equal number of applications. However this is subject to change, depending on the number and peer review area of applications. There will be a single panel of peer reviewers for this grant opportunity. Panel membership and application assignment is informed by the proposed field of research and other key words entered into NHMRC's grant management system by applicants and peer reviewers.

4.3.5. Briefing

NHMRC will provide panel members briefing material with further details on their duties and responsibilities in the **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** peer review process. This will be made available to panel members prior to assessing applications. Further information may be provided as necessary throughout the peer review process. Further information and tutorials are available from Sapphire.

4.3.6. Assessment of applications

Panel members will be given access to applications (where no high CoI exists) and will be required to complete their assessments in Sapphire.

Consumer and Community representatives will complete a written assessment highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the Community and Consumer Representative Summary contained within the application Grant Proposal.

Peer reviewers will assess all applications assigned to them against the assessment criteria, using the category descriptors, taking into account career disruptions and other 'relative to opportunity' considerations (NHMRC Policy and Priorities), where applicable. Peer reviewers will also consider the Consumer and Community representative and *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* assessments and discussions when submitting their final application scores at the panel meeting.

To ensure they provide independent scores, peer reviewers are not to discuss applications with other peer reviewers, except at the panel meeting.

Peer reviewers must ensure scores are completed by the nominated due date. If peer reviewers are unable to meet this requirement, they must contact NHMRC promptly to discuss alternative arrangements.

Peer reviewers' scores will be used to create provisional ranked lists of applications from which funding recommendations will be based. The overall score will be determined using each peer reviewer's score for each of the assessment criteria. The overall score, as calculated arithmetically to three decimal places, will take account of the weighting of each criterion.

4.3.6.1. Relative to opportunity and career disruption

Peer reviewers must assess productivity relative to opportunity and, where applicable, career disruption considerations, in the assessment of all applications. This reflects NHMRC's policy that peer reviewers should assess an applicant's track record of research productivity and professional contribution in the context of their career stage and circumstances, by taking into consideration whether the applicant's productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to them. To assist peer reviewers with their assessment, further details of the Relative to Opportunity Policy are provided on NHMRC's website.

4.3.6.2. Mitigating bias in peer review

NHMRC is raising peer reviewers' awareness of unconscious bias in the assessment process, in alignment with international practice and to ensure that NHMRC grant applications continue to receive objective and impartial assessments. Understanding bias enables peer reviewers' to critically and independently review applications and avoid suboptimal or unfair outcomes.

This is underpinned by the NHMRC document *Peer Review: A guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, which states that peer reviewers should be aware of how their own biases (conscious or unconscious) could affect the peer review process, including in relation to gender, ethnicity, nationality, institutional employer and research discipline.

To minimise or avoid bias, peer reviewers are encouraged to take action to address the unintended and systematic biases which prevent unprejudiced consideration of an application. To increase peer reviewers' awareness of the types of cognitive biases that can occur during peer review, NHMRC recommends the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DoRA) guidance on Rethinking Research Assessment.

NHMRC is also committed to addressing gender equality to promote fairness, transparency, equality and diversity in health and medical research. Fostering gender equality in peer review is a strategic objective, underpinned by NHMRC's *Gender Equity Strategy*.

Peer reviewer participation in the online Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT) for gender and science

In support of the objective, NHMRC encourages peer reviewers to complete the online for gender and science. The IAT for gender and science, used by several research funding agencies nationally and internationally, is designed to help participants identify any implicit associations they may have between gender and participation in a science career.

By completing the test, peer reviewers gain a better understanding and increased awareness of how unconscious attitudes may affect their decisions, which prepares them to carry out their duties to the high standards of fairness and rigour expected by NHMRC. Peer reviewers should continue to follow all peer review principles and processes outlined in these guidelines, ensuring that each application is accurately reviewed against the assessment criteria (Appendix C). NHMRC does not have access to, nor does it seek, peer reviewers' information and results for the IAT for gender and science in the peer review process.

Peer reviewers must also familiarise themselves with any additional materials provided by NHMRC about unconscious bias awareness and implicit associations during the peer review process.

Use of gender-neutral language

To reduce unconscious gender bias, NHMRC has strongly advised applicants to use gender-neutral language. This will limit the opportunity for unconscious gender bias to affect the assessment process.

NHMRC also encourages peer reviewers to use gender-neutral language in the assessment of applications. This means that during panel discussions or when preparing written material peer reviewers should:

- avoid the use of gendered pronouns such as he/she or her/his, and instead use gender-neutral alternatives such as CIA/CIB, CI last-name or plural pronouns (they/their) when referring to applicants.
- avoid the use of first names, and
- use gender-neutral nouns where appropriate e.g. parental leave rather than maternity/paternity leave.

The use of gender-neutral language in applications is encouraged, but does not form part of the assessment criteria and therefore should not influence your scoring of applications. Peer reviewers are required to consider the proposal on its merits, taking relative to opportunity considerations into account.

Where gender dimensions are important for the research being proposed, applicants have been advised they should be included in the application. Please refer to scheme-specific category descriptors for information on whether gender dimensions are to be considered as a part of assessment.

4.3.6.3. Use of Impact Factors and other metrics

Peer reviewers are to take into account their expert knowledge of their field of research, as well as the citation and publication practices of that field, when assessing the publication component of an applicant's track record. Track record assessment takes into account the overall impact, quality and contribution to the field of the published journal articles from the grant applicant, not just the standing of the journal in which those articles are published.

It is not appropriate to use publication metrics such as Journal Impact Factors.

The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DoRA) makes recommendations for improving the evaluation of research assessment. NHMRC is a signatory to DoRA and adheres to the recommendations outlined in DoRA for its peer review processes.

