

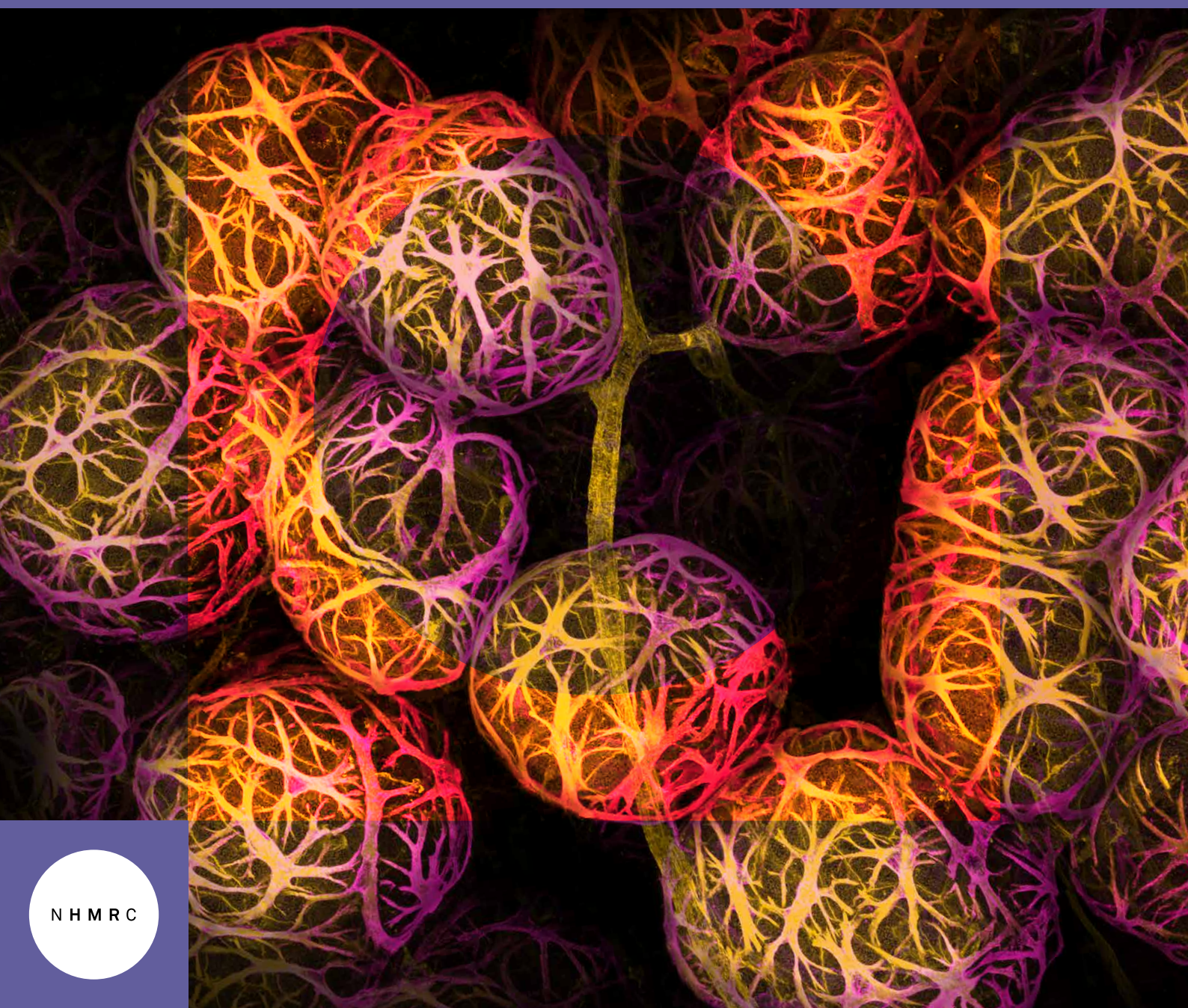


Australian Government  
National Health and Medical Research Council

BUILDING  
A HEALTHY  
AUSTRALIA

# Corporate Plan 2023–24

National Health and Medical Research Council



NH&MRC

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# Message from the CEO



It is a pleasure to introduce NHMRC's Corporate Plan for 2023-24. This will be my last CEO Message before I leave NHMRC in late July 2023 and I am delighted to see the emerging opportunities for the health and medical research sector and NHMRC in the year ahead.

**Professor Anne Kelso AO**  
Chief Executive Officer

We welcome the appointment of Professor Steve Wesselingh as NHMRC's next CEO, commencing in August 2023. Professor Wesselingh has already contributed enormously to the work of the agency as chair of the Expert Advisory Group for the Structural Review of NHMRC's Grant Program (2016-2017) and member of NHMRC Council and chair of Research Committee the past and current triennia (2018-2021 and 2021-2024). He will step down from the latter roles at the end of July. Professor Wesselingh brings an extraordinary breadth of leadership experience and knowledge of the Australian health and medical research sector to his new role at NHMRC and I look forward to seeing him take the agency to new heights of achievement and impact on the health of the Australian community.

This Corporate Plan sets out the strategic vision for NHMRC for the coming year and beyond, drawing on the advice of our Council and Principal Committees, and reflecting the current environment in which we and the research sector work.

Of particular importance this year is the consultation on improving alignment and coordination between the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) and NHMRC's Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA), the account from which NHMRC distributes research grants to universities, medical research institutes, hospitals and other institutions. Led by the Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Mark Butler MP, and the Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Ged Kearney MP, the consultation is an important opportunity for the many interested parties to advise on reform of the governance and administration of the MRFF and the MREA. Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of these complementary funds will help to ensure the Australian community obtains the greatest benefit from Commonwealth investment in health and medical research.

A second consultation will then be held on a national strategy for health and medical research, engaging with states and territories, researchers, consumers, health professionals, industry and philanthropists.

The outcomes of both consultations are likely to have a significant impact on the future organisation and activities of NHMRC. We look forward to continuing our close collaboration with the Department of Health and Aged Care to undertake the changes needed to implement the Government's decisions in response to the consultations.

These discussions are occurring in parallel with other important developments and reviews that may also affect NHMRC and the wider sector – notably, the establishment of the Australian Centre for Disease Control (ACDC) and the National Reconstruction Fund, and the articulation of new national science and research priorities. The ACDC, in particular, will be an important partner in providing strategic guidance on the research needed to prepare for and respond to current and future health challenges.

During this year, NHMRC expects to disburse more than \$920 million in research grants from the MREA. This is critical support for the wide range of research undertaken in public institutions around the country to understand the biological and other determinants of health and disease, to develop and trial new clinical and public health interventions, and to improve the design and delivery of health services.

This investment also provides critical support for the research sector itself, recognising the importance of building and sustaining Australia's capacity to undertake research at the frontiers of knowledge and innovation in health and medicine and our readiness to respond to new threats to individual and population health and wellbeing. Meeting these needs presents significant challenges in balancing support for established and emerging researchers across diverse fields, institutions and contexts. With NHMRC already delivering many MRFF grant opportunities as a service to the Department of Health and Aged Care, stronger coordination between the MRFF and the MREA offer the opportunity to take a holistic approach to supporting the health and medical research workforce.

During 2022, NHMRC released its *Gender Equity Strategy 2022–2025* and introduced two significant special measures to address systemic disadvantage faced by women and non-binary applicants as they seek to advance in their research careers. Non-binary applicants will now be included in all interventions to improve gender equity across NHMRC's grant program and equal numbers of Investigator Grants in the Leadership category will be awarded to female/non-binary and male applicants respectively.

The period covered by this Corporate Plan will see the release of the first outcomes of these two special measures in the Investigator Grant scheme. In addition to the direct support provided, it is hoped that the initiative will have a ripple effect by encouraging more women and non-binary researchers to pursue their careers past the early to mid-career stage.

