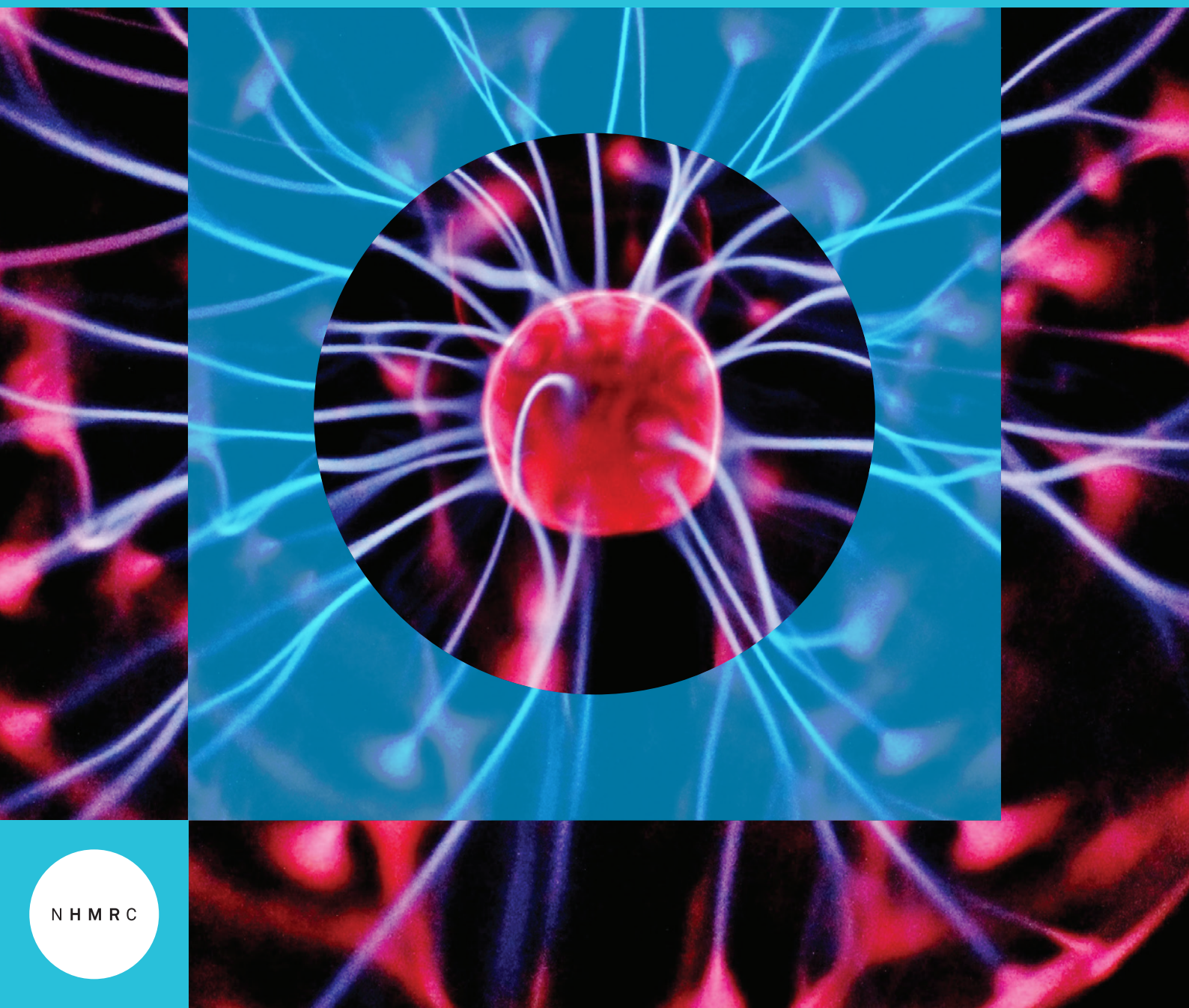




Corporate Plan 2019–20

National Health and Medical Research Council



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Message from the CEO

As Australia's lead agency for health and medical research, NHMRC works actively and collaboratively to promote the highest research standards and develop evidence-based health advice, as well as making significant investments in research to improve the health of the Australian community.

In 2019–20 we will see outcomes from the first round of the new grant program announced. This will be an important milestone for work that commenced in 2016–17 with the Structural Review of NHMRC's Grant Program and has continued with the development and implementation of the new grant program. Evaluation of the effectiveness of these reforms in encouraging innovation and creativity, providing opportunities for talented researchers at all career stages and reducing burden on the sector will be an important focus of NHMRC's work during this triennium.

The Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) continues to recognise NHMRC's expertise in peer review and grants management, with an expanded number of MRFF schemes to be managed by NHMRC. This makes efficient use of government resources and simplifies access for the research sector. We will continue to work closely with the Department of Health to streamline the award of MRFF funding wherever possible.

Work continues on the development of Sapphire, NHMRC's new grant management solution, which we expect to deploy in 2019–20. Sapphire will provide a user-friendly interface that will simplify grant application and assessment processes for researchers and peer reviewers.

I am looking forward to working with the sector to implement NHMRC's *Research Quality Strategy*. The Strategy was developed with advice from an expert working committee and reflects the priority NHMRC places on promoting the conduct of high quality research. Outcomes of this work will include identifying the enablers and barriers to research quality, a framework for rewarding excellence in research quality, a focus on the education and training of researchers, and guidance for institutions and researchers on conducting high quality research.