4.3.6.4. Research Integrity Issues

The peer review process can sometimes identify possible research integrity issues with applications or applicants (e.g. concerns about possible plagiarism, inconsistencies in the presentation of data, inaccuracies in the presentation of track record information) or the behaviour of other peer reviewers. NHMRC has established specific processes for addressing research integrity concerns that arise in peer review. Peer reviewers must not discuss their concerns with other peer reviewers as this may jeopardise the fair assessment of an application. Instead, these issues should be raised with NHMRC separately from the peer review process. Advice about how to raise concerns and a description of how this process is managed are provided on the NHMRC website.

Applications that are the subject of a research misconduct allegation will continue to progress through NHMRC peer review processes while any investigations are ongoing. NHMRC liaises with the institution regarding the outcome of any investigation and, if necessary, will take action under the *NHMRC Research Integrity and Misconduct Policy* available on the NHMRC website.

4.3.6.5. Contact between peer reviewers and applicants

Peer reviewers must not contact applicants about their application under review. If this occurs, the peer reviewer may be removed from the process, and there is the potential for exclusion from future NHMRC peer review.

Where an applicant contacts a peer reviewer, the relevant application may be excluded from consideration.

In either case, contact between applicants and peer reviewers may raise concerns about research integrity and NHMRC may refer such concerns to the relevant Administering Institution.

4.3.7. Panel meetings

It is expected that the **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** panel meeting will occur via videoconference. The panel meeting will meet for up to 5 days (depending on the number of applications).

4.3.7.1. Discussion of applications at panel meeting

The least competitive applications within the provisional ranked list of applications for each panel will form a Not For Further Consideration (NFFC) list and will be provided to respective panel members before the panel meeting. Each peer reviewer has the opportunity to rescue one application from the NFFC list if they believe an application warrants full review at the panel meeting. Once the NFFC list has been finalised, NHMRC staff will release a running order for the panel meeting. Applications not on the NFFC list will proceed to full review.

An application will be excluded from NFFC for the following reasons:

- NHMRC has not received a score and an assessment for all criteria from at least two spokespersons
- If a spokesperson has a high CoI after the initial assessment has been undertaken.

4.3.7.2. Panel meeting process

The purpose of the panel meeting is not for individual peer reviewers to regress their scores to the panel mean. It is an opportunity to discuss divergent opinions or aspects of an application that a peer reviewer may have overlooked and adjust their scores as necessary. Peer reviewers should be able to justify how their scores align with the category descriptors.

The process for the panel meeting is as follows:

Declaration of inter-relationships
Suggested time limit: 30 minutes

When panel members (including the Chair and secretariat) meet face-to-face for the first time, each panel member will be invited to briefly describe their expertise and previous peer review experience. During their introductions, members will be asked to declare any relationships with other panel members including:

- current and previous collaborations
- former student/teacher/mentoring relationships
- common employment/institutional relationships
- other relationships that may, or be perceived to, impair fair and impartial assessment.

Chair to announce the application
Suggested time limit: 2 minutes

The Chair will announce the application to be discussed including the title, Administering Institution/s and the CIs.

The Chair will identify any panel members who have a previously identified CoI with the application. Those members with a high CoI will be asked to leave the room/temporarily blocked from the videoconference by the secretariat (the videoconference connection will remain active).

The Chair will invite panel members to disclose any late interests with the application. If a panel member discloses a new interest, or wishes to discuss any concerns related to an existing CoI, the matter will be discussed with the panel. It is up to the remaining panel members to determine if the new interest constitutes a high CoI and if the declaring panel member should leave the room/ be temporarily blocked from the videoconference by the secretariat. The details of the late interest will be recorded by NHMRC. As this decision making can take extra time, it is important that all interests are disclosed and decided upon well in advance of the meeting, where possible.

If an interest is disclosed at the panel meeting by a SP and it is determined to be a high CoI, a new SP will be assigned to the application and the scores from the initial SP will be discarded. Discussion of the application will be moved to a later time where possible to give the new SP time to prepare.

Once highly conflicted members have left the room (those with a low CoI remain in the panel room)/ been temporarily blocked from the videoconference by the secretariat, the Chair will announce the category of funding the application relates to (e.g., NHMRC and/or Cancer Australia). The Chair will then identify the 1SP and 2SP and announce the Spokesperson scores for each of the four assessment criteria.

1SP and 2SP to comment on the application
Suggested time limit: 5 minutes (1SP) and 3 minutes (2SP)

The Primary and Secondary Spokespersons will:

- discuss the application's strengths and weaknesses against the assessment criteria, referring to the Category Descriptors
- 2SP only to add anything not addressed by the 1SP, or explain why they disagree with the 1SP, if applicable, and
- not make reference to the budget at this stage.

The Consumer/Community reviewer
Suggested time limit: 5 minutes

The Consumer/Community reviewer will:

- discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed research focusing on their perspectives as consumers or community members.

Full panel discussion
Suggested time limit: 5 minutes

The Chair will open discussion to the panel. Panel members have an opportunity to ask questions of all Spokespersons including the Consumer/Community reviewer, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the application and ensure that relevant considerations are taken into account.

The Chair must ensure adequate review of the application occurs, that all members have a fair opportunity to comment and that no member exerts undue influence over others.

Scoring by panel members
Suggested time limit: 3 minutes

Following the panel's discussion, the Chair will ask the Primary and Secondary Spokespersons to confirm their

three criterion scores noting that these may change as a result of the panel discussion.

The Chair will then ask if any member intends to score two or more away from the 1SP or 2SP criterion scores. If so, the panel member must declare this and provide a brief justification, which will be recorded by the secretariat.