In partnership with the Department of Health and Aged Care, NHMRC is also developing a statement to promote consideration of sex and gender in the design, analysis and reporting of health and medical research. The statement intends to raise awareness and ensure that future research fills the substantial gap in data on sex and gender differences in many aspects of health, disease and responses to clinical and other interventions. This work complements the activities of the National Women's Health Advisory Council established by Assistant Minister Kearney; the NHMRC CEO is an *ex-officio* member of the Council and chair of its Research Subcommittee.

NHMRC has a long-standing focus on improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through targeted and investigator-initiated research. In recent years, this focus has extended to building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researcher capacity, recognising the importance of Indigenous leadership in addressing the profound health disparities experienced by their communities. Now, in addition to investing at least 5% of the MREA in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research each year, NHMRC has established a target of 3.4% for annual grants led by a chief investigator of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent. The current review of the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria, used in the assessment of grant applications, is another important project designed to strengthen NHMRC support for high-quality research in this area.

The development of evidence-based public health and environmental health guidelines remains one of the most powerful ways that NHMRC can foster the translation of research for immediate health benefit. During the year ahead, the review of the *Australian Dietary Guidelines 2013* will enter a critical stage when evidence reviews are undertaken to underpin the development of new recommendations. The review is being conducted in accordance with NHMRC's published guideline development framework and will ensure that dietary advice is based on the most recent scientific evidence. NHMRC is also continuing to evaluate the evidence for clinical effectiveness of 16 natural therapies as part of the Department of Health and Aged Care's natural therapies review.

NHMRC is responsible for the *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines* which undergo a rolling review overseen by the Water Quality Advisory Committee. Over the next year, NHMRC will continue to review 16 chemical factsheets, develop public health advice on the potential impact of lead replacements in plumbing products and review public health advice on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in drinking water. NHMRC will also continue working with the Recreational Water Quality Advisory Committee to update the *Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water* and develop a new risk management framework for managing water quality at water sites used for recreational and cultural purposes.

This year we expect to complete the first evaluation of the implementation of research impact as a criterion in the assessment of track record in the Investigator and Synergy Grant schemes. This was an important change to track record assessment, designed to recognise and reward researchers whose previous work has had an impact on knowledge, health, the economy and/or society, and to reduce the emphasis on traditional academic indicators of research achievement. It has, however, been challenging for many researchers to monitor, describe and verify their research impact and it is now timely to review the way this criterion is assessed to ensure it meets the intent of the policy.

NHMRC recognises the importance of consumer and community involvement in research at every stage, from conception to design, conduct, communication and implementation. We are working in partnership with the Consumers Health Forum of Australia to update our joint 2016 *Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research* to reflect the significant advances of recent years and our aspirations for the future. We expect to release the position paper for consultation in early 2023-24 to engage health consumers and the community in the development of an updated Statement.

NHMRC's work to promote the highest standards of research quality and integrity will continue on several fronts this year. We will monitor implementation of the *NHMRC Open Access Policy 2022*, release guidance on core competencies in research and develop a Good Institutional Practice Guide to support delivery of high-quality research. With the imminent completion of the first independent evaluation of the Australian Research Integrity Committee, we will work with the Australian Research Council to respond to the review findings.

Following its development of the regulatory framework to support the *Mitochondrial Donation Law Reform (Maeve's Law) Act 2022*, NHMRC's Embryo Research Licensing Committee expects to consider licence applications for research, training and a clinical trial of mitochondrial donation. The first Australian clinical trial of this IVF technology will be a major milestone in its implementation into clinical practice.

Rapid advances in digital technology are creating opportunities for NHMRC and the research sector. With the completion of the minimum viable product for NHMRC's grant management system, Sapphire, and the recent retirement of the previous system, RGMS, NHMRC will continue to develop Sapphire to meet the needs of applicants, peer reviewers, institutions and the agency. Enhanced data linkage and process design will help to make engagement with Sapphire more intuitive, efficient and effective. Artificial intelligence and machine learning tools offer opportunities to automate some activities but they also present new challenges to privacy, confidentiality and accountability that will require continuing attention. Work has commenced on the development of policies for grant applicants and peer reviewers.

NHMRC has significant data holdings in Sapphire that may have value within and outside the Australian Government. With the introduction of the *Data Availability and Transparency Act 2022*, we will strive to ensure that data under NHMRC custodianship are secure, reliable, accessible and re-usable by NHMRC, the Australian Government and other relevant users.

As a government agency working at the interface with the research sector, the health system and the community, NHMRC has a critical role in supporting high-quality ethical research that meets society's current and future needs, and fostering its translation into public policy and practice. We will continue to work closely with our advisory committees and many people across government, the sector and the community to understand the world around us and to improve our policies and processes, so that we can play our part in 'building a healthy Australia'.

## Statement of preparation

As the accountable authority of NHMRC, I present the *NHMRC Corporate Plan 2023-24*, which covers the four-year period of 2023-24 to 2026-27. 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

26 June 2023

# Purposes

NHMRC’s purposes support our mission of *building a healthy Australia*.

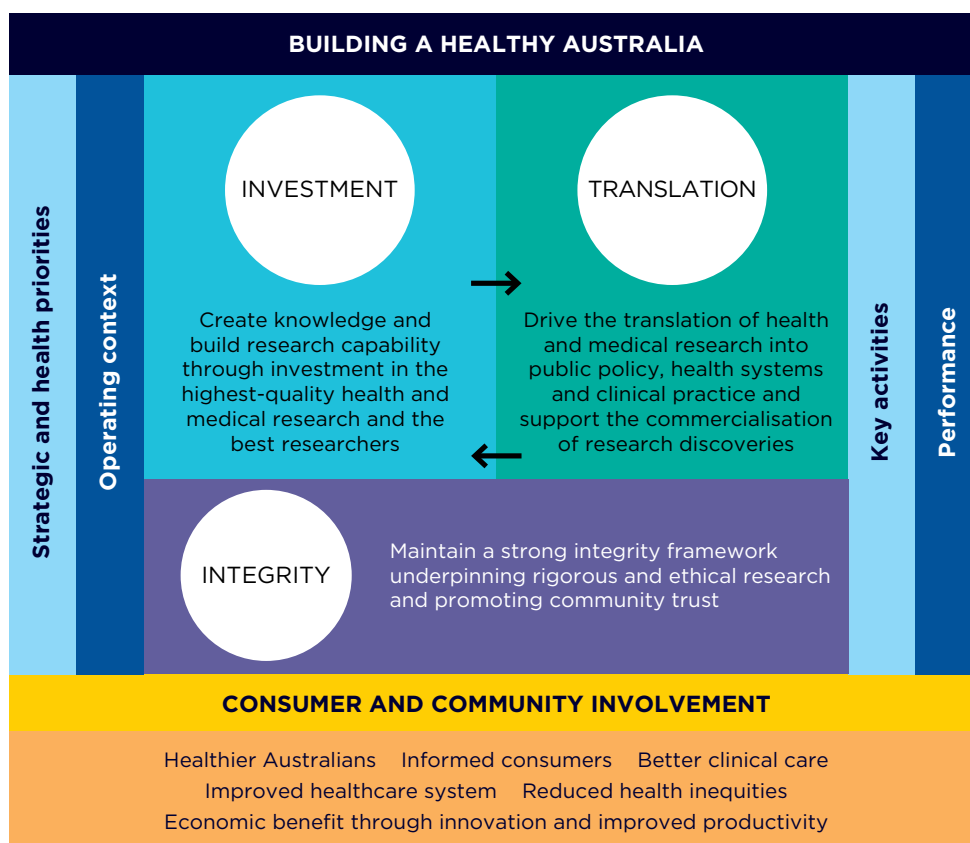
They reflect NHMRC’s legislated functions to fund health and medical research and training, and to issue guidelines and advise on improving health outcomes, through prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease and the provision of health care. They also reflect NHMRC’s role in promoting the highest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