Consumer involvement in health and medical research is vital. NHMRC's Community and Consumer Advisory Group (CCAG) ensures we have access to the knowledge and advice of consumer and community leaders to guide our policies and practices. A new initiative to highlight the importance of consumer perspectives was launched in 2018 with the creation of the NHMRC Consumer Engagement Award. I look forward to working with CCAG to drive stronger consumer engagement across all of NHMRC's activities to increase the value and impact of the research we fund.

Achievement of the goals of this corporate plan will rely on NHMRC's partnerships with researchers and research institutions. We will actively consult and engage with the sector, both informally and through the Council, Principal Committees and many other advisory committees that support our work every year. NHMRC will also continue to engage internationally through strategic bilateral and multilateral arrangements, such as the Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases and the e-ASIA Joint Research Program, to create opportunities for Australian researchers to develop new collaborations that contribute to global health research.

NHMRC's success in meeting its objectives depends on the hard work and commitment of many people, including researchers, committee members and our staff. Together, we will continue to fulfil NHMRC's mission of building a healthy Australia.

Statement of preparation

As the accountable authority of NHMRC, I present the *NHMRC Corporate Plan 2019–20*, which covers the periods of 2019–20 to 2022–23. It has been prepared as required under paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) and Section 16 of the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (NHMRC Act).

Professor Anne Kelso AO

Chief Executive Officer

National Health and Medical Research Council

NHMRC's mission and purposes

NHMRC's purposes are to fund high quality health and medical research and build research capability, support the translation of health and medical research into better health outcomes and promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity in health and medical research.

These purposes support NHMRC's mission of 'building a healthy Australia'. They align with the outcome for NHMRC identified in the Portfolio Budget Statements 2019-20 (PBS),¹ which in turn reflects the role for NHMRC set out in its enabling legislation.² The purposes are implemented through three underpinning strategic themes of **investment, translation and integrity**.

During the period covered by this plan, we will be implementing a number of significant initiatives in addition to our ongoing work across all three strategic themes.

The first of the new schemes under the new grant program opened for applications in late 2018. Peer review outcomes for the first rounds of the new schemes will be notified in late 2019 with grants to start on 1 January 2020. The new grant program is designed to ensure that, through the Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA), NHMRC continues to fund the best research and researchers.

NHMRC will also continue its support of the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF), sharing its expertise in grant administration to help ensure funds are directed to high quality research and transformational projects, in line with MRFF's specific objectives. NHMRC's implementation of Sapphire, a new, high-performing grant management solution, will support NHMRC and MRFF granting and improve user experience. Sapphire will also enhance NHMRC's measurement and reporting of research impact.

Research translation at NHMRC consists of activities that progress the results of any type of research funded by NHMRC through to its expected next stage on the path to implementation into policy and practice, and ultimate impact on human health. Major work over the period covered by this plan includes the development of public and environmental health guidelines, which are relied on by jurisdictions, and new work in the areas of end of life care and chronic health conditions.

Research integrity will continue to be a key strategic theme where NHMRC plays a leadership role. This will include a focus on implementing the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018*, which came into effect on 1 July 2019, and *NHMRC's Research Quality Strategy*, which was released in mid-2019. The strategy focuses on ensuring quality in NHMRC-funded research through rigour, transparency and reproducibility, with work in this area informed by an expert committee.

Consultation with stakeholders, including consumers and community members, is intrinsic to much of what we do. Through consultation processes and participation in NHMRC committees, a wide spectrum of Australians will continue to contribute directly to ensuring the excellence of NHMRC's work and promoting trust in the integrity and value of science and in health decision-making.

1 NHMRC's outcome is 'improved health and medical knowledge, including through funding research, translating research findings into evidence-based clinical practice, administering legislation governing research, issuing guidelines and advice for ethics in health and the promotion of public health' (*Health Portfolio Budget Statements 2019-20*, p. 355). The delivery of NHMRC's purposes against its program objectives is also set out in the PBS.

2 Under the NHMRC Act, NHMRC is responsible for promoting the development of individual and public health standards, fostering national consistency in health standards, supporting research and training, and fostering consideration of relevant ethical issues.

NHMRC's strategic priorities

The NHMRC Act requires the CEO to identify major national health issues likely to arise during the four-year period covered by this plan. In considering these issues, the CEO consults with the Council, principal committees and the Minister before determining the issues that are within NHMRC's scope.

The major issues identified for the period covered by this plan are:

- Improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including through research that builds capacity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and addresses health disparities.
- Resilience to environmental change, emerging health threats and emergencies.
- Issues related to the end of life and the delivery of palliative and supportive care.
- Integrated and coordinated approaches to chronic conditions.
- Harnessing the power of data and analytical technologies.
- Improving research quality to maximise the rigour, transparency and reproducibility of NHMRC-funded research.

These major health issues represent NHMRC's strategic priorities. They will be addressed through NHMRC's strategy for health and medical research and our key activities, and informed by expert advice (see Box 1 for more information). We will address our priorities through the full range of our work including, for example, evidence translation, domestic and international collaborations, advice to the Australian Government and the development of ethical guidelines, as well as through funding research.

Box 1: Expert advice on major health issues

NHMRC's approach to addressing major health issues is to draw on scientific expertise and evidence, including the advice of principal committees and other fora, to identify key interventions.