All panel members in the room/videoconference, excluding the Chair, must independently score the application in Sapphire. All scoring panel members will provide scores against the three assessment criteria using the seven-point scale outlined in the **TCR IIMCHEY 2022** *Category Descriptors* (Appendix D), as a reference. While the category descriptors provide panel members with some benchmarks for appropriately scoring each application, it is not essential that all descriptors relating to a given score are met. Panel members should consider this and ensure the entire seven-point scale is considered when scoring applications.

At the completion of scoring, the panel secretariat will announce the overall score. The overall score will be determined by including each panel member's score for each of the assessment criteria. The rating, as calculated arithmetically to three decimal places and will take account of the weighting of each criterion.

Where panel members have concerns regarding the final score, the Chair should invite further discussion. If the panel collectively determines that reassessment is warranted, members will be invited to independently rescore that application. Panel members should not aim to achieve a consensus score, nor take into consideration the potential overall ranking or funding outcome of an application.

Discussion by exception of proposed budget

Suggested time limit: 5 minutes

Budget discussions should not commence until the NHMRC secretariat has announced the rating and category. Once the category has been announced, the secretariat will advise if the application may progress to budget discussion.

Budget discussions occur only where the 2SP has made a recommendation to discuss the budget. The Chair will facilitate the budget discussion to ensure applications are considered fairly and equitably. The 2SP will lead the budget discussion and comment on the appropriateness of the outlined costs and provide recommendations. The other SPs should be prepared to assist, if required. Other panel members may also provide relevant comments. Where the panel deems the proposed budget exceeds that required to accomplish the research objectives, appropriate reductions may be recommended and reasons recorded by the NHMRC secretariat.

NHMRC will record budget recommendations as agreed by the panel. NHMRC will check the budget recommendations to ensure the budgets have been recorded correctly and approved by the Chair.

NHMRC research staff may amend the budget recommended by the panel for any application, if necessary. NHMRC reserves the right to recommend funding levels which are less than those requested in the application and a duration of funding which differs from that requested.

4.3.8. Quorum/Minimum number of assessments

A quorum is regarded as 50 percent plus one of the appointed panel members. If there is an uneven number of panel members, a majority is the next full number after 50 percent (e.g. seven in the case of 13 members).

NHMRC will endeavour to identify, prior to panel meetings, those applications that do not have a scoring quorum and obtain a suitably qualified member from another panel to participate in panel discussion and to score that application.

However, in situations where a number of members have a high CoI with an application and a suitably qualified member(s) cannot be recruited from another panel, the scoring quorum cannot be less than one-third of the panel membership present at the meeting.

4.3.9. Principles for setting conditions of funding for NHMRC grants

Setting a condition of funding (CoF) on a grant through the peer review process is, and should be, a rare event.

When this does occur, the panel/peer reviewers or NHMRC will use the principles set out below to decide the CoF. These principles aim to achieve a consistent approach, minimise the number of conditions set and ensure conditions are unambiguous and able to be assessed.

CoFs relate to the award of funding, the continuation of funding or the level of funding. They do not relate to conditions which affect either eligibility to apply or subsequent peer review.

The principles are:

- NHMRC seeks to minimise the administrative burden on researchers and Administering Institutions.
- CoFs must not relate to the competitiveness of an application (e.g. project requires more community engagement); these issues should be considered during peer review and be reflected in the scores for the application.
- Any CoFs must be clear and measurable, so that the condition can be readily assessed as having been met.

4.3.10. Documentation

Peer reviewers may be required to retain personal notes that they made during the peer review process for a certain period, and if so, these must be held securely and in accordance with reviewers' obligations of confidentiality. NHMRC will notify peer reviewers of any such requirements prior to the peer review process.

4.3.11. Funding Recommendation

After the panel meeting, application scores from all peer reviewers are used to create a ranked list. This final ranked list will be used to prepare funding recommendations to NHMRC's Research Committee and Council for advice to the CEO, who will then make recommendations to the Minister for Health.

4.3.12. Notification of Outcomes

NHMRC will notify applicants and their Administering Institution's Research Administration Officer of grant application outcomes.

Feedback will be provided to all applicants in the form of an Application Assessment Summary (AAS). The AAS will contain numerical information on the competitiveness of the application that will be drawn from the scores given by peer reviewers.

Appendix A - Understanding the Principles of Peer Review

Fairness

- Peer review processes are designed to ensure that peer review is fair and seen to be fair by all involved.
- Peer reviewers have an obligation to ensure that each application is judged consistently and objectively on its own merits, against published assessment criteria. Peer reviewers must not introduce irrelevant issues into the assessment of an application.
- Peer reviewers must only address information provided in the application based on its relevance to the assessment criteria. Any information or issues relating to the applicant(s) outside of the application must not be considered in the peer reviewers assessment. Applications will be subject to scrutiny and evaluation by individuals who have appropriate knowledge of the fields covered in the application.
- Peer reviewers should ensure that their assessments are accurate and that all statements are capable of being verified.
- Complaints processes are outlined on the NHMRC website. All complaints to NHMRC relating to the peer review process are dealt with independently and impartially.

Transparency

- NHMRC will publish key dates, all relevant material for applicants and peer reviewers, and grant announcements on its website and/or via GrantConnect.
- NHMRC publicly recognises the contribution of participants in the peer review process, through publishing their names on the NHMRC website.[1]

Independence

- Peer reviewers must provide independent and impartial assessment of applications. Peer reviewer assessments may be informed by input from other experts (e.g. in panel meetings or when considering expert reports) but must not be unduly influenced by the views of other researchers or stakeholders.
- The order of merit determined by peer reviewers is not altered by NHMRC. However, additional applications may be funded 'below the funding line' in priority or strategic areas.
- Chairs are independent and are not involved in the peer review of any application. Chairs act to ensure that NHMRC's processes are followed for each scheme, including adherence to the principles of this Guide.