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

Figure 1: NHMRC’s strategic themes and purposes

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

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





# Governance

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

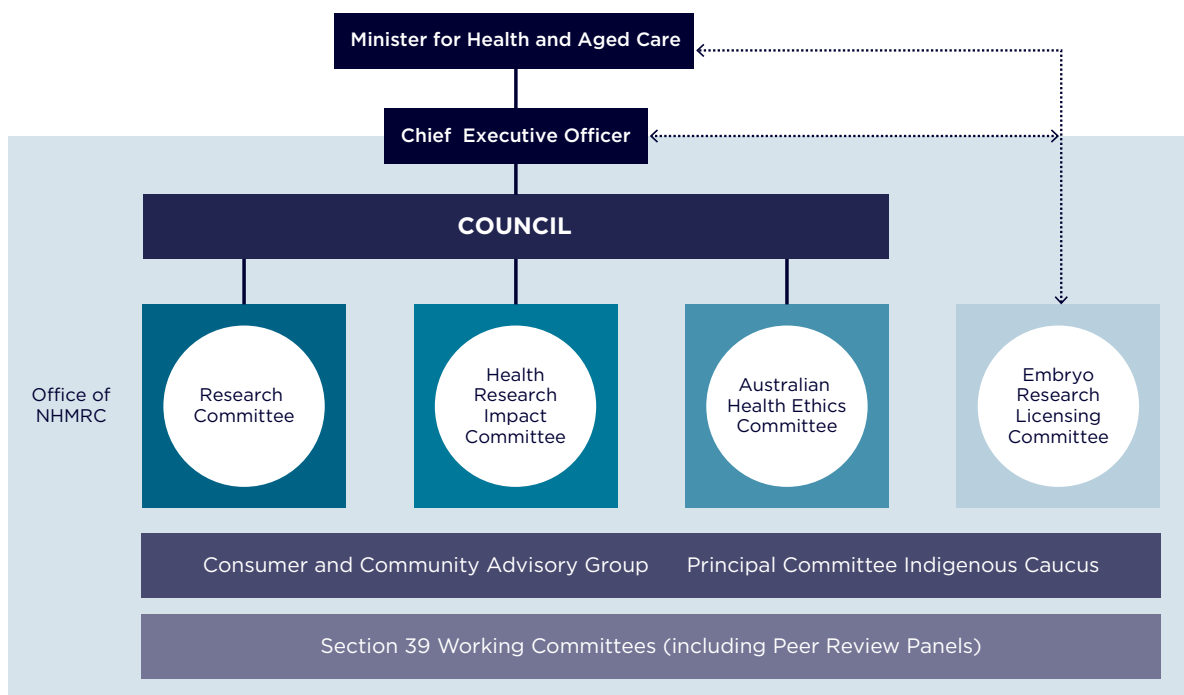
NHMRC's Executive Board and the Audit and Risk Committee support the CEO in fulfilling their responsibilities as the accountable authority under the PGPA Act.

The CEO is supported in fulfilling the legislative functions under the NHMRC Act by the expert and independent advice of NHMRC Council, Principal Committees and other committees and expert working groups. Figure 3 shows NHMRC's key governance and advisory bodies under the NHMRC Act, including Council, the Principal Committees and selected working committees.

Through Council and its committees, researchers, healthcare professionals and consumers contribute to the work of NHMRC and provide a bridge to the community and the research and health sectors. They also help guide NHMRC's strategy for health and medical research.

NHMRC Council and Principal Committees are appointed every three years, with the current triennium ending on 30 June 2024.

Figure 3: NHMRC's structure under the NHMRC Act



# Strategy for health and medical research

Under subsection 16(2) of the NHMRC Act, NHMRC is required to set out its strategy for health and medical research. This strategy is underpinned by our strong commitment to the highest quality and standards of research and health advice. The themes of investment, translation and integrity encapsulate 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 public policy, health systems and clinical practice and support the commercialisation of research discoveries
- maintain a strong **integrity** framework underpinning rigorous and ethical research and promoting community trust.

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

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

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

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

## Strategic priorities

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

NHMRC recognises that the funding and translation landscape for the health and medical research sector will evolve as the Government responds to a number of strategic sector reviews in the period covered by this Plan.<sup>1</sup> NHMRC's structures have proven their agility throughout the pandemic and the agency is well placed and prepared to respond quickly as it supports the efficient and effective delivery of the Government's health and medical research agenda. NHMRC will ensure that it continues to support the current and future needs of the health and medical research sector, as well as the expectations of the Government.

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

<sup>1</sup> For example, the Australian Universities Accord Higher Education Review, the review of the *Australian Research Council Act 2001* and the establishment of the Australian Centre for Disease Control.

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

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	KEY STRATEGY DOCUMENT/S	GOALS/OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIC THEME/S	KEY ACTION/S PLANNED IN 2023–24
Consumer and community involvement	Statement <sup>2</sup> and Toolkit <sup>3</sup> on consumer and community involvement in health and medical research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote active involvement of consumers and the community in health and medical research and care.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on promoting the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, rural and remote, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.</li> <li>Continue to involve consumer and community representatives in the scoping and assessment of targeted grant opportunities.</li> <li>Work with the Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) to review the NHMRC-CHF Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research.</li> <li>Continue to seek advice from the <b>Consumer and Community Advisory Group</b> and the <b>Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus</b>.</li> </ul>
Diversity and inclusion	NHMRC Gender Equity Strategy 2022–2025 <sup>4</sup> and Road Map 3: A strategic framework for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health through research <sup>5</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote diversity and inclusion in health and medical research and in the research workforce.</li> <li>Base NHMRC actions and interventions on transparent evidence.</li> <li>Strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researcher workforce.</li> </ul>	Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to the National Women's Health Advisory Council and support the National Women's Health Strategy.</li> <li>Measure the impact of NHMRC's <i>Gender Equity Strategy 2022–2025</i> by establishing baseline data and an evaluation strategy.</li> <li>Work with the Department of Health and Aged Care to promote consideration of sex and gender in health and medical research (including clinical trials).</li> <li>Measure the impact of new special measures to address systemic disadvantage faced by women and non-binary applicants to the Investigator Grant scheme.</li> <li>Continue to allocate structural priority funding to address gender equity and to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers in selected NHMRC grant schemes.</li> <li>Liaise with OCHRe (Our Collaborations in Health Research) and support its mission to strengthen capacity and capability amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers.</li> <li>Continue to seek advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and other advisory committees.</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/statement-consumer-and-community-involvement-health-and-medical-research/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/consumer-and-community-engagement/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/gender-equity/nhmrc-gender-equity-strategy-2022-2025>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health/road-map-3/>

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	KEY STRATEGY DOCUMENT/S	GOALS/OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIC THEME/S	KEY ACTION/S PLANNED IN 2023–24
International engagement	NHMRC <i>International Engagement Strategy 2023–2026</i> <sup>6</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Australian health and medical researchers collaborate internationally to improve the health of the Australian community, our region and the world.</li> <li>Foster Australian participation in international networks and collaborative health and medical research.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage and promote international opportunities for NHMRC-funded researchers and facilitate cooperation and exchange.</li> <li>Build awareness and support NHMRC-funded Administering Institutions to counter foreign interference in health and medical research.</li> <li>Engage bilaterally and multilaterally with international research funding agencies.</li> <li>Engage in international fora that promote high quality open science and global health objectives.</li> <li>Continue to seek advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and other advisory committees.</li> </ul>
Peer review	<i>Principles of peer review</i> <sup>7</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that NHMRC funds are invested wisely and fairly to support the best health and medical research.</li> <li>Evaluate and improve peer review processes, aiming for an appropriate balance between rigour of review and burden on reviewers.</li> </ul>	Investment Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to embed and refine a streamlined application-centric peer review process for relevant schemes to improve the matching of reviewers to applications for conflict and suitability declarations, and assessments.</li> <li>Refine and consolidate guidance for peer reviewers.</li> <li>Continue to develop and enhance NHMRC's grant management system, Sapphire, to support efficient and effective peer review.</li> <li>Maintain the highest standards of integrity and quality in peer review for both NHMRC and Medical Research Future Fund schemes.</li> <li>Review the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria and their application, including a national consultation.</li> <li>Continue to seek advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and other advisory committees.</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/international-engagement/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/principles-peer-review/>

