Australian Government
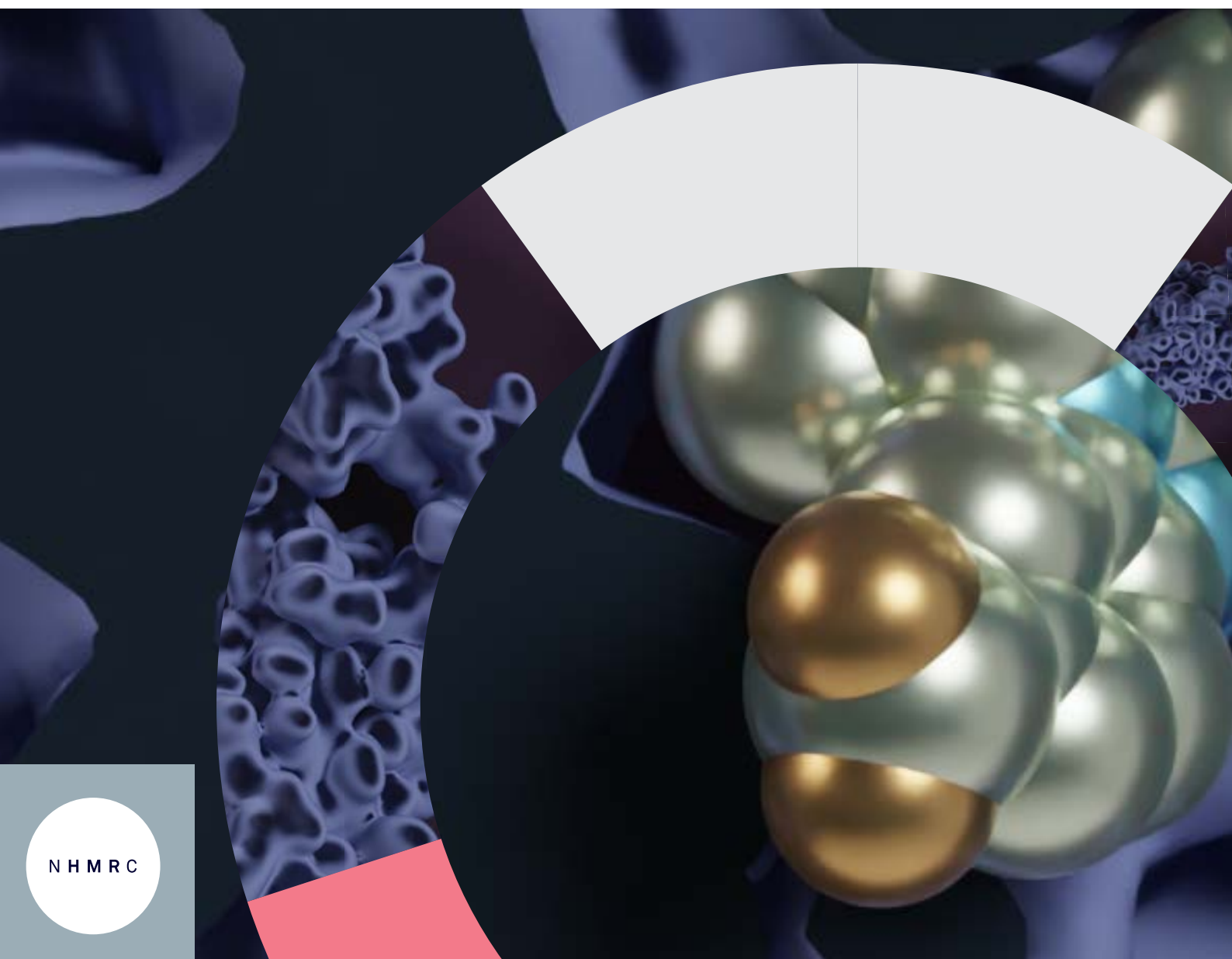
National Health and Medical Research Council

BUILDING
A HEALTHY
AUSTRALIA

CORPORATE PLAN
2024–25

NHMRC

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Acknowledgement of Country

NHMRC acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

Message from the CEO

As I come towards the end of my first year as the CEO of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), I am pleased and excited to present our latest Corporate Plan, which establishes NHMRC's strategy and priorities for our new triennium commencing 1 July 2024.