Appropriateness and balance

- Peer reviewers are selected to meet the scheme's objectives and to ensure adequate expertise to assess the applications received.
- NHMRC endeavours to ensure that peer reviewers are selected with regard to an appropriate representation of gender, geography and large and small institutions.

Confidentiality

- NHMRC provides a process by which applications are considered by peer reviewers in-confidence. In addition NHMRC is bound by the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988* in relation to its collections and use of personal information, and by the commercial confidentiality requirements under section 80 of the NHMRC Act.
- Peer reviewers are to treat applications in-confidence and must not disclose any matter regarding

[1] Such information will be in a form that prevents applicants determining which particular experts were involved in the review of their application.

applications under review to people who are not part of the process.

- Any information or documents made available to peer reviewers in the peer review process are confidential and must not be used other than to fulfil their role.
- NHMRC is subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* which provides a statutory right for an individual to seek access to documents. If documents that deal with peer review fall within the scope of a request, there is a process for consultation and there are exemptions from release. NHMRC will endeavour to protect the identity of peer reviewers assigned to a particular application.

Impartiality

- Peer reviewers must disclose all interests and matters that may, or may be perceived to, affect objectivity in considering particular applications.
- Peer reviewers must disclose relationships with other members of the panel, and interests with applications being reviewed, including:
    - research collaborations
    - student, teacher or mentoring relationships
    - employment arrangements
    - any other relationship that may, or may be seen to, undermine fair and impartial judgement.
- Disclosures of interest are managed to ensure that no one with a high conflict is involved in the assessment of relevant applications.

Quality and Excellence

- NHMRC will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its peer review processes.
- Any significant change will be developed in consultation with the research community and may involve piloting new processes.
- NHMRC will strive to introduce new technologies that are demonstrated to maximise the benefits of peer review and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process while minimising individual workloads.
- NHMRC will undertake post-scheme assessment of all its schemes with feedback from the sector.
- NHMRC will provide advice, training and feedback for peer reviewers new to NHMRC peer review.
- Where NHMRC finds peer reviewers to be substandard in their performance, NHMRC may provide such feedback directly to the peer reviewer or their institution.

Appendix B - Guidance for Declaring and Assessing Disclosures of Interest

Peer reviewers are required to disclose all interests that are relevant, or could appear to be relevant, to the proposed research.

An interest is a collaboration or relationship which may, or could be perceived to, affect impartial peer review and thus needs to be disclosed and transparently managed (where necessary) to safeguard the integrity of the peer review process. It is essential that peer reviewers not only disclose their own actual interests relating to proposed research (real interest), but also collaborations and relationships that could be perceived by stakeholders to affect impartial peer review (perceived interest). Failure to do so without a reasonable excuse may result in the peer reviewer being removed from the peer review process in accordance with subsection 44B(3) of the NHMRC Act.

A disclosure does not always equate to a conflict of interest (CoI). In determining if an interest is a conflict, peer reviewers should give consideration to the following values that underpin the robust nature of peer review:

- **Impartiality:** The benefits of peer reviewers' expert advice needs to be balanced with the risk of real or perceived interests affecting an impartial review.
- **Significance:** Not all interests are equal. The type of interest needs to be considered in terms of its significance and time when it occurred.
- **Integrity through disclosure:** Peer review rests on the integrity of peer reviewers to disclose any interests and contribute to transparently managing any real or perceived conflicts in a rigorous way. The peer review system cannot be effective without trusting peer reviewers' integrity.

In determining if an interest is a 'High', 'Low', or 'No' conflict, the responsibility is on the peer reviewer to consider the specific circumstances of the situation. This includes:

- the interest's significance
- its impact on the impartiality of the reviewer, and
- maintaining the integrity of the peer review process.

Once a peer reviewer discloses an interest they can provide an explanation of the interest in Sapphire to enable a judgement of its significance. Wherever possible, peer reviewers are required to provide sufficient detail in the explanation, such as date (month and year) and nature of the interest. Disclosures are to be documented for interests with both CIs and AIs.

The written declaration of interest is retained for auditing purposes by NHMRC. The details below provide general examples and are not to be regarded as a prescriptive checklist.

HIGH Conflict of Interest		
Situation		**Example**
Associated with Application and/or Chief Investigator (CI)	✓	Peer reviewer is a CI or AI on the application under review.
	✓	Peer reviewer has had discussions/significant input into the study design or research proposal of this application.
Collaborations	✓	Peer reviewer is actively collaborating or has collaborated with the CI in the last three calendar years on publications (co-authorship), pending grant applications and/or existing grants.
Working relationships	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI currently work or are negotiating future employment in the same: • research field at an independent Medical Research Institute. • Department or School of a university. • Department of a hospital.
	✓	Peer reviewer is in a position of influence within the same organisation as a CI, or has a pecuniary interest in the organisation (either perceived or real) e.g. Dean of Faculty or School/Institute Directors.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI are on the same committee/board and the peer reviewer or their affiliated organisation would stand to benefit from, or be affected, by the outcome of the application (i.e. vested interested in the proposed research). For example, peer reviewer and CI are both on the same governing board within their organisation.
Professional relationships and interests	✓	Peer reviewer or a peer reviewer's employer is directly affiliated or associated with an organisation(s) that may have, or may be perceived to have, a vested interest in the research. For example, a pharmaceutical company, which has provided drugs for testing, has a vested interest in the outcome.
Social relationship and / or interests	✓	The peer reviewer or a peer reviewer's immediate family member has a personal or social relationship with a CI on the application.
Teaching or supervisory relationship	✓	Peer reviewer has taught or supervised a CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies within the last three years.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI co-supervise an undergraduate or postgraduate student and collaborate with each other on the student's research.
Direct financial interest in the application	✓	Peer reviewer has the potential for financial gain if the application is successful, such as benefits from: payments from resulting patents, supply of goods and services, access to facilities, and provision of cells/animals as part of the collaboration.
	✓	Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company and the research proposal may involve collaboration/association with that company.
Other interests or situations	✓	Peer reviewer had or has an ongoing scientific disagreement and/or dispute with a CI. This may still be ruled as a high conflict if the events in question occurred beyond the last

HIGH Conflict of Interest		
Situation		**Example**
		three years.
	✓	There are other interests or situations not covered above that could influence/or be perceived to influence the peer review process. In these instances, sufficient details must be provided to allow NHMRC to make a ruling.