For example, in the strategic priority area of **resilience to environmental change, emerging health threats and emergencies**, NHMRC will convene a workshop with researchers, policy-makers and other key stakeholders in late 2019. The workshop will consider options for NHMRC to stimulate capacity and support research to address the impacts on individual and population health, as well as implications for Australia's health system. The outcomes of this workshop will inform future activities.

Similarly, NHMRC's Health Translation Advisory Committee will consider the strategic priority of **end of life and the delivery of palliative and supportive care**, especially from the perspective of evidence translation, and the Australian Health Ethics Committee will consider the need for ethics guidance on these issues. NHMRC will work to bring the efforts of its principal committees together, as well as consider whether targeted research funding is required.

The Health Translation Advisory Committee also advises on NHMRC-accredited Advanced Health Research and Translation Centres and Centres for Innovation in Regional Health, which are helping support **evidenced-based health care approaches, including for chronic conditions**.

Other cross-cutting activities, such as the implementation of the new grant program, will be important features of our work over the period of this plan, and will support our actions in addressing strategic priorities. We will also continue to meet our obligations under the NHMRC Act, the PGPA Act and other relevant legislation. This includes issuing guidelines and providing advice on health, health research and ethical issues and ensuring the efficient, effective, economical and ethical use of public funds.

As well as the priorities identified above, NHMRC's ongoing work will address the full range of matters within our scope. Our work on mitochondrial donation provides a current example of how NHMRC's efforts are focused on health areas of concern to the Australian community, health professionals, researchers and government. Box 2 gives information about this activity.

Box 2: Mitochondrial donation

Following the Senate Community Affairs References Committee's 2018 *Inquiry into the Science of Mitochondrial Donation and Related Matters*, the Australian Government has asked NHMRC to advise on the key scientific questions identified by the inquiry, as well as to lead a public consultation on the potential introduction of mitochondrial donation into Australian clinical practice.

This work is of profound significance and may lead to Parliament considering whether to amend legislation to allow mitochondrial donation in Australian clinical practice. It is important that this work proceed carefully and thoughtfully to ensure the views of the public, combined with expert scientific advice, inform the Government's approach.

NHMRC will conduct a public consultation to ascertain Australian community views on the social and ethical implications of using this form of assisted reproductive technology. To support this process, NHMRC has established the Mitochondrial Donation Expert Working Committee, which will provide advice to the NHMRC CEO on the legal, regulatory, scientific and ethical issues.

Box 3: Mental health research

NHMRC recognises mental health as a national priority and is engaging with the National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) and the Department of Health on how best to support research and research capability in this vital area. NHMRC activity is building on the advice of NHMRC's Mental Health Research Advisory Committee, which reported in late 2018, and a stakeholder workshop held in 2019. We are also contributing to the work of the NMHC to develop a research strategy for the mental health sector, as outlined in the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan.

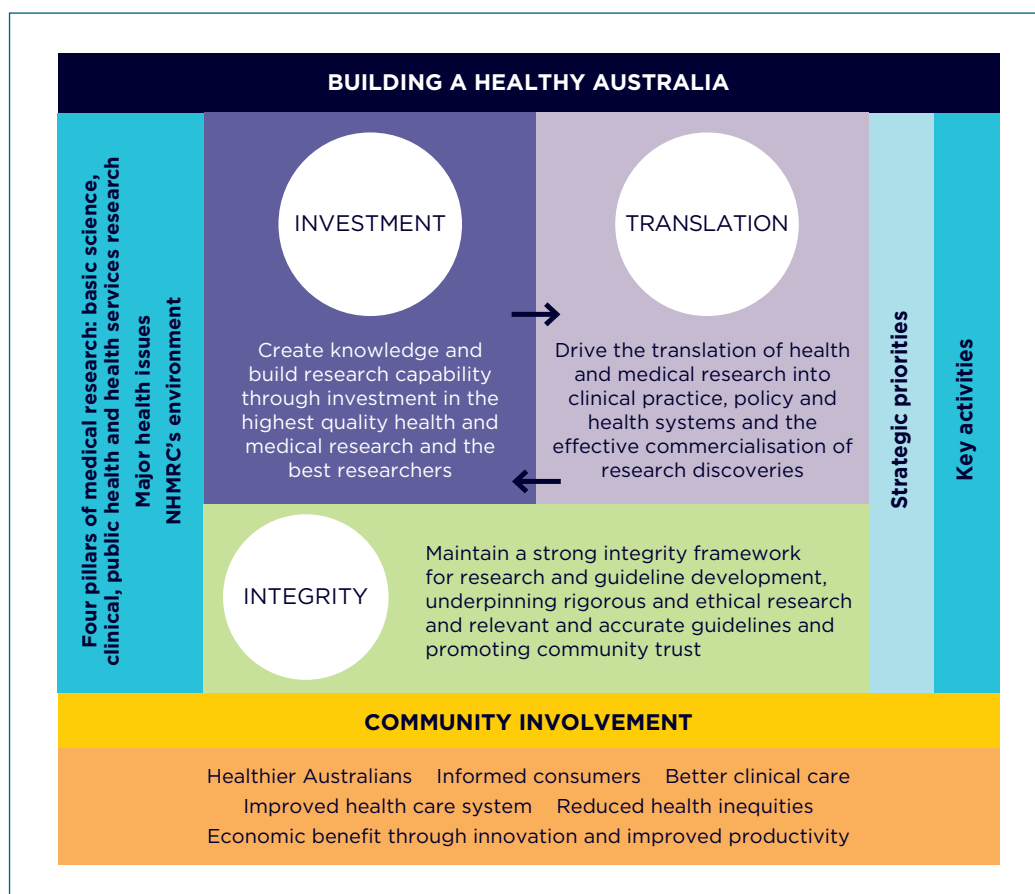
Strategy for health and medical research