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	KEY STRATEGY DOCUMENT/S	GOALS/OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIC THEME/S	KEY ACTION/S PLANNED IN 2023-24
Research impact	<i>NHMRC Research Impact Position Statement 2022</i> <sup>8</sup> and <i>NHMRC Research Translation Strategy 2022-2025</i> <sup>9</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote, communicate and measure pathways from research to impact.</li> <li>Accelerate the translation of health and medical research into public policy, health systems and clinical practice and support the commercialisation of research discoveries, for the improvement of individual and population health.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to work with partners to demonstrate the longer-term impacts of NHMRC-funded research through Impact Case Studies.</li> <li>Continue to offer funding opportunities that foster translation and support the commercialisation of research discoveries.</li> <li>Drive translation of health and medical research in accordance with NHMRC's <i>Research Translation Strategy 2022-2025</i>, with advice from the <b>Health Research Impact Committee</b>.</li> <li>Evaluate the Research Impact Track Record Assessment Framework used in the Investigator Grant scheme, with advice from the <b>Health Research Impact Committee</b>.</li> </ul>
Research quality	<i>NHMRC Research Quality Strategy 2019</i> <sup>10</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the highest quality in research funded by NHMRC.</li> <li>Guide and support good research practices throughout the research cycle.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor the implementation of the <i>NHMRC Open Access Policy 2022</i><sup>11</sup> including whether Administering Institutions have updated associated policies and processes to support NHMRC-funded researchers.</li> <li>Develop guidance on core competencies for good research practices.</li> <li>Develop a <i>Good Institutional Practice Guide</i> to support delivery of high-quality research.</li> <li>Continue to seek advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and other advisory committees.</li> </ul>

8 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/research-translation-and-impact/research-impact>

9 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/research-translation-and-impact/research-translation-strategy-2022-2025>

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

11 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/nhmrc-open-access-policy>

# Health priorities

The NHMRC Act requires the CEO to identify major national health issues likely to arise in 2023–24 and during the four-year period covered by this plan. As outlined earlier, NHMRC operates on a triennial basis. The major national health issues outlined below have been identified by the NHMRC CEO as priorities for NHMRC for the current triennium (1 July 2021–30 June 2024). NHMRC reviews its priorities with a longer-term outlook in the last year of each triennium. In considering these issues, the CEO consults with the Council, its committees and the Minister, and considers the role of NHMRC within Australia’s health and medical research landscape, before determining the issues that are within NHMRC’s scope.

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

The Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) continues to change the health and medical research landscape. As a priority-driven research fund, its success depends on the foundations of research excellence and capability built with NHMRC funding. NHMRC will continue to support this broad base to underpin and complement the MRFF’s research initiatives and to ensure Australia can meet its present and future health challenges. NHMRC will also work with the Department of Health and Aged Care to enhance the coordination of investments through the NHMRC grant program and the MRFF, including working towards reform of the governance and administration of the two funds to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

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

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

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

HEALTH PRIORITY	STRATEGY	KEY ACTIONS PLANNED OVER THE 2021–2024 TRIENNium
Strengthening resilience to emerging health threats and emergencies, including environmental change, pandemics and antimicrobial resistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NHMRC will prioritise targeted funding opportunities to build Australia’s capacity or capability to strengthen resilience to emerging health threats and emergencies of relevance to Australia.</li> <li>We will continue to offer flexibility to NHMRC-funded researchers to pivot their research to evolving health emergencies and encourage researchers to contribute to the national and international research responses as needed.</li> <li>We will continue to leverage international funding and networking opportunities to develop common approaches to emerging health threats and emergencies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider targeted research funding opportunities to build Australian capacity or capability to strengthen resilience to emerging health threats and emergencies.</li> <li>Participate in the Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness (GloPID-R) and antimicrobial resistance and pandemic focused opportunities through the e-ASIA Joint Research Program.</li> <li>Work with the Australian Centre for Disease Control to share information and adapt to the evolving public health emergency response landscape.</li> <li>Seek and consider advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and the <b>Health Research Impact Committee</b>.</li> </ul>

HEALTH PRIORITY	STRATEGY	KEY ACTIONS PLANNED OVER THE 2021–2024 TRIENNIUM
<p>Improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people including through research that addresses health inequities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NHMRC will maintain its commitment to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes through research and issuing health guidelines and advice.</li> <li>NHMRC will ensure targeted research funding opportunities reflect national health priorities and health issues identified as important by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.</li> <li>NHMRC will promote strong community engagement that flows through the grant application and research process so that researchers are supported to engage meaningfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations.</li> <li>NHMRC will continue to allocate specific funding within selected NHMRC grant schemes to address structural issues in the health and medical research sector with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Renew and actively participate in the Tripartite Agreement to improve Indigenous peoples' health, with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Health Research Council of New Zealand.</li> <li>Conduct up to two calls for research annually in priority areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.</li> <li>Consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities when developing public and environmental health guidelines and advice and consider their needs, values and preferences.</li> <li>Promote a 3.4% target for annual awards of NHMRC grants led by a Chief Investigator A (CIA) of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent, in addition to continuing to invest more than 5% of NHMRC's annual budget on research that provides better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</li> <li>Seek and consider advice from the <b>Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus</b> and <b>Research Committee</b>.</li> </ul>
<p>Building capacity and innovation in the effective translation of research into quality health-related policy, services and care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NHMRC aims to fund research that strengthens national capacity for research translation, and translation into practice, policy and products, encouraging industry engagement and the commercialisation of research outcomes where appropriate.</li> <li>NHMRC will engage with consumers and the Australian community on health and medical research, and work to increase community involvement in research and access to the results of research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to recognise successful examples of co-design and partnerships between researchers and end-users, including Research Translation Centres that bring together researchers, healthcare providers, policy makers, industry and education and training to improve the health and wellbeing of patients and populations.</li> <li>Continue to support clinician researchers to undertake research.</li> <li>Consider targeted research funding opportunities to build capacity or capability to improve health-related policy, care or services or innovations in the health system.</li> <li>Engage globally in implementation science through the Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases (GACD).</li> <li>Seek and consider advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and the <b>Health Research Impact Committee</b>.</li> </ul>

HEALTH PRIORITY	STRATEGY	KEY ACTIONS PLANNED OVER THE 2021–2024 TRIENNIUM
Preventing and managing multimorbidity and chronic conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NHMRC will continue to invest in research on chronic conditions and multimorbidity through its grant schemes.</li> <li>Develop, update or approve guidelines that will help prevent and manage chronic conditions and multimorbidity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in the Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases (GACD).</li> <li>Work with the Department of Health and Aged Care to support the National Preventive Health Strategy.</li> <li>Continue to invest in research on chronic conditions and multimorbidity through NHMRC grant schemes.</li> <li>Consider offering targeted research funding opportunities to build Australian capacity or capability to prevent or manage multimorbidity and chronic conditions.</li> <li>Continue the review of the <i>2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines</i>.</li> <li>Seek and consider advice from <b>Research Committee</b>, the <b>Health Research Impact Committee</b> and the <b>Consumer and Community Advisory Group</b>.</li> </ul>
Identifying emerging technologies in health and medical research and in health care, and promoting their safe, ethical and effective application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NHMRC will identify, explore and consult on ethical issues relating to emerging technologies in health and medical research and care, and develop ethics guidelines and advice as needed.</li> <li>NHMRC will continue to fund high-quality health and medical research from new ideas and innovations, through to clinical trials and development of products for use in health care.</li> <li>Consumer involvement and ethical consideration in research and health care will ensure that emerging health technologies meet the needs and societal expectations of the Australian community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regulate the licensing of research, training and a clinical trial of mitochondrial donation through NHMRC's <b>Embryo Research Licensing Committee</b>.</li> <li>Identify and advise on emerging technologies with potential impact on health and medical research and health care.</li> <li>Recognise the growing importance of artificial intelligence and consider its impact on NHMRC grant processes and opportunities for improving health outcomes.</li> <li>Consider and advise on the ethical implications and regulation of rapidly emerging technologies in research and health care, such as embryoids and organoids, stem cells and gene editing technologies, and the use of big data.</li> <li>Seek and consider advice from <b>Research Committee</b> and the <b>Australian Health Ethics Committee</b>.</li> </ul>