LOW Conflict of Interest		
Situation		**Example**
Collaborations	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI on the application have collaborated more than three years ago.
	✓	Within the last three years, the peer reviewer was part of large collaborations involving the CI, but did not interact or collaborate with the CI directly. Examples include: • publication(s) as part of a multi-author collaborative team (i.e. ≥10 authors) • pending grant applications or existing grants involving more than ten CIs (e.g. large collaborative research centres and network grants)
	✓	A colleague is planning future collaborations with a CI.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a named AI on the application are actively collaborating or have previously collaborated within the last three years.
	✓	Without financial gain or exchange, a peer reviewer and a member of the research team have shared cells/animals/reagents/specialist expertise (biostatistician) etc. but have no other connection to each other.
	✓	Collaboration between a peer reviewer's colleague/research group and a CI on the application, where the peer reviewer did not participate or have a perceived interest (e.g. direct leadership or responsibility for the researchers involved in the collaboration) in the collaboration, or vice versa.
	✓	Peer reviewer is considering, planning or has planned a future collaboration with a CI on the application but has no current collaborations, including joint publications/applications under development.
	✓	Peer reviewer and CI have previously proposed or planned a collaboration that did not progress.
Working relationships	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI currently work or are negotiating future employment in: • the same institution but have no direct association or collaboration. • the same Faculty or College of a university but in different Schools or Departments and do not know each other.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI work for two organisations that are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI are on the same committee/board, but otherwise have no working or social relationships that constitute a high conflict and the peer reviewer or their affiliated organisation would not benefit from, or be affected by, the outcome of the application (i.e. do not have a vested interest in the proposed research). For example, the peer reviewer and CI are both on an external government advisory committee.

LOW Conflict of Interest		
Situation		**Example**
Professional relationships and interests	✓	Peer reviewer and CI's organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration between the CI and peer reviewer and there is no other link that would constitute a high conflict.
Social relationship and/or interests	✓	Peer reviewer's partner or immediate family member has a known personal/social (non-work) or perceived relationship with a CI on the application, but the peer reviewer themselves does not have any link with the CI that would be perceived or constitute a high conflict.
Teaching or supervisory relationship	✓	Peer reviewer taught or supervised the CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, co-supervised a CI or the peer reviewer's research was supervised by a CI, more than three years ago.
	✓	Peer reviewer and a CI are co-supervisors of an undergraduate or postgraduate student, but they are not collaborating with each other on the student's research (e.g. where one of the supervisors may provide additional expert input or guidance to the student's project or thesis).
Financial interest in the application	✓	Peer reviewer has an associated patent pending, supplied goods and services, improved access to facilities, or provided cells/animals etc. to a named CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies.
	✓	Peer reviewer has intellectual property that is being commercialised by an affiliated institution. Peer reviewer has previously provided and/or received cells/animals to/from a CI on the application, but has no other financial interests directly relating to this application that would constitute a high conflict.
	✓	Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company, and the research proposal may impact upon the company.
Other interests or situations	✓	Peer reviewer may be, or may be perceived to be, biased in their review of the application. For example, peer reviewer is a lobbyist on an issue related to the application.

Appendix C - TCR IIMCHEY 2022 Assessment Criteria

The following category descriptors are used as a guide to scoring an application against each of the assessment criteria. While the category descriptors provide peer reviewers with some benchmarks for appropriately scoring each application, **it is not essential that all descriptors relating to a given score are met.**

The category descriptors are a guide to a 'best fit' outcome. Peer reviewers will consistently refer to these category descriptors to ensure thorough, equitable and transparent assessment of applications.

There are three weighted assessment criteria for the TCR IIMCHEY 2022 grant opportunity, namely;

- **Scientific Quality and Relevance (50%)** – the clarity and potential application of the hypotheses or research objectives, the strengths and weaknesses of the study design, feasibility and sustainability.

- **Record of achievement of the team (25%)** - the value of the team members' past research, community activities and linkages, and other relevant achievements, relative to opportunity. Assessment comprises leadership and community involvement, publications, and research impact, as well as any other relevant contributions.

- **Multidisciplinary collaboration (25%)** - the quality of a diverse team's multifaceted and collaborative approach. This approach will improve identified community priority health outcomes, while building and strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and community capacity and capabilities.