NHMRC’s strategy for health and medical research is underpinned by our strong commitment to research that is of the highest quality and standards of ethics and integrity. We balance the needs of the community, Government and the research sector, supporting both investigator-initiated and priority-driven research. We fund research across the spectrum from discovery to implementation science. We understand the important contribution that health and medical research makes to exploring and addressing differences in health outcomes.

The themes of investment, translation and integrity represent NHMRC’s strategy for health and medical research for the period covered by this plan. We will:

- create knowledge and build research capability through **investment** in the highest quality health and medical research and the best researchers
- drive the **translation** of health and medical research into clinical practice, policy and health systems and the effective commercialisation of research discoveries, supporting the pursuit of an Australian health system that is research-led, evidence-based, efficient and sustainable, and
- maintain a strong **integrity** framework for research and guideline development, underpinning rigorous and ethical research and relevant and accurate guidelines, and promoting community trust.

Figure 1: NHMRC’s strategy for health and medical research



The model above depicts our strategy. This model is intended to be illustrative and to be applied in a flexible way, allowing NHMRC to respond to changes in the broader environment.

Key activities

To implement the strategy for health and medical research and deliver against our strategic priorities, NHMRC has developed a set of key activities for the period covered by this plan. These activities are informed by NHMRC's operating environment and engagement, and incorporate a focus on the major health issues. These high-level activities will be implemented through undertaking specific tasks and projects, which are set out in NHMRC's internal business planning documents. As well as the activities under the three themes of investment, translation and integrity, an additional set of operational activities is outlined in the capability section, which provide critical support across all three themes. The integrated nature of the work we do means there is some overlap between themes.

Investment

- Support, via appropriate funding, excellence in research that meets the health needs of Australians, from basic science through to clinical, public health and health services research and research that reflects national, state and territory and community priorities.
- Provide strategic funding in areas of need, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research and researchers, grants led by female researchers and health services research.
- Fund health research to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to build and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researcher capacity.
- Continually optimise the grant application and peer review process, including through the implementation and evaluation of the new grant program.
- Work with others to drive innovation in health and medical research and support integration with the broader Australian Government innovation agenda via a range of mechanisms including through the Health Innovation Advisory Committee and the introduction of the Ideas Grant scheme.
- Work with partners to support the research workforce and build researcher capacity in fields relevant to health and medical research, including implementing *NHMRC's Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2021*.
- Enhance and coordinate research into dementia including through the NHMRC National Institute for Dementia Research and in responding to the evaluation of the Boosting Dementia Research Initiative.
- Respond to changing health needs and future threats, including working with others to address evidence gaps, evidence-practice gaps and evidence-policy gaps and providing priority driven and targeted research funding where warranted.
- Support collaborative approaches to health and medical research, domestically and internationally, including connecting, supporting and encouraging links with researchers in non-health related disciplines, and consider ways to strengthen relationships across the system including with non-government organisations, philanthropic organisations and other government agencies.
- Work closely with the Department of Health to provide effective and efficient support for relevant MRFF investments that leverage NHMRC's existing capability.

Translation

- Drive translation of evidence from health and medical research into public, environmental and clinical health policy and practice so that all Australians benefit from the results of high quality health and medical research, including through funding schemes that focus on research translation and through the work of the Health Translation Advisory Committee.
- Maintain a leadership role in the development of public and environmental health and clinical advice designed to prevent illness, improve health, enhance clinical care and support the states and territories in achieving consistent standards.
- Share information on how NHMRC Advanced Health Research and Translation Centres (AHRTCs) and Centres for Innovation in Regional Health (CIRHs) are working to integrate their research findings into innovative and evidence-based health care for their communities.
- Encourage engagement with industry to leverage skills, networks and resources to enhance research and boost commercialisation of research outcomes to benefit health, strengthen researcher collaboration with industry and promote mobility between the sectors.
- Foster sharing of publications and data resulting from NHMRC-funded research and researchers as soon as practicable.
- Promote best practice guideline development by providing up-to-date standards and supporting their implementation, and promoting collaboration tools to foster high quality, rigorously developed, current and relevant guidelines in Australia.

Integrity

- Promote the highest standards of research quality and integrity, develop national guidance to ensure rigour, transparency and reproducibility in health and medical research and strengthen the management of research integrity matters.
- Lead ongoing revision of key statements, codes and guidelines and develop new guidelines and information papers.
- Continue to support streamlined research governance and ethics review processes, including through the administration of the Certification of Institutional Ethics Review Processes Scheme and the Human Research Ethics Application.
- Administer the *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002* (RIHE Act) and *Prohibition of Human Cloning for Reproduction Act 2002* (PHCR Act), including continually improving the efficiency of processes relating to the Embryo Research Licensing Committee's administration of this legislation by increasing stakeholder understanding of legislative requirements.
- Identify and explore ethical issues arising from new technologies and scientific advances, including mitochondrial donation, and working with the Australian Health Ethics Committee, the Embryo Research Licensing Committee, and the Mitochondrial Donation Expert Advisory Committee.