# Operating context

## Environment

Factors in our environment that are likely to affect NHMRC's activities and performance in 2023–24 and over the four-year period of this plan include:

- the evolving public health emergency response landscape and its impact on the public health system and research environment
- the lived healthcare experience of consumers and the community, including the lived experience and impact of post-COVID condition or 'long COVID'
- the *Data Availability and Transparency Act 2022*, which enables the sharing of public sector data with state and federal governments and public Australian universities
- trends and changes in the burden of disease and their impact on health service delivery
- advances in health technology and associated emerging ethical issues
- disparities in the health and medical research workforce and in the community
- disruption and/or innovations to everyday work practices and caring responsibilities for researchers and for our staff
- international action in health and medical research, health care and prevention
- global movements to support open science, data sharing and access to research results
- scrutiny of research integrity issues and high-profile research misconduct cases
- ongoing need to mitigate the risks from foreign interference, cybersecurity threats and the unregulated use of artificial intelligence
- the impact of generative artificial intelligence in health care and research systems
- the ongoing impact of the MRFF on Australia's health and medical research sector and the outcome of deliberations on future governance and administrative structures
- the role of the states and territories in delivering health services
- the broader Australian and global social and economic context.

Each of these factors has been taken into consideration in planning NHMRC's major activities, identifying risks and establishing performance measures, as set out in this plan, which are regularly reviewed and adjusted as needed.

## Cooperation

Our environment includes multiple domestic and international partners and stakeholders. NHMRC works closely with universities, medical research institutes, hospitals, professional colleges, other national and international funding agencies, peak bodies, consumer groups and the wider public and private sectors.

Table 3 details some of NHMRC's major collaborative partnerships that contribute to achieving our mission and purposes. NHMRC does not have any subsidiaries.

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

ORGANISATION	NATURE OF COOPERATION	PURPOSE/S
Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We collaborate with the Department on national strategies and priorities for health and medical research, including coordination between NHMRC and the MRFF.</li> <li>We serve as a grants hub for the Department to support the delivery of the MRFF, using NHMRC’s expertise to support peer review and grants management.</li> <li>Together, we simplify access for researchers, make efficient use of government resources and achieve our shared objectives to support Australian health and medical research and improve the health of Australians.</li> <li>We work with the Department to undertake evidence-based reviews and develop guidelines that support public and environmental health and clinical practice.</li> <li>We collaborate with the Department and the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator on social, ethical and legal issues in health and related regulatory frameworks.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity
State and territory governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We work with state and territory governments to identify gaps and priorities for health and medical research investment.</li> <li>Together, we support the translation of research into policy and practice, work towards national consistency in health standards, and develop evidence-based public health, environmental health, clinical practice and ethical guidelines.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity
Other Commonwealth and Health portfolio agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We work with the Department of Health and Aged Care and other Commonwealth portfolios to contribute to government policy affecting research, researchers and the research sector.</li> <li>We work with other government health agencies to invest in the highest quality health and medical research (e.g. Cancer Australia) and to develop health advice and ethical guidelines (e.g. Organ and Tissue Authority).</li> <li>We collaborate with other Commonwealth agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to support the health and medical aims of Australia’s development aid program.</li> <li>We engage with other Commonwealth agencies to support Australia’s efforts to counter foreign interference in research and protect critical technologies for the future.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity
Administering Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We award funding to Administering Institutions, which include universities, medical research institutes and hospitals that meet defined research governance requirements.</li> <li>We collaborate with Administering Institutions both informally and formally on research policy and support for health and medical research.</li> <li>Administering Institutions implement policies and practices that support NHMRC objectives, including ensuring that NHMRC research is carried out in an ethical, responsible and competent manner.</li> <li>We work with Administering Institutions to increase applicant and peer reviewer understanding of funding scheme objectives and help ensure that the highest-quality eligible research proposals are funded.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity
Peak bodies in the health and medical research sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We consult with universities, medical research institutes, learned academies and other peak bodies in the health and medical research sector to seek advice and evaluate our activities.</li> <li>We work with Cochrane Australia to support the translation of research into policy and practice and promote robust frameworks to support evidence-based decision making.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity

ORGANISATION	NATURE OF COOPERATION	PURPOSE/S
Australian Research Council (and others)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We collaborate with the Australian Research Council and Universities Australia to promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity in research in line with the <i>Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research</i>, the <i>National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research</i> and the <i>Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes</i> (also co-authored with CSIRO).</li> <li>Through the Australian Research Integrity Committee, jointly established by NHMRC and the ARC, we undertake reviews of institutional processes used to manage and investigate potential breaches of the Code and contribute to community confidence in the integrity of Australia's research effort.</li> </ul>	Integrity
International organisations and funding partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We contribute to global health strategies and benefit from membership in international science programs, such as the Human Frontier Science Program, which promotes excellence and international collaboration in innovative life sciences research.</li> <li>We contribute to and learn from international best practice to support the highest standards of research quality and integrity, peer review processes and evidence-based advice on improving health and preventing disease.</li> <li>We collaborate with international funding agencies to support high-quality collaborative international research, through bilateral and multilateral joint funding schemes.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity
Philanthropic organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We collaborate with philanthropic organisations to support high-quality health and medical research in areas of mutual interest, including supporting philanthropic funders to leverage NHMRC's excellence in peer review.</li> </ul>	Investment
Consumer and community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We engage with health consumer and community groups to identify representatives to participate in our committees, in peer review processes, in guidelines development and in public consultation.</li> <li>We invite consumer, community and professional organisations to identify health issues that may benefit from targeted research funding, to ensure that health and medical research is meeting the needs of the Australian community.</li> </ul>	Investment Translation Integrity

# Risk oversight and management

NHMRC applies an integrated risk management framework, where all staff are aware of the risks inherent in the activities we undertake and are proactive in their management. Our positive risk culture requires us to have a sound understanding of appropriate risk acceptance and to apply it to daily decision-making processes. NHMRC collaborates and shares oversight on risks that extend beyond our agency and takes responsibility for risks that we are positioned to manage most effectively. Supported by our Audit and Risk Committee, we actively use risk information to improve business processes and achieve our purposes.

NHMRC's **risk appetite** recognises that it is not possible, or necessarily desirable, to eliminate all risks inherent in our work. Accepting some degree of risk promotes innovation and recognises the limits of what we can control. Our appetite for risk varies by the type of risk, with a greater willingness to accept risks in pursuit of some of our strategic objectives than for operational matters.

NHMRC's *Risk Management Policy and Framework 2023-2026* provides the foundations and organisational arrangements for risk management within the agency and supports officials to document and use risk information in their activities. NHMRC's enterprise risk register details strategic and operational risks. NHMRC continues to conduct regular risk assessments to test and adjust our response to the changing operational environment. We augment our enterprise risk oversight and management with project-level risk management.