Appendix D - TCR IIMCHEY 2022 Category Descriptors

Category	*Scientific Quality and Relevance to the Objectives and Expected Outcomes of the TCR (50%)*	*Record of Achievement of the Team in Areas/Disciplines Relevant to this TCR – relative to opportunity (25%)*	*Multidisciplinary collaboration (25%)*
7 ***Outstanding***	The **research proposal**: • is **highly relevant** to the call • is **without question, highly feasible** • has objectives that are **well-defined, highly coherent** and **strongly developed** • has a **near flawless** design • has **very comprehensive** strategies for performance measures/milestones and how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed • will provide very **high quality** evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the call • is **highly competitive** with the best comparable research proposals internationally • is **highly likely** to be translated into, or inform changes in, policy or health practice • will **almost certainly** result in highly influential publications and research outputs • is **highly integrated** with consumer and/or community representatives in every aspect of the project • has a framework for strategies and processes for evaluation that is **highly integrated** into the project design including risk management strategies where	The **applicant team:** • has a track record that is **highly relevant** to the proposed research in depth and breadth • has **all** the required skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes • is **highly networked** with domestic and/or international alliances to exchange knowledge and skills.	The proposed **research team** has **outstanding** potential for multidisciplinary collaboration as it: • comprises an **outstanding**, diverse team (in terms of perspectives, gender, career stage and/or researchers from different cultures) that will provide expertise **and** build capacity aligned to the research question • **comprehensively** demonstrates why the research requires the integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines and has processes to ensure the research question is addressed using these different disciplines complementarily • integrates researchers with **outstanding expertise and insights** across disciplines **necessary and sufficient** to address the major research question and lead to **highly likely**, **transformative outcomes** • demonstrates to a **very high degree**, comprehensive and suitable plan(s) for the research team to work collaboratively, including milestones and evaluation measures and strategies for intellectual exchange, governance, grant sharing and resources • demonstrates sustainable collaborations that are **very highly** likely to extend beyond

	appropriate.		the life of the project • demonstrates each investigator's previous experience and success in collaborative research (with the same or other collaborators) • incorporates **comprehensive and outstanding** strategies to integrate, provide mentoring and development opportunities and increase capability of under-represented groups/researchers (e.g. health professionals, consumers, community groups, policy makers and people from different cultures).
6 ***Excellent***	The **research proposal**: • is **very relevant** to the call • is **highly feasible** • has objectives that are **clear**, **logical** and **well developed** that advances knowledge • is **excellent** in design • has **comprehensive** strategies for performance measures/milestones and how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed • will provide **high quality** evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR • is very **likely** to be competitive with strong comparable research proposals internationally • is very **likely** to be translated into, or inform changes in, policy or health practice • is **very likely** to result in highly influential publications • is **well integrated** with consumers and/or community representatives in most aspects of the project	The **applicant team:** • has a track record that is **highly relevant** to the proposed research in depth and breadth • has **all** the required skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes • is **well networked** with international alliances to exchange knowledge and skills.	The proposed **research team** has **excellent** potential for multidisciplinary collaboration as it: • comprises an **excellent**, diverse team (in terms of gender, career stage and/or researchers from different cultures) that will provide expertise **and** build capacity aligned to the research question • demonstrates to **a high degree** why the research requires the integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines and has processes to ensure the research question is addressed using these different disciplines complementarily • integrates researchers with **excellent expertise and insights** across disciplines **necessary and sufficient** to address the major research question and lead to **highly likely substantial outcomes** • demonstrates to a **high degree**, comprehensive and suitable plan(s) for the research team to work collaboratively, including milestones and evaluation measures and strategies for intellectual exchange, governance, grant sharing and

	• has a framework for strategies and processes for evaluation that is **well integrated** into the project design including risk management strategies where appropriate.		resources • demonstrates sustainable collaborations that are **highly** likely to extend beyond the life of the project • demonstrates each investigator's previous experience and success in collaborative research (with the same or other collaborators) • incorporates **comprehensive** and **excellent** strategies to integrate, provide mentoring and development opportunities and increase capability of under-represented groups/researchers (e.g. health professionals, consumers, community groups, policy makers and people from different cultures).
5 ***Very Good***	The **research proposal**: • is **relevant** to the call • is **likely to be feasible** • has objectives that are **clear** and **logical** that advances knowledge • raises a **few minor concerns** with respect to the study design • has **clear** strategies for performance measures/milestones and how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed • will provide **some high quality** evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR • may **not be highly competitive** with comparable research proposals internationally • may be translated into, or inform changes in, policy or health practice • may result in **several** influential publications	The **applicant team:** • has a track record that is **very relevant** to the proposed research in depth and breadth • has **most of** the required skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes • is **networked** with international alliances to exchange knowledge and skills.	The proposed **research team** has **very good** potential for multidisciplinary collaboration as it: • comprises a **very good**, diverse team (in terms of gender, career stage and/or researchers from different cultures) that will provide expertise **and** build capacity aligned to the research question • **largely** demonstrates why the research requires the integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines and has processes to ensure the research question is addressed using these different disciplines complementarily • integrates researchers with **very good expertise and insights** across disciplines **necessary and sufficient** to address the major research question and lead to **substantial outcomes** • **largely** demonstrates a comprehensive and suitable plan(s) for the research team to work collaboratively, including milestones and evaluation

	• is **integrated** with consumers and/or community representatives in some aspects of the project • has a framework for strategies and processes for evaluation that is **integrated** into the project design including risk management strategies where appropriate.		measures and strategies for intellectual exchange, governance, grant sharing and resources • demonstrates sustainable collaborations that are **likely** to extend beyond the life of the project • demonstrates each investigator's previous experience and success in collaborative research (with the same or other collaborators) • incorporates **comprehensive** and **very good** strategies to integrate, provide mentoring and development opportunities and increase capability of under-represented groups/researchers (e.g. health professionals, consumers, community groups, policy makers and people from different cultures).
4 ***Good***	The **research proposal**: • is somewhat **relevant** to the call • raises **some concerns** regarding feasibility • has objectives that are **clear** that advance knowledge • raises **some concerns** regarding the study design • has **some** strategies for performance measures/milestones and how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed • will provide **some evidence** that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR • is **not likely to be competitive** with similar research proposals internationally • may be translated into, or inform changes in, policy or health	The **applicant team:** • has a track record that is **consistent** with the proposed research in depth and breadth • has **some** of the required skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes • is **somewhat networked** with international alliances to exchange knowledge and skills.	The proposed **research team** has **good** potential for multidisciplinary collaboration as it: • comprises a **good**, diverse team (in terms of gender, career stage and/or researchers from different cultures) that will provide expertise **and** build capacity aligned to the research question • **broadly** demonstrates why the research requires the integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines and has processes to ensure the research question is addressed using these different disciplines complementarily • integrates researchers with **good expertise and insights** across disciplines **necessary and sufficient** to address the major research question and **likely** lead to **substantial outcomes** • **broadly** demonstrates comprehensive and suitable plan(s) for the research team to