Performance measures

Performance criteria linked to each of NHMRC's major purposes are in Table 1 below, including an indication of when each will be assessed.³ These measures are designed to capture NHMRC's overall success in achieving its purposes. As with the key activities, while each criterion appears under one of NHMRC's three purposes, some show NHMRC's success against more than one of the purposes. Reporting on NHMRC's performance in achieving its major objectives and purposes will occur in the NHMRC Annual Report to Parliament. The performance criteria in the table include both those that are in the Health Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS) (marked in the table with an asterisk) and additional measures that supplement the performance criteria included in the PBS.

NHMRC continues to develop methods and build its capacity in defining and measuring the impact of the research we fund. As this capacity continues to develop, additional performance measures using impact information will be developed. Box 4 explains how NHMRC uses case studies to understand and describe the impacts of NHMRC funding.

Box 4: Impact case studies

Measuring the impact of NHMRC-funded research is critically important for demonstrating the value of the community's investment in health and medical research. NHMRC produces case studies to illustrate its contribution to raising the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia.

Developed in partnership with research organisations and other bodies, case studies describe the long-term processes of research translation and commercialisation, which lead to positive impacts upon knowledge, human health, the economy and society.

Case studies demonstrate that outcomes and impact can take many years and the combined work of many people and organisations. Over the period covered by this plan, NHMRC will continue to partner with Australian health and medical researchers to document research translation journeys and demonstrate the ways in which NHMRC-funded research contributes to improving health outcomes and generating economic return on investment.

Case studies are published at: www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/impact-case-studies

³ These measures have been largely retained from the 2018–2019 plan, with some modification where required to update their focus, to consolidate criteria or to align with the NHMRC PBS.

Table 1: Performance measures

INVESTMENT							
Purpose: Fund high quality health and medical research and build research capability							
Create knowledge and build research capability through investment in the highest quality health and medical research and the best researchers.							
				Expected measurement years			
Performance criteria	Context	Measurement methods	Targets	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Research grants in basic science, clinical medicine, public health and health services research meet the health needs of Australians, and include national, state and territory and community priorities.*	NHMRC grants cover the full spectrum of health and medical research and NHMRC-funded research is focused on working towards better health outcomes for all Australians. The impact of NHMRC-funded research is wide-reaching, with numerous examples showcased on the NHMRC website. NHMRC funds both researcher-initiated and priority-driven research. Priority areas are identified in a range of ways, including through engagement with community members and state and territory governments and through consideration of proposals submitted through our online pathway.	Identify appropriate case studies for inclusion in NHMRC's Annual Report.	Case studies demonstrating impacts of NHMRC-funded health and medical research.	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Through a range of approaches, identify key priority areas that would benefit from research grants.	Key priority areas identified that would benefit from research grants.	✓	✓	✓	✓
				<i>[Note: additional PBS target concerning annual expenditure for better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is specified separately below.]</i>			
Support research that will provide better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, through percentage of annual research budget expenditure on Indigenous health research.	NHMRC is committed to contributing to better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A range of initiatives are planned to support this important priority, under the guidance of NHMRC's Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus (PCIC). These include a longstanding commitment to expending at least five per cent of the Medical Research Endowment Account annually on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research.	Calculate based on annual expenditure. Funding is categorised as 'Indigenous health research' by reviewing each funded grant against a range of investigator-provided data classifications including fields of research, keywords, grant titles and media summaries.	>5% of annual budget expended on research that will provide better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	✓	✓	✓	✓

INVESTMENT

Purpose: Fund high quality health and medical research and build research capability

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

Performance criteria	Context	Measurement methods	Targets	Expected measurement years			
				2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers through building and strengthening capacity.	NHMRC supports the diverse research career pathways of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and offers a number of individual and team grants that are highly competitive.	Calculate based on the number of chief investigators across all NHMRC schemes who identify as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.	Monitor the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander chief investigators.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Support research on dementia and its translation into policy and practice.	The establishment of the NHMRC National Institute for Dementia Research (NNIDR) was a key element of the Australian Government's \$200 million initiative to boost dementia research. The NNIDR is bringing together Australia's best researchers to undertake coordinated research on dementia while also drawing on the expertise of consumers, health professionals, industry and policy-makers to translate evidence into policy and practice.	Support research on dementia.	Provide grants to support dementia research projects.	✓			
		Support research with a translational focus, including the Dementia Centre for Research Collaboration.	Synthesise outcomes from dementia research to inform improved treatments and care for people with dementia.	✓			
		Continue to monitor research outcomes from the Boosting Dementia Research Initiative.	Report on outcomes from dementia research investments.	✓			
Effectively implement NHMRC's new grant program.	NHMRC's new grant program comprises four streams: Investigator Grants, Synergy Grants, Ideas Grants and Strategic and Leveraging Grants, which includes a new Clinical Trials and Cohort Studies Grant scheme. Implementation of the program began in 2018-19 and the first grants from the new schemes will commence on 1 January 2020.	Establish an evaluation framework to assess the impacts of change to the program structure.	Evaluation framework in place by 2020.	✓			
		Assess impacts of the new grant program in line with the evaluation framework.	First phases of evaluation have commenced.	✓	✓		
			Further evaluation of aspects of the program will continue.				✓
Support the development of outstanding leadership in health and medical research through NHMRC funding.	NHMRC's new grant program will support the research programs of outstanding researchers at all career stages, providing support for early career, mid-career and established researchers.	Through a case study approach, demonstrate the success of NHMRC's grant schemes in building leadership.	Researcher profiles demonstrating outstanding leadership.	✓	✓	✓	✓