The commencement of NHMRC's new triennium comes at an exciting time for the health and medical research community, as work commences on Australia's first National Strategy for Health and Medical Research. This work, led by the Department of Health and Aged Care (the Department) in collaboration with NHMRC, will engage consumers and community members, industry, philanthropists, researchers and all levels of government, to develop a plan to strengthen and leverage Australia's world-leading research capability, delivering better health outcomes from a productive and efficient research ecosystem.

I am also excited to be working collaboratively with the Department to progress greater alignment and coordination between the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) and NHMRC's grant program funded through the Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA). Together we are working to streamline and align our funding policies and processes.

We have also established a new shared NHMRC-MRFF advisory committee structure that will enable NHMRC Council and the MRFF's Australian Medical Research Advisory Board (AMRAB) to provide holistic advice on the health and medical research landscape, including on the MRFF and the MREA, supported by a range of advisory committees. Key committees include the NHMRC's Research Committee and advisory groups focused on consumer involvement; industry, philanthropy and commercialisation; Indigenous health research; public health and health systems; and engagement with the Commonwealth and state and territory chief medical officers.

We will continue to maintain peer-review processes that ensure that funding decisions are fair, transparent and based on the highest standards, including continuing to introduce evidence-based improvements to achieve the highest quality decision-making through peer review. We will also continue to build confidence in the functionality of Sapphire — NHMRC's end-to-end grant management system.

We will also continue to champion consumer involvement, including in grant assessment and in other NHMRC activities, as well as progressing the review of the *Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research* in collaboration with the Consumers Health Forum of Australia and the Department of Health and Aged Care.

We are committed to embedding equity in health and medical research and will continue to apply an equity lens to our own policies and programs. We will work in partnership with First Nations people to promote wellness and health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and we will continue to apply initiatives that drive equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, as well as for women and non-binary researchers. We will also turn our focus to research that helps to address health inequities for rural and remote communities.

In partnership with the Australian Research Council, we plan to engage the research sector in a conversation about how to ensure confidence in the integrity of Australian research and trust in the scientific endeavour.

We will also continue to identify and encourage strategies that drive the translation of research into real social, economic and health benefits. This includes research that promotes prevention and public health to improve and protect individual and community health and wellbeing, including collaborating in our region and globally. NHMRC will be expanding its engagement with industry, with a focus on fostering the translation and commercialisation of medical research for social and economic prosperity.

NHMRC is a leader in providing advice on ethical issues in health, developing evidence-based health advice and guidelines, and overseeing the standards for guidelines that apply to all clinical practice, public health and environmental health guidelines. We will continue to build and strengthen NHMRC's expert advice to clinicians, policy makers and the public over the period of this plan, with a number of guidelines expected to be finalised and published in 2024–25, and other reviews well underway.

This year, we will publish the 6th edition of *Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services* — one of NHMRC's most accessed documents which exemplifies our commitment to promoting prevention and public health through the translation of research into practical advice. NHMRC is also continuing its important reviews of the *Australian Dietary Guidelines* and the *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines*.

This year we will also publish an update to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, which establishes the principles and responsibilities for the ethical design, review, conduct and dissemination of results of human research. We also expect to publish comprehensive and up-to-date *Ethical guidelines on cell, tissue and organ donation and transplantation*, following a review over several years by NHMRC, in partnership with the Organ and Tissue Authority.

NHMRC will also continue to champion innovation — in medical research and translation — and within the operations of the agency. NHMRC is already engaged in active discussions with the research sector about the safe, ethical and effective use of artificial intelligence, which is transforming the way we work in government, research and the health system.

Within NHMRC, I am focused on building an innovation culture, strengthening NHMRC's information and communications technology and data capability and increasing our external outreach and communication activities – all to optimise NHMRC's capability to achieve our mission of *building a healthy Australia* through the investment, translation and integrity of health and medical research.

Statement of preparation

As the accountable authority of NHMRC, I present the *NHMRC Corporate Plan 2024–25*, which covers the 4-year period of 2024–25 to 2027–28. 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 Steve Wesselingh

Chief Executive Officer

1 July 2024

NHMRC Corporate Plan 2024–25
Building a Healthy Australia

NHMRC

PURPOSE

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

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

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

NHMRC Council and Committees
(including shared NHMRC-MRFF advisory committees)

STRATEGY

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Support the National Strategy for Health and Medical Research

| Harmonise the MRFF and MREA | Maintain excellence in peer review |

| Champion consumer involvement | Embed equity in health research | Bolster confidence in research integrity |

| Foster translation and commercialisation | Promote prevention and public health |