	practice • may result in **some** strong or influential publications • is **somewhat integrated** with consumers and/or community representatives in minor aspects of the project • has a framework for strategies and processes for evaluation that is **somewhat integrated** into the project design including risk management strategies where appropriate.		work collaboratively, including milestones and evaluation measures and strategies for intellectual exchange, governance, grant sharing and resources • demonstrates sustainable collaborations that **could** extend beyond the life of the project • demonstrates each investigator's previous experience and success in collaborative research (with the same or other collaborators) • incorporates **comprehensive and good** strategies to integrate, provide mentoring and development opportunities and increase capability of under-represented groups/researchers (e.g. health professionals, consumers, community groups, policy makers and people from different cultures).
3 ***Marginal***	The **research proposal**: • is **not particularly relevant** to the call • raises **several concerns** regarding feasibility • is **somewhat unclear** in its objectives and potential to advance knowledge • raises **several concerns** regarding the study design • has **superficial** consideration of strategies for performance measures/milestones and how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed • may provide **limited** evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR • is **not competitive** nationally or internationally	The **applicant team:** • has a **limited** track record in the field of the proposed research • has **minimal** skills and expertise required to achieve the expected outcomes • is **marginally networked** with international alliances to exchange knowledge and skills.	The proposed **research team** has **moderate** potential for multidisciplinary collaboration as it: • comprises a diverse team (in terms of gender, career stage and/or researchers from different cultures) that will provide expertise **and** build capacity aligned to the research question • demonstrates to a **moderate degree** why the research requires the integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines and has processes to ensure the research question is addressed using these different disciplines complementarily. • integrates researchers with **moderate expertise and insights** across disciplines **necessary and sufficient** to address the major research question and **could** lead to **substantial outcomes**

	• is **unlikely** to be translated into, or inform changes in, policy or health practice • may result in some **modestly** influential publications • is **marginally integrated** with consumers and/or community representatives in the project • has a framework for strategies and processes for evaluation that is **moderately integrated** into the project design including risk management strategies where appropriate.		• **demonstrates a moderate** plan(s) for the research team to work collaboratively, including milestones and evaluation measures and strategies for intellectual exchange, governance, grant sharing and resources • demonstrates collaborations that **could** extend beyond the life of the project • demonstrates each investigator's previous experience and success in collaborative research (with the same or other collaborators) • incorporates **moderate** strategies to integrate, provide mentoring and development opportunities and increase capability of under-represented groups/researchers (e.g. health professionals, consumers, community groups, policy makers and people from different cultures).
2 ***Unsatisfactory***	The **research proposal**: • raises **several major concerns** regarding feasibility • is **unclear** in its objectives and capacity to advance knowledge • raises **several major concerns** regarding the study design • has **no** shared budget, **some** evidence of shared resources, **no** consideration of how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed • has **little relevance** to the call • is **not competitive** nationally or internationally • is **unlikely** to provide evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR • is **very unlikely** to be translated	The **applicant team:** • has a track record which **does not relate well** to the proposed research • is **deficient in many** of the required skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes • is **poorly networked** with international alliances to exchange knowledge and skills.	The proposed **research team** has **very limited** potential for multidisciplinary collaboration as it: • comprises a diverse team (in terms of gender, career stage and/or researchers from different cultures) that will **unlikely** provide expertise **or** build capacity aligned to the research question • demonstrates **to a limited degree** why the research **could** require the integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines and has processes to ensure the research question is addressed using these different disciplines complementarily, **but poses some concerns** • integrates researchers with **limited expertise and insights** across disciplines necessary to address the major research

	into, or inform changes in, policy or health practice • is **unlikely** to result in influential publications • is **poorly integrated** with consumers and/or community representatives in the project • has a framework for strategies and processes for evaluation that is **poorly integrated** into the project design including risk management strategies where appropriate.		question. • **demonstrates a limited** plan(s) for the research team to work collaboratively, including milestones and evaluation measures and strategies for intellectual exchange, governance, grant sharing and resources • demonstrates **limited** collaborations that is **unlikely** to **extend** beyond the life of the project. • demonstrates **to a limited extent** each investigator's previous experience and success in collaborative research (with the same or other collaborators) • Incorporates **limited** strategies to integrate, provide mentoring and development opportunities and increase capability of under-represented groups/researchers (e.g. health professionals, consumers, community groups, policy makers and people from different cultures).
1 ***Poor***	The **research proposal**: • contains a research plan that **does not seem to be feasible** and is **unlikely** to be successfully completed • is **very unclear** in its objectives, and unlikely to advance knowledge • contains a study design that is **not adequate** • has **no** shared budget, **no** evidence of shared resources, **no** consideration of how grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed • is **not relevant** to the call • is **not competitive** nationally or	The **applicant team:** • does **not have a relevant** track record in the field of the proposed research • is **deficient in most** of the required skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes • is **not networked** with international alliances.	The proposed **research team does not** have potential for multidisciplinary collaboration as it: • **does not** comprise a diverse team (in terms of gender, career stage and/or researchers from different cultures) or the proposed team is diverse but investigators **do not** provide diverse experience and vital perspectives aligned **to** the research question. • **does not** demonstrate why the research requires the integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines and **has no processes** to ensure the research question is addressed using these different disciplines complementarily