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

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

Table 4: Enterprise risks and risk tolerances

PURPOSE/ THEME	RISK DESCRIPTION	RISK TYPE	RISK TOLERANCE	PRIMARY CONTROL/S	CONTROL TYPE/S
Investment	Funding opportunities are not available to talented researchers to contribute to the improvement of human health.	Strategic	Very Low	Maintain delivery of grant schemes, with adjustments (e.g. to timing) as needed to respond to public health emergencies or other major disruptions.	Preventative Corrective
				Identify the best researchers and research through robust, independent, expert peer review.	Preventative
	Grant application and review processes are an unreasonable burden on researchers and peer reviewers.	Strategic	Low	Undertake regular surveys of peer reviewers to assess the burden and opportunities to improve processes.	Detective
				Continue to refine the grant management system, Sapphire, to support peer review processes.	Corrective
				Implement a streamlined process where appropriate, to reduce the workload, broaden participation and shorten the time needed for peer review.	Corrective
				Consider the impact of artificial intelligence on grant application and assessment processes.	Preventative Corrective
	Poor fiscal control or financial management adversely impacts NHMRC's ability to operate.	Operational	Very low	Manage resources in accordance with agreed budgets, ensure oversight by the relevant governance body and make financial decisions at the appropriate level.	Preventative
				Undertake regular independent review of the internal control and financial frameworks, including as part of internal and external audits.	Detective
				Maintain systems and processes to ensure accurate and timely payment of NHMRC and MRFF grants administered by NHMRC.	Preventative

PURPOSE/ THEME	RISK DESCRIPTION	RISK TYPE	RISK TOLERANCE	PRIMARY CONTROL/S	CONTROL TYPE/S
Translation	Health advice and guidelines are inaccurate, do not comply with national and international best practice, or fail to adhere to principles for evidence-based advice.	Strategic	Low	Use the best available scientific methods for rating the certainty of evidence and making recommendations and follow transparent development and decision-making processes.	Preventative
				Consider declarations of interests and carefully manage any perceived and actual conflicts of interest, both prior to appointments and during the term of expert committees.	Preventative
		Strategic	Moderate	Promote, and provide resources to support, consumer and community involvement in research at all stages.	Preventative
				Release guidelines for a period of public consultation to allow the Australian community to comment.	Detective Preventative
Obtain advice from Council and Principal Committees on emerging sectoral concerns and issues.	Detective				

PURPOSE/ THEME	RISK DESCRIPTION	RISK TYPE	RISK TOLERANCE	PRIMARY CONTROL/S	CONTROL TYPE/S
Integrity	Research misconduct is not adequately investigated and addressed and/or inadequate controls are placed on NHMRC-funded researchers.	Strategic	Low	Require funded institutions, as a condition of NHMRC funding, to investigate and appropriately manage allegations of research misconduct and notify NHMRC in specific circumstances.	Detective Corrective
				Apply precautionary (and where warranted consequential) actions to researchers and research institutions implicated in research integrity matters to protect the integrity of NHMRC processes and funding.	Preventative Corrective
	There is unethical, fraudulent or corrupt conduct or systematic non-compliance by staff, service providers or contractors.	Operational	Very Low	Maintain a robust internal control framework, including fraud control, supported by regular education and resources.	Preventative
				Undertake regular independent review of the fraud control and assurance frameworks and ongoing compliance monitoring, including as part of audits.	Detective
Foreign interference in NHMRC-funded research or other activities compromises Australia's national interests.	Strategic	Low	Require NHMRC Administering Institutions to meet obligations of the University Foreign Interference Taskforce's <i>Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector</i> (UFIT Guidelines).	Preventative	
			Monitor and measure Administering Institutions' awareness of, and compliance with, the UFIT Guidelines.	Detective	

PURPOSE/ THEME	RISK DESCRIPTION	RISK TYPE	RISK TOLERANCE	PRIMARY CONTROL/S	CONTROL TYPE/S
Capability	Building innovative information and communications technology (ICT) to support business capability exceeds time or resource constraints.	Strategic	Moderate	Maintain an appropriate governance structure to oversee project management and budgets, including regular review of risks and issues.	Preventative Detective
	Sustainability of operations and/or security of information held by NHMRC ICT platforms is threatened by malicious cyber activity.	Operational	Very low	Maintain security controls within the ICT architecture, regularly monitor cyber threats and security risks, assess the effectiveness of existing controls and implement remediation actions promptly as needed.	Preventative Detective Corrective
				Deliver and, where required, stabilise, and enhance core ICT systems to provide reliable, highly available services to support NHMRC operations.	Preventative Corrective
	ICT solutions operate suboptimally or increase the burden on stakeholders.	Strategic	Moderate	Design and test ICT solutions with internal and external users and implement enhancements over time, as feasible and where most needed.	Preventative Detective Corrective
	A suitable, appropriately skilled workforce that enables the achievements of NHMRC's objectives is not maintained.	Operational	Low	Recruit and retain staff to support the range of NHMRC activities and support staff to learn relevant skills.	Preventative
	The health, safety or wellbeing of NHMRC staff, contractors or visitors is compromised.	Operational	Very low	Maintain, and when needed activate, the Business Continuity Plan to respond to public health emergencies and other critical events.	Preventative
				Monitor the work environment and rectify identified safety issues in a timely manner.	Detective Corrective
				Actively continue to monitor staff welfare and wellbeing.	Detective
	Staff behaviour is inconsistent with the core values of the Australian Public Service – ICARE (Impartial, Committed to Service, Accountable, Respectful, Ethical).	Operational	Very low	Uphold the APS values in everything we do, reinforced by a respectful work culture and leadership behaviours that model ICARE.	Preventative



# Capability

NHMRC aims to operate effectively within a strong governance framework that supports performance, integrity, efficiency and compliance. Core capabilities for NHMRC’s effective operation are in the areas of governance, workforce, business services, safety and security, information and communications technology (ICT) (Table 5). Many of NHMRC’s core capabilities support our ability to be flexible and agile, adapting to new circumstances and addressing emerging issues. In addition to these capabilities, we will focus on the following operational priorities in 2023–24 to ensure we have the capability we need over the period of the plan and beyond:

- Continue to build a positive work culture that helps our people to perform, grow, lead and inspire.
- Foster operational resilience enabled by a safe, supportive, agile and technologically equipped work environment.
- Deploy technologies to support the efficient and effective delivery of NHMRC operations, including optimising business processes and recordkeeping, leveraging digitalisation to reduce administrative burden.
- As a data custodian, strengthen data governance, manage agency data as an asset and support data accessibility, reuse and transparency.
- Refine our grant management system (Sapphire) to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of grant application, peer assessment and post-award management processes and reduce the administrative burden on health and medical researchers.

Table 5: Capabilities to support the effective operation of NHMRC

CAPABILITY AREA	CORE CAPABILITIES
<b>Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a strong governance framework.</li> <li>• Maintain an effective financial/resource management framework.</li> <li>• Uphold a robust risk oversight and internal control framework that incorporates legislative compliance, risk control, privacy management, fraud control, complaint review and freedom of information requests.</li> <li>• Maintain an effective assurance framework, including supporting the NHMRC Audit and Risk Committee and internal audit function.</li> </ul>
<b>Workforce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustain workforce strategies to promote diversity and inclusion, flexible work, learning and development, and performance management.</li> <li>• Support a workplace culture and environment that is inclusive, accessible and flexible and where inclusion is seen as everyone’s responsibility, including through NHMRC’s:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Inclusion Network and LGBTQIA+ Action Plan</li> <li>– Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and RAP Working Group.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Maintain NHMRC’s commitment to embedding work, health and safety by design throughout its business and culture, with a focus on supporting good mental health and addressing psychosocial risk.</li> <li>• Continue to build and maintain a high-performing and engaged workforce through leadership development activities, acknowledging existing and emerging agency priorities.</li> </ul>
<b>Business services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver critical internal business support services, including human resources, financial and travel management, and provision of data and reporting.</li> <li>• Maintain NHMRC properties and facilities.</li> </ul>

**CAPABILITY  
AREA****CORE CAPABILITIES**

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<b>Security and safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain and strengthen NHMRC's Business Continuity Plan.</li><li>• Continue to implement effective controls to meet the Australian Government's <i>Protective Security Policy Framework</i>.</li><li>• Uphold the Emergency Management Framework and comply with <i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i> and relevant Australian standards.</li></ul>
<b>ICT and communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue to support and upgrade NHMRC's grant management system, Sapphire.</li><li>• Continue to support and improve NHMRC's ICT infrastructure and service delivery standards.</li><li>• Continue to align NHMRC's ICT service delivery with business objectives.</li><li>• Protect NHMRC's data and resources by continuing to implement the recommendations of the Cyber Security Strategy.</li><li>• Strategically manage NHMRC's stakeholder relations, digital communication channels, media relations and other communications.</li></ul>