INVESTMENT**Purpose: Fund high quality health and medical research and build research capability***Create knowledge and build research capability through investment in the highest quality health and medical research and the best researchers.***Expected measurement years**

Performance criteria	Context	Measurement methods	Targets	Expected measurement years			
				2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Foster gender equality in research funding through NHMRC policies and processes.	NHMRC is committed to gender equality in its research funding. Success rates for women in many NHMRC schemes have historically been below those of men. The new grant program, which commenced in 2018-19, introduced new schemes and processes that may affect the funded rates for men and women.	Collect baseline data on the funded rates for men and women in the Investigator Grant, Ideas Grant and Synergy Grant schemes. Compare funded rates by gender in subsequent years against these baseline data.	An increase in the funded rates of women in schemes where funded rates are statistically significantly lower than those for men.		✓	✓	✓

TRANSLATION**Purpose: Support the translation of health and medical research into better health outcomes***Drive the translation of health and medical research into clinical practice, policy and health systems and the effective commercialisation of research discoveries.***Expected measurement years**

Performance criteria	Context	Measurement methods	Targets	Expected measurement years			
				2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Support an Australian health system that is research-led, evidence-based, efficient and sustainable. ⁴	NHMRC's Advanced Health Research and Translation Centre (AHRTC) initiative, and the Centre for Innovation in Regional Health (CIRH) initiative, recognise leading centres of collaboration in health and medical research, research translation, research-infused education and training, and outstanding health care. NHMRC has recognised seven AHRTCs and two CIRHs.	Identify appropriate achievements for highlighting on the website. Undertake accreditation and re-accreditation of centres that excel in the provision of evidence-based health care and training by conducting a call for recognition of AHRTCs and CIRHs.	Achievements in improving clinical care, health service delivery, and clinical training by AHRTCs and CIRHs highlighted on NHMRC's website.	✓	✓	✓	✓
			Announce newly accredited AHRTCs and CIRHs.	✓			
			Conduct process of re-accreditation of AHRTCs and CIRHs.		✓		

⁴ This performance criterion is the same as the PBS performance criterion, but includes additional targets.

TRANSLATION

Purpose: Support the translation of health and medical research into better health outcomes

Drive the translation of health and medical research into clinical practice, policy and health systems and the effective commercialisation of research discoveries.

Performance criteria	Context	Measurement methods	Targets	Expected measurement years			
				2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
	NHMRC's guidelines and advice support other Commonwealth entities and states and territories in detecting and preventing poor health or illness as well as consistent standards in public and environmental health and clinical practice.	Monitor the number of guidelines being developed or approved.	Development and/or approval of public health, clinical and environmental health guidelines.	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Develop case studies on how NHMRC guidelines have been integrated into health policy to improve consistency in health standards, e.g. the use by state and territory governments of the <i>2019 Australian guidelines for the prevention and control of infection in healthcare</i> , including the Educators' Guide and consumer resources.	Case studies demonstrate uptake of latest scientific evidence into health policy.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improve the capability to report on the impact of the research funded by NHMRC.	Measuring and recognising the impact of NHMRC-funded research where it has benefited or made broader contributions to society are critically important, as reflected in the Australian Government's National Innovation and Science Agenda and the <i>Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy 2016-2021</i> .	Use commercialisation metrics and case studies to demonstrate the impact of NHMRC-funded research.	Develop a framework for a research impact accelerator that lists impact indicators linked to NHMRC funding.	✓	✓		
			Present ten case studies that demonstrate the impact of health and medical research funding.	✓	✓		

INTEGRITY**Purpose: Promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity in health and medical research**

Maintain a strong integrity framework for research and guideline development, underpinning rigorous and ethical research and relevant and accurate guidelines and promoting community trust.

Performance criteria	Context	Measurement methods	Targets	Expected measurement years			
				2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Promote and monitor the implementation of the revised <i>Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018</i> (the Code) and supporting guides.*	The Code is co-authored by NHMRC, the Australian Research Council and Universities Australia. The 2018 Code will be supported by guidance on specific topics to facilitate its implementation. The revised Code, along with the new <i>Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Code, 2018</i> , was finalised following public consultation and was released in mid-2018. The additional supporting documents are currently being developed.	Use NHMRC's existing Institutional Annual Compliance Report to survey Administering Institutions on implementation of the new Code and guides.	Implementation of the Code reported by at least 80% of Administering Institutions (AIs).	✓			
			Implementation of the Code reported by 100% of AIs.		✓	✓	
			Implementation of the Guides reported by 90% of AIs. ⁵		✓	✓	
Provide guidance to the research sector to support research quality.	The quality of NHMRC-funded research is critical to ensuring that public funds spent on research deliver the highest possible value. Rigour, transparency and reproducibility in research are key foundations for research integrity.	Examine current advice and identify gaps. Ensure that guidance focuses on critical issues including rigour, transparency and reproducibility and addresses previous gaps.	Gaps in advice identified.	✓			
			Guidance on research quality published.		✓		
Stakeholders demonstrate good understanding of the regulatory requirements under the RIHE Act and PHCR Act.	The NHMRC Embryo Research Licensing Committee oversees the RIHE Act and PHCR Act, and regulates research activities that involve the use of human embryos. NHMRC conducts inspections of licence holders to ensure compliance with the legislation and licence conditions.	Undertake licence inspections, which include an assessment of the licence holder's processes in relation to activity under each licence and whether these processes meet legislative and licence requirements.	Good understanding of regulatory requirements is demonstrated through outcomes from inspections and six-monthly reports.	✓	✓	✓	✓

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

⁵ In the PBS, the target for this criterion in 2020-21 and beyond is 90% of Administering Institutions implementing both the Code and the guides. The targets listed in this table measure implementation of the Code and the guides separately.