	internationally • is **very unlikely** to provide evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR • has **no potential** to be translated into changes in or inform policy or health practice • is **very unlikely** to result in influential publications • **does not involve** consumers and/or community representatives • no framework for strategies and processes for evaluation is contained in the project design. Does not include risk management strategies.		• **does not** integrate researchers with **expertise and insights** across disciplines necessary to address the major research question. • **does not demonstrate suitable** plan(s) for the research team to work collaboratively, including milestones and evaluation measures and strategies for intellectual exchange, governance, grant sharing and resources • **does not** demonstrate collaborations that are **likely to extend** beyond the life of the project • **does not** demonstrate each investigator's previous experience and success in collaborative research (with the same or other collaborators) • **does not** incorporate strategies to integrate provide mentoring and development opportunities and increase capability of under-represented groups/researchers (e.g. health professionals, consumers, community groups, policy makers and people from different cultures).

Appendix E - Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

To qualify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, at least 20% of the research effort and/or capacity building must relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Qualifying applications must address the NHMRC *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* as follows:

- Community engagement - the proposal demonstrates how the research and potential outcomes are a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with relevant community engagement by individuals, communities and/or organisations in conceptualisation, development and approval, data collection and management, analysis, report writing and dissemination of results.

- Benefit - the potential health benefit of the project is demonstrated by addressing an important public health issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This benefit can have a single focus or affect several areas, such as knowledge, finance and policy or quality of life. The benefit may be direct and immediate, or it can be indirect, gradual and considered.

- Sustainability and transferability - the proposal demonstrates how the results of the project have the potential to lead to achievable and effective contributions to health gain for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, beyond the life of the project. This may be through sustainability in the project setting and/or transferability to other settings such as evidence based practice and/or policy. In considering this issue, the proposal should address the relationship between costs and benefits.

- Building capability - the proposal demonstrates how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and researchers will develop relevant capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project.

Peer reviewers will consider these and the IREC assessment report (completed by the 1SP), in their overall assessment of the application, when scoring the *Assessment Criteria* set out in Appendix C.

Appendix F – Guidance for assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

Peer reviewers should consider the following when assessing applications that have a focus on the health of Indigenous Australians. The points below should be explicit throughout the application and not just addressed separately within the Indigenous criteria section.

Community Engagement

- Does the proposal clearly demonstrate a thorough and culturally appropriate level of engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or health services prior to submission of the application?
- Is there clear evidence that the level of engagement throughout the project will ensure the feasibility of the proposed study?
- Has the application demonstrated evidence that any of the methods, objectives or key elements of the proposed work have been formed, influenced or defined by the community?
- Were the Indigenous community instrumental in identifying and inviting further research into the health issue and will the research outcomes directly benefit the 'named' communities?
- Is there a history of working together with the 'named' communities e.g. co-development of the grant, involvement in pilot studies or how the 'named' communities will have input/control over the research process and outcomes across the life of the project?

Benefit

- Does the proposal clearly outline the potential health benefits (both intermediate and long term, direct and indirect) to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- Does the proposal demonstrate that the benefit(s) of the project have been determined or guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities or organisations themselves?

Sustainability and Transferability

- Does the proposal:
    - Provide a convincing argument that the outcomes will have a positive impact on the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which can be maintained after the study has been completed?
    - Have relevance to other Indigenous communities?
    - Clearly plan for and articulate a clear approach to knowledge translation and exchange?
    - Demonstrate that the findings are likely to be taken up in health services and/or policy?
- Will the outcomes from the study make a lasting contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their wellbeing?

Building Capability

- Does the proposal outline how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and/or communities will benefit from capability development?
- Does the proposal outline how researchers and individuals/groups associated with the research project will develop capabilities that allow them to have a greater understanding/engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

Appendix G – Peer Review Guidance for Community/Consumer Representatives

The *Targeted Call for Research Improving Indigenous maternal and child health in the early years 2022 Grant Opportunity Guidelines* state the requirement that community/consumer involvement and engagement is included in the design, conduct and dissemination of outcomes of the research proposed. The applicant team is expected to include details on how they aim to achieve these requirements in the research proposal.

The purpose of community/consumer representation is to convey the perspective of someone who has knowledge and/or lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander maternal and child health and wellbeing, including cultural practices, to the wider peer review panel (PRP).

The following questions are provided as guidance to assist in framing your consideration of the research application and providing advice to the PRP.

Consumer and community involvement activities:

- Were consumers and/or the community were consulted/involved in the design of the research proposal?
- Is there ongoing consumer involvement during the research including the communication of results?
- Are there arrangements in place to coordinate the involvement of consumers and/or the community involvement in the research team (ie consumer input to advisory committees, planned activities or specific roles for community members).

Track record and support for consumer and community involvement activities:

- Is there adequate time and resourcing allocated to support consumer and community involvement activities?
- Does the research team have any previous experience with working with consumers or the community?

Research impact:

- Does the proposed research addresses the objectives of the call in a way that is meaningful and relevant to the needs of consumers and the community?
- Given the objectives of the TCR, there is appropriate consideration to meeting the needs of people different and diverse cultural backgrounds or have a higher disease burden or poorer health outcomes.
- Will the outcomes of the proposed research will make a difference in improving health services or health policy that will lead to improved health outcomes for individuals?