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# Key activities

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

## Investment

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

Our priority activities for 2023–24 are to:

- Contribute to the nation's strategy for health and medical research, including working with the Department of Health and Aged Care to enhance coordination of investments through the NHMRC grant program and the MRFF.
- Establish baseline data and an evaluation strategy to measure the impact of NHMRC's *Gender Equity Strategy 2022–2025*.<sup>12</sup>
- Promote consideration of sex and gender in health and medical research, especially for NHMRC and MRFF funded research activities.<sup>13</sup>
- Measure the impact of new special measures to address systemic disadvantage faced by women and non-binary applicants to the Investigator Grant scheme.<sup>13</sup>
- Continue to optimise grant application and assessment processes, including improving the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of peer review processes and peer reviewer training.<sup>14</sup>
- Promote, communicate and measure the impact of NHMRC-funded research.<sup>15</sup>

Over the period covered by this plan, we will:

- Fund the best researchers and research to meet Australia's diverse health and medical research needs and invest in innovative and collaborative research projects.
- Fund research to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and build and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researcher capacity.<sup>16</sup>
- Fund targeted research that responds to unmet or emerging health needs and reflects national, state and territory, and consumer and community priorities.
- Continue to work with the Department of Health and Aged Care to deliver MRFF grant schemes effectively and efficiently, leveraging NHMRC's grant processes and capability, to achieve program outcomes and complement NHMRC funding schemes.
- Work with domestic and international partners, including non-government and philanthropic organisations and other government agencies, to support health and medical research.<sup>17</sup>
- Recognise excellence and celebrate leadership in health and medical research in Australia.

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12-13 Strategic priority area: Diversity and inclusion

14 Strategic priority area: Peer review

15 Strategic priority area: Research impact

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

17 Strategic priority area: International engagement

# Translation

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

Our priority activities for 2023–24 are to:

- Maintain a leadership role in the development of evidence-based public and environmental health and clinical guidance, which is relied upon by jurisdictions, health professionals and the Australian community.
- Drive translation of health and medical research in accordance with NHMRC’s *Research Translation Strategy 2022–2025* to encourage partnerships between researchers and end-users, capacity and capability-building in translation, and the use of high-quality research evidence for the community’s benefit.<sup>18</sup>

Over the period covered by this plan, we will:

- Fund research that focuses on translation into policy, practice and products, encouraging industry engagement and the commercialisation of research outcomes where appropriate.
- Engage with consumers and the Australian community on health and medical research, including increasing community involvement in research and access to the results of research.<sup>19</sup>
- Promote open access to publications and data from NHMRC-funded research.<sup>20</sup>
- Engage internationally to promote and support collaboration, open science and global health objectives, including participating in bilateral, multilateral and other international forums.<sup>21</sup>
- Promote best-practice evidence development and standards, including support for rapidly updated and living guidelines, *Guidelines for Guidelines* and approval of third-party public health and clinical practice guidelines.
- Develop and update guidelines in public and environmental health and clinical practice to support consistent standards and clinical, policy and regulatory decisions.
- Progress the review of the *2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines* to ensure they remain a trusted resource for the community and health professionals by considering the best and most recent scientific evidence and maintaining transparency at all stages of the review.

18 Strategic priority area: Research impact

19 Strategic priority area: Consumer and community involvement

20 Strategic priority area: Research quality

21 Strategic priority area: International engagement

# Integrity

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

Our priority activities for 2023–24 are to:

- Support the Embryo Research Licensing Committee as it regulates the licensing of research, training and a clinical trial of mitochondrial donation in Australia.<sup>22</sup>
- Promote the highest standards of research quality and integrity, including engaging with the research sector on good practice, maintaining key statements, codes and guidelines, and supporting the work of the Australian Research Integrity Committee.<sup>23</sup>

Over the period covered by this plan, we will:

- Identify, explore and consult on ethical issues relating to emerging technologies in health and medical research, and develop ethical guidelines and advice as needed.<sup>24</sup>
- Monitor Administering Institutions' compliance with NHMRC's policies and requirements.
- Respond to an evaluation of the Australian Research Integrity Committee.
- Continue to promote best practice in research governance and ethics review processes.
- Administer the *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002* (RIHE Act) and the *Prohibition of Human Cloning for Reproduction Act 2002* (PCHR Act), as amended by the *Mitochondrial Donation Law Reform (Maeve's Law) Act 2022*, through the work of the Embryo Research Licensing Committee.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Health priority: Identifying emerging technologies in health and medical research and in health care, and promoting their safe, ethical and effective application

23 Strategic priority area: Research quality

24 Health priority: Identifying emerging technologies in health and medical research and in health care, and promoting their safe, ethical and effective application

# Performance

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

For example, impact case studies are included under Translation because they demonstrate the translation of health and medical research into real world outcomes, but they are also measures of the effectiveness of NHMRC Investment over time. Research impact relies on the underlying quality of health and medical research, so it is also an indirect measure of the effectiveness of NHMRC's Integrity activities. Similarly, NHMRC's peer review processes contribute to Investment, Translation and Integrity. An efficiency measure to streamline these processes continues for the 2023-24 year.

Across all three of NHMRC's purposes, we aim to achieve efficiencies in the way we work and for our stakeholders by making effective use of digital technologies, for example by continuing to develop our grant management system, Sapphire, and other ICT solutions. One of the performance measures under the theme of Capability monitors our performance in achieving efficiencies through digitalisation.

NHMRC continues to develop methods and build its capacity to measure the impact of the research it funds, including by understanding the lived experience of consumers and the community. NHMRC's Evaluation Strategy helps to mature our performance information and guide continuous quality improvement activities over time.<sup>25</sup>

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

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/evaluation>

Table 6: Performance measures

<b>INVESTMENT</b>		<b>PURPOSE: Create knowledge and build research capability through investment in the highest-quality health and medical research and the best researchers.</b>				
<b>Performance criteria</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Assessment methodology</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Measurement year/s</b>		
				2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
<p>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.*</p>	<p>NHMRC grants cover the full spectrum of health and medical research and NHMRC-funded research is focused on achieving better health outcomes for all Australians. The impact of NHMRC-funded research is wide-ranging, with numerous examples showcased on the NHMRC website. NHMRC funds both researcher-initiated and priority-driven research. Priorities 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 NHMRC's online pathway.</p>	<p>Quantitative assessment and analysis of the distribution of grant expenditure and new grants awarded in the financial year. The analysis will draw on the evaluation framework for NHMRC's grant program. The analysis may be supplemented by selected qualitative cases studies and/or researcher profiles of top grants awarded.</p>	<p>Grants are awarded, based on expert peer review, across the full spectrum of health and medical research areas, and focus on achieving better health outcomes.*</p>	✓	✓	✓
<p>Research funding is invested effectively and efficiently through expert peer review against published assessment criteria, including an overall consideration of value with money.</p>	<p>NHMRC identifies the best health and medical research and researchers to fund by enabling robust, independent and expert peer review of applications. NHMRC continues to streamline its peer review process by acting on feedback from peer reviewer surveys and by improving the matching of reviewer expertise to applications, thereby reducing the burden on peer reviewers.</p>	<p>Qualitative assessment of how targeted and priority-driven funding meets a research gap and how the unmet need was identified.</p>	<p>Targeted and priority-driven research funding calls are initiated that address areas of unmet need.</p>	✓	✓	✓
<p>Research funding is invested effectively and efficiently through expert peer review against published assessment criteria, including an overall consideration of value with money.</p>	<p>NHMRC identifies the best health and medical research and researchers to fund by enabling robust, independent and expert peer review of applications. NHMRC continues to streamline its peer review process by acting on feedback from peer reviewer surveys and by improving the matching of reviewer expertise to applications, thereby reducing the burden on peer reviewers.</p>	<p>Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the peer review process, including level of suitability matching of peer reviewers to applications, feedback from reviewers and measurement of time spent on peer review (by individual reviewers and total time).</p>	<p>Better matching of peer reviewers to application, improving application-centric peer review in applicable schemes, and reduced burden on peer reviewers.</p>	✓	✓	✓