HEALTH PRIORITIES

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health
- Artificial intelligence in health
- Emerging health threats and emergencies
- Multiple long-term conditions

COOPERATION

Consumers and community groups	Industry organisations
Commonwealth agencies	States and territories
International and global partners	Philanthropic organisations

Researchers and research organisations

Governance and accountability

OPERATING CONTEXT

CAPABILITY PRIORITIES

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

- Optimising ICT and data capability
- Creating confidence in Sapphire

RISK OVERSIGHT AND MANAGEMENT

- Stabilising financial sustainability
- Increasing external communications and outreach
- Building an innovation culture

ACTIVITIES

INVESTMENT
Research strategy and policy
Grant opportunities
Grant Hub service delivery
Grant administration
Sapphire capability

TRANSLATION
Research translation strategy
International engagement strategy
Research impact reporting
Guidelines development
Guidelines standards and approvals

INTEGRITY
Research integrity framework
Research quality strategy
Human and animal research ethics guidelines
Embryo research regulation

PERFORMANCE

High-quality research
Broad range of research areas
Community needs
Effective and efficient review
Research capability and equity

Evidence-based health
Clinical practice guidelines
Public health guidelines
Environment health guidelines
Impact case studies

Responsible and ethical conduct of research, including research involving human embryos

National Health and Medical Research Council

Purposes

NHMRC's purposes support our mission of *building a healthy Australia* and collectively capture NHMRC's legislated functions.

Legislative context

NHMRC is an independent statutory authority within the Health and Aged Care portfolio. We operate under the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (NHMRC Act), *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) and *Public Service Act 1999*.

The NHMRC Act establishes NHMRC's core functions as being:

- To fund health and medical research and training (through the application of the Medical Research Endowment Account), and

- To issue guidelines and advise the community on improving health (including on the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease and the provision of health care) and on ethical issues relating to health.

NHMRC also administers and has legislated functions under the *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002* and the *Prohibition of Human Cloning for Reproduction Act 2002*. In addition, NHMRC exercises some functions under the *Medical Research Future Fund Act 2015*.

Figure 1: NHMRC's mission and purposes

BUILDING A HEALTHY AUSTRALIA

PURPOSES

INVESTMENT

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

TRANSLATION

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

INTEGRITY

Maintain a strong integrity framework underpinning rigorous and ethical research promoting community trust.
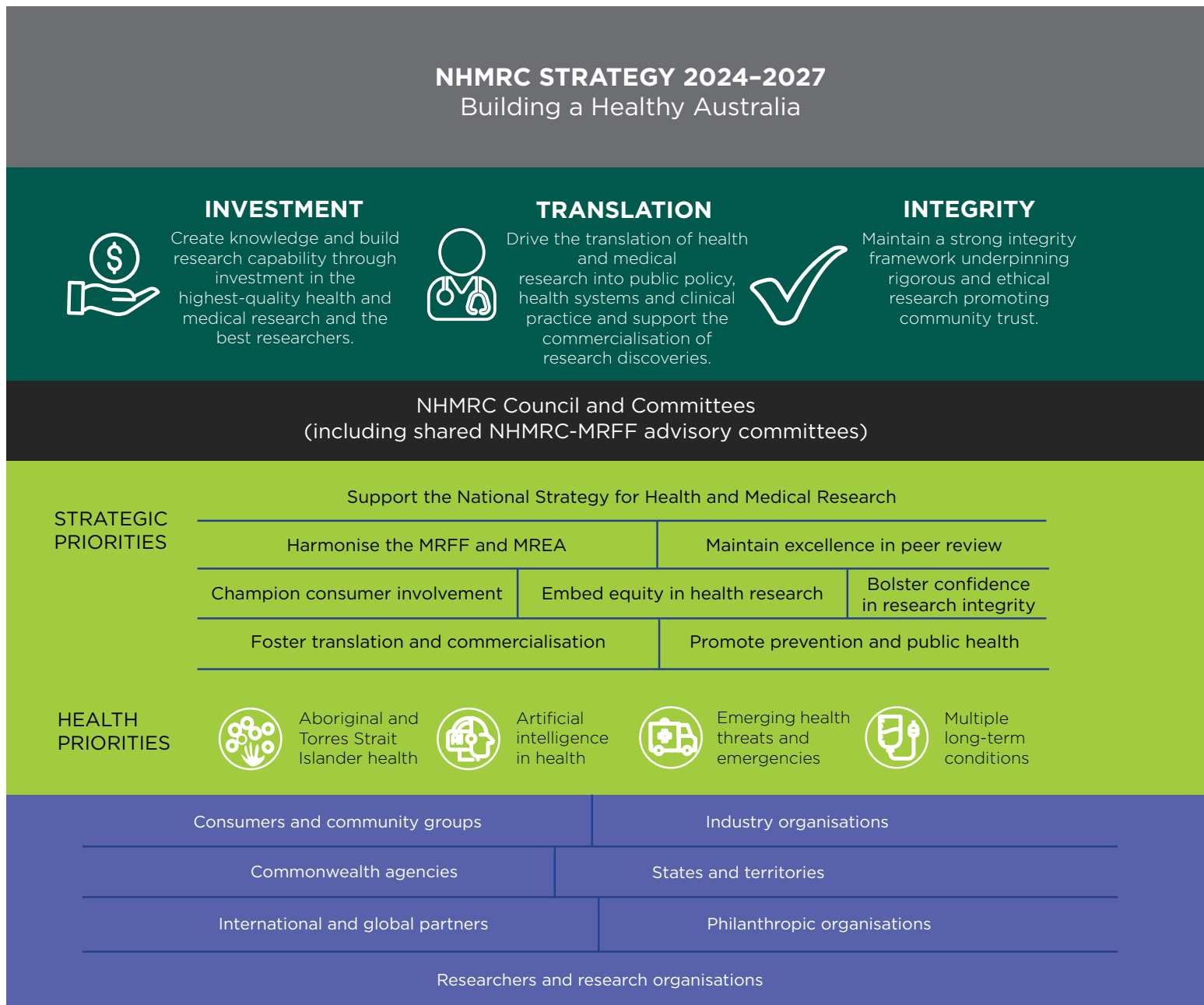
Strategy