Environment, capability and risk

NHMRC's environment

Our work influences and is influenced by a wide range of factors, including:

- trends in the burden of disease and health service delivery
- advances in technology
- changes in research practices
- emerging ethical issues
- changes in research training environments
- international action in health and medical research, health care and prevention
- the role of the states and territories in delivering health services, and
- the broader economic context.

Our environment includes multiple domestic and international partners and stakeholders. We work closely with universities, hospitals, medical research institutes, professional colleges, other national and international funding agencies, peak bodies and consumer groups and the wider public and private sectors. Global events and changes can have profound impacts on both health care and the research environment. NHMRC needs to be alert to Australia's place in the world and engaged in international partnerships and movements relevant to our work.

Some of the major factors expected to affect NHMRC's work over the four years covered by this plan are:

- strong demand for NHMRC funding
- health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research capacity
- complex and emerging health issues
- engagement with industry and support of innovation
- research integrity and quality
- broader government agendas and projects (e.g. [National Innovation and Science Agenda](#); [Advancing Women in STEM](#); [National Health and Medical Industry Growth Plan](#)), and
- impact of the MRFF on the health and medical research sector.

NHMRC addresses these factors in many ways, including through its research funding and guideline functions. Major responses over the period covered by this plan are incorporated into the key activities and performance measures set out on pages 8-15.

Capability

Key capabilities for NHMRC’s effective operation include those related to workforce, information and communications technology (ICT) and our peer review system. A proactive and rigorous approach to corporate governance is also a critical capability area. We operate within a corporate governance framework that promotes performance, integrity, efficiency and compliance. The Office of NHMRC works to support and meet strategic priorities and is responsive to the needs of stakeholders.

Table 2 shows some of our major capabilities and ways these will be further developed over the period covered by this plan. Many of NHMRC’s key capabilities support our ability to be flexible and agile, adapting to new circumstances and addressing emerging issues. Box 5 outlines how we are developing new technologies and data linkages to support these capabilities.

Box 5: Data and analytical technologies

Consistent with our strategic priority to harness the power of data and analytical technologies, we are developing new technologies and data linkages to support our own capability. Over the life of this plan NHMRC will:

- implement the new grant management solution, Sapphire, including Omnigrants Forms, the Grants Management Accelerator (GMA) and the Outcomes Reporting Accelerator (ORA)
- collaborate with other organisations, including non-government organisations, to strengthen data linkages and progress the ‘tell us once’ principle, reduce the burden on the health and medical research sector and enhance outcome reporting, and
- implement cloud-based technologies to streamline and simplify NHMRC operations and engagement with the health and medical research sector.

Table 2: Selected capabilities

CAPABILITY		
Key capabilities	Selected actions over the period of the plan	Theme
Grant assessment and outcome processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of grant management capabilities to reduce the burden of grant application processes on the health and medical research community. • Implementation of the Sapphire component - Grants Management Accelerator tool to assist with the assignment of grant applications to the most appropriate reviewers and ongoing development of an Outcome Reporting Accelerator that will provide data on the outcomes flowing from health and medical research. 	Investment Corporate operations
Application and peer review process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-implementation evaluation of peer review processes for the new grant program. • Streamlining to reduce burden on applicants and peer reviewers. • Continued use of NHMRC expertise in data analysis and to assess applications for funding by other agencies, including continuing status as an interim Grants Hub. 	Investment Integrity

CAPABILITY

Key capabilities	Selected actions over the period of the plan	Theme
Strong corporate governance framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual training of staff in fraud awareness. Ongoing monitoring of compliance with legislation, policy, procedures and guidelines. Use of recommendations from audits and other evaluation actions to improve business practices. Participation in the annual Comcover Benchmarking Program, using learnings from that process to inform changes to the framework. Maintaining an effective financial management information system and enhancing controls to ensure compliance with the resource management framework. Implementation of reforms to the Australian Government's Protective Security Policy Framework. Undertaking a business impact analysis and reviewing the core business processes in the current Business Continuity Plan given the implementation of the new grant program. Planning for transition to the APS Shared and Common Services Program to deliver standardised services and business processes for accounts payable and receivable, travel and payroll. Implementation of the NHMRC Information and Data Governance Framework to build and promote information maturity and capability. 	Corporate operations
Best practice evidence development and standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing development and release of <i>Guidelines for guidelines</i> modules, providing practical advice online for guideline developers. Ongoing approval of selected third party guidelines developed to NHMRC standards. Researching ways to measure the impact of guidelines. Ongoing development and revision of key public and environmental health guidelines and advice. Improving the methodologies underpinning public and environmental health guideline development. 	Translation
Best practice digital service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing to implement requirements of the Australian Government's Digital Continuity 2020 Policy. Implementation of NHMRC's Cloud Strategy. Implementation of a new NHMRC Data Management Strategy. 	Corporate operations
Enterprise cyber security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of an <i>Enterprise Cyber Security Strategy</i> to protect NHMRC's data and resources. 	Corporate operations
Involvement of stakeholders and wider community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with NHMRC's Community and Consumer Advisory Group on significant issues of relevance to the Australian community and consumers of health care or medical research. Researcher videos and stories on NHMRC's website. Dissemination of research knowledge to increase community access to the results of research. Targeted Calls for Research online pathway for community and professional groups to propose ideas for health research topics. Public consultation processes. Extensive use of both permanent and task-specific stakeholder committees. 	Investment Translation Integrity Corporate operations