**INVESTMENT**

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

Performance criteria	Context	Assessment methodology	Targets	Measurement year/s			
				2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Research grants are provided to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	NHMRC is committed to contributing to better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, through a range of initiatives and guided by NHMRC's Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus. NHMRC has a longstanding commitment to expend at least five per cent of the Medical Research Endowment Account annually on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research.	Quantitative assessment of grant expenditure and new grants awarded in the financial year. Funding is categorised as 'Indigenous health research' by reviewing each funded grant against a range of investigator-provided data classifications including fields of research, keywords, grant titles and media summaries.	More than 5% of NHMRC's annual budget is expended/ awarded on research that will provide better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*	✓	✓	✓	✓
Capacity and capability are built and strengthened by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers.	NHMRC supports research career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers by providing competitive funding opportunities and through participation in NHMRC committees.	Quantitative assessment of the percentage of new grants awarded in the financial year to lead chief investigators of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent. Quantitative assessment of the number of new grants awarded in the financial year to lead chief investigators of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent. NHMRC will also continue to report on the number of investigators of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent currently funded (active grants) across all NHMRC schemes.	3.4% of NHMRC's annual grants awarded to lead chief investigators of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Report on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander chief investigators.	✓	✓	✓	✓



## INVESTMENT

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

Performance criteria	Context	Assessment methodology	Targets	Measurement year/s			
				2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
NHMRC grants support a gender inclusive health and medical research workforce.	NHMRC is committed to achieving gender equity in its grant program. Under its <i>Gender Equity Strategy 2022-2025</i> , NHMRC's vision is a gender diverse and inclusive health and medical research workforce to take advantage of the full range of talent needed to build a healthy Australia.	Quantitative assessment of the number of grants, amount of funding awarded to and funded rates for men and women, and whether measures such as structural priority funding have been applied to reduce gender disparities and, if so, what was the impact. The assessment covers all NHMRC grant schemes (collectively) and key schemes (Investigator, Ideas and Synergy Grants) separately and considers gender equity in grant distribution across career stages.	Gender inequities in NHMRC funding outcomes are reduced.	✓	✓	✓	✓

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

## TRANSLATION

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

Performance criteria	Context	Assessment methodology	Targets	Measurement year/s			
				2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Support an Australian health system that is research-led, evidence-based, efficient and sustainable.*	NHMRC develops, updates and approves high-quality guidelines for clinical practice, public health, environmental health and ethics. NHMRC's guidelines and advice support other Commonwealth entities and states and territories in preventing, detecting and treating poor health or illness as well as fostering consistent standards in public health, environmental health and clinical practice.	Qualitative assessment of NHMRC's role in developing, updating and/or approving guidelines that are timely, are based on a review of the available evidence, follow transparent development and decision-making processes, and will promote health, prevent harm, encourage best practice and reduce waste.	Develop and/or approve public and environmental health and clinical practice guidelines.*	✓	✓	✓	✓
Report on the impact of the research funded by NHMRC.	NHMRC acknowledges the critical importance of measuring and recognising the impact of NHMRC-funded research where it has benefited or made broader contributions to society.	Qualitative and in-depth assessment of the impact of NHMRC-funded research using a case study approach.	Five case studies (per year) are developed that demonstrate the impact of health and medical research funding.	✓	✓	✓	✓

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

## INTEGRITY

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

Performance criteria	Context	Assessment methodology	Targets	Measurement year/s			
				2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Research is conducted responsibly, ethically and with integrity in Australia.*	The <i>Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research</i> is co-authored by NHMRC, the Australian Research Council and Universities Australia. The Code is supported by a series of Guides on specific topics to facilitate its implementation.	Quantitative assessment using NHMRC's annual survey of Administering Institutions (Institutional Annual Compliance Report) to ensure that the Code and its supporting Guides have been implemented in institutional processes.  Qualitative analysis of Australian Research Integrity Committee reviews of the processes used by Administering Institutions to conduct integrity investigations in line with the requirements of the Code.	Research integrity matters are managed appropriately by Administering Institutions in line with the requirements of the Code.*	✓	✓	✓	✓
Research involving human embryos is conducted ethically and legally in accordance with appropriate licence conditions.	The NHMRC Embryo Research Licensing Committee oversees the RIHE Act and PHCR Act, as amended by the <i>Mitochondrial Donation Law Reform (Maeve's Law) Act 2022</i> , and regulates research activities that involve the use of human embryos. NHMRC conducts inspections to ensure licence holder compliance with the legislation and licence conditions.	Qualitative assessment through licence inspections, which include an assessment of the licence holder's processes in relation to activity under each licence and whether these processes meet legislative and licence requirements.	Compliance with regulatory requirements is demonstrated through outcomes from inspections and six-monthly reports.	✓	✓	✓	✓

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

CAPABILITY<sup>26</sup>

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

Performance criteria	Context	Assessment methodology	Targets	Measurement year/s			
				2023-24	2024-2	2025-26	2026-27
<p>Digitalisation supports the effective and efficient delivery of NHMRC activity.</p>	<p>NHMRC aims to make effective use of digitalisation to support its core operations. For example, NHMRC's grant management system, Sapphire, aims to use enhanced data linkage and process redesign to make the health and medical research sector's engagement with NHMRC grant processes intuitive and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of grant administration.</p>	<p>Quantitative analysis of the progressive refinement of processes through improving the efficiency of data entry and collection. In addition, resource intensive business process steps are automated through integration with available digital platforms across NHMRC's grant lifecycle.</p>	<p>Digitalisation reduces administrative burden and improves data quality.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<p>Robust data governance and management ensure data under NHMRC custodianship are secure, reliable, re-usable and accessible.</p>	<p>NHMRC treats data as an asset by managing data through its lifecycle to ensure it is protected where it must be, exposed where it can be and used and re-used for the benefit of Australians and the global health and research sector.</p>	<p>Qualitative methods to demonstrate that data under NHMRC's custodianship is managed in accordance with the <i>Data Availability and Transparency Act 2022</i>.</p>	<p>Data under NHMRC custodianship is secure, reliable, accessible and re-usable by NHMRC, the Australian Government and other relevant data consumers.</p>	✓	✓	✓	✓

<sup>26</sup> The Capability theme underpins achievement of all three of NHMRC's strategic themes or purposes: Investment, Translation and Integrity.

# Appendix A

## Requirements for Commonwealth entity corporate plans

The NHMRC Corporate Plan 2023–24 has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of:

- section 16 of the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (NHMRC Act)
- subsection 35(1) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act)
- subsection 16E(2) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014* (PGPA Rule).

Table 7 below details the requirements met by this corporate plan and the page reference(s) for each requirement.

Table 7: Corporate plan requirements

REQUIREMENT	LEGISLATION REFERENCE	PAGE(S)
<b>Introduction</b>	16E(2)	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• statement of preparation: a statement that the plan is prepared for paragraph 35(1)(b) of the PGPA Act</li> <li>• the reporting period for which the plan is prepared</li> <li>• the reporting periods covered by the plan</li> </ul>	PGPA Rule	
<b>Purposes</b>	16E(2) PGPA Rule	6
<b>Strategy for health and medical research</b>	16(2)	8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a national strategy for medical research and public health research</li> </ul>	NHMRC Act	
<b>Health priorities</b>	16(2)	12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the CEO's assessment of the major national health issues that are likely to arise during the period</li> <li>• the manner in which the CEO proposes to perform their functions in dealing with those issues during the period</li> </ul>	NHMRC Act	
<b>Key activities</b>	16E(2) PGPA Rule	25
<b>Operating context</b>	16E(2)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• environment</li> <li>• capability</li> <li>• risk oversight and management, including key risks and its management</li> <li>• cooperation</li> <li>• subsidiaries (where applicable)</li> </ul>	PGPA Rule	15 23 18 15 N/A
<b>Performance</b>	16E(2)	28
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• performance measures</li> <li>• targets for each performance measure</li> </ul>	PGPA Rule	