CAPABILITY

Key capabilities	Selected actions over the period of the plan	Theme
Workforce diversity, flexibility and expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing to foster a supportive work culture aimed at retaining excellent staff by providing access to a range of supportive mechanisms including flexible work options, promotion of work-life balance and employee benefits and initiatives. Use of innovative recruitment practices to recruit the right people, at the right time, for the right job. Use of innovative learning and development opportunities, building on LearnHub and internal training opportunities currently provided. Developing and implementing policies to address social issues, for example, domestic and family violence. Implementation of new staff performance management system. Implementing work health and safety measures in line with legislative requirements. Updating our people and diversity strategies to maintain a culture that fosters inclusiveness, promotes diversity, accelerates gender equality, and embraces the unique skills of all our staff. 	Corporate operations

Risk

In order to maintain the integrity of investment in the health and medical research sector, NHMRC applies an integrated risk management framework, where all staff are aware of the risks inherent in the activities we undertake and proactive in their management. Our positive risk culture requires us to have a sound understanding of appropriate risk acceptance and to apply this to daily decision-making processes. In all activities we seek to ensure that risk information is actively used to improve business processes and gain efficiency advantages.

NHMRC's *Risk Management Policy and Framework* (Policy and Framework) has been developed in accordance with the International Standard on Risk Management, *AS/NZS/ISO 31000:2018 Risk Management Guidelines* and the PGPA Act and *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014*. The Policy and Framework, which is reviewed annually, provides the foundations and organisational arrangements for designing, implementing, monitoring, reviewing and continually improving risk management throughout NHMRC for the period covered by this plan.

Key enterprise risks relevant to the period covered by this plan, broadly matched against our three strategic themes or corporate operations, are outlined in Table 3 below. Strategic risks, if realised, may have a significant impact on NHMRC's reputation, as well as outcomes. Operational risks are largely internal, but may still have a significant impact on the ability of NHMRC to operate and achieve its outcomes.

Table 3 also provides NHMRC's risk appetite statement, which recognises that it is not practical or possible to eliminate all risk and outlines the level of risk tolerance that is considered acceptable in most circumstances. A high risk appetite indicates that we are prepared to accept exposure to the risk in order to achieve our strategic objectives, whereas a low to very low appetite indicates NHMRC is prepared to invest time and cost to establish appropriate controls to minimise exposure to the risk, or to take immediate corrective action where required.

NHMRC's strategic risk register sets out key risks in further detail, the controls in place to prevent the risk occurring, the likelihood and consequences of each risk occurring given the controls in place and where necessary the planned strategies to be implemented to further mitigate each risk.

Management of risks is informed by a cascade of branch and project risk registers, which underpin all risk management activities. Over the coming four years, risks will be regularly reviewed at all levels of the organisation as we actively seek to identify, manage and mitigate our actual, potential and emerging risks.

Table 3: Key enterprise risks and risk appetite

Theme	Risk description	Risk type	Risk appetite
Investment	Funding opportunities are not available to talented researchers to contribute to the improvement of human health.	Strategic	Very Low
	Grant application and review processes are a burden on researchers and peer reviewers such that the pool of available reviewers is reduced.	Strategic	Low
	Poor fiscal control or financial management adversely impacts NHMRC's ability to operate.	Operational	Low
Translation	Health advice and guidelines are inaccurate, do not comply with national and international best practice, or fail to adhere to principles for evidence-based advice.	Strategic	Low
	Needs and feedback of stakeholders, including researchers and consumers, are not adequately taken into account, which adversely impacts the end goals for the community.	Strategic	Moderate
Integrity	Research misconduct is not adequately investigated and addressed and/or inadequate controls are placed on NHMRC-funded researchers.	Strategic	Low
	Unethical, fraudulent, corrupt conduct or systematic non-compliance by staff, service providers, or contractors.	Operational	Very Low
Corporate operations	Embracing innovation and building ICT and business capability exceed time, resource or cost constraints.	Strategic	Moderate
	Core ICT platforms are ineffective or not stable.	Operational	Very low
	New ICT solutions (including Sapphire) operate sub-optimally or increase the burden on stakeholders.	Strategic	Low
	A suitable, appropriately skilled workforce that enables the achievement of NHMRC's objectives is not maintained.	Operational	Low
	Inadequate workplace safety leads to an adverse incident.	Operational	Very low
	Staff activity goes against the core values of the Australian Public Service—ICARE (Impartial, Committed to Service, Accountable, Respectful, Ethical).	Operational	Very low