The NHMRC Act requires the CEO to develop a strategy for health and medical research and to identify major national health issues likely to arise during the period covered by this plan. In considering these issues, the CEO consults with NHMRC Council, its committees and the Minister before determining issues that are within NHMRC's scope.

Overview

NHMRC's strategy for health and medical research helps to focus our activity to ensure we achieve our mission of *building a healthy Australia*, and contributes to the broader research and innovation system in Australia.

The NHMRC CEO has endorsed new strategic and health priorities for the next 3 years (2024—2027), which are at the core of the strategy. The development and implementation of NHMRC's strategy and priorities is overseen by NHMRC Council and committees, and subject to review by the NHMRC CEO as required as part of the annual Corporate Plan.

Figure 2: NHMRC's strategy for 2024–2027

NHMRC STRATEGY 2024–2027
Building a Healthy Australia

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

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

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

NHMRC Council and Committees
(including shared NHMRC-MRFF advisory committees)

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Support the National Strategy for Health and Medical Research

Harmonise the MRFF and MREA

Maintain excellence in peer review

Champion consumer involvement

Embed equity in health research

Bolster confidence in research integrity

Foster translation and commercialisation

Promote prevention and public health

HEALTH PRIORITIES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health

Artificial intelligence in health

Emerging health threats and emergencies

Multiple long-term conditions

Consumers and community groups

Industry organisations

Commonwealth agencies

States and territories

International and global partners

Philanthropic organisations

Researchers and research organisations

NHMRC Council and committees

The CEO is supported in fulfilling the legislative functions under the NHMRC Act by the expert and independent advice of NHMRC Council, Principal Committees and other committees and expert working groups.

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

As part of new collaborative arrangements with the Department of Health and Aged Care to progress and improve alignment and coordination between the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) and NHMRC's Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA), a new shared NHMRC-MRFF advisory committee structure is being established from 1 July 2024.

As part of these arrangements, NHMRC Council and the MRFF's Australian Medical Research Advisory Board (AMRAB) will work more closely together to provide holistic advice on the health and medical research landscape in Australia, including on the MRFF and the MREA, supported by a range of shared or linked advisory committees.

NHMRC Council, Principal Committees and NHMRC-MRFF advisory committee arrangements, as well as other NHMRC's committees that support the full range of NHMRC functions, are shown in Figure 3.

NHMRC Council and Principal Committees are appointed every 3 years, with new appointments for 2024—2027 in progress at the time of publishing this Corporate Plan.

Figure 3: NHMRC and MRFF advisory committee arrangements from 1 July 2024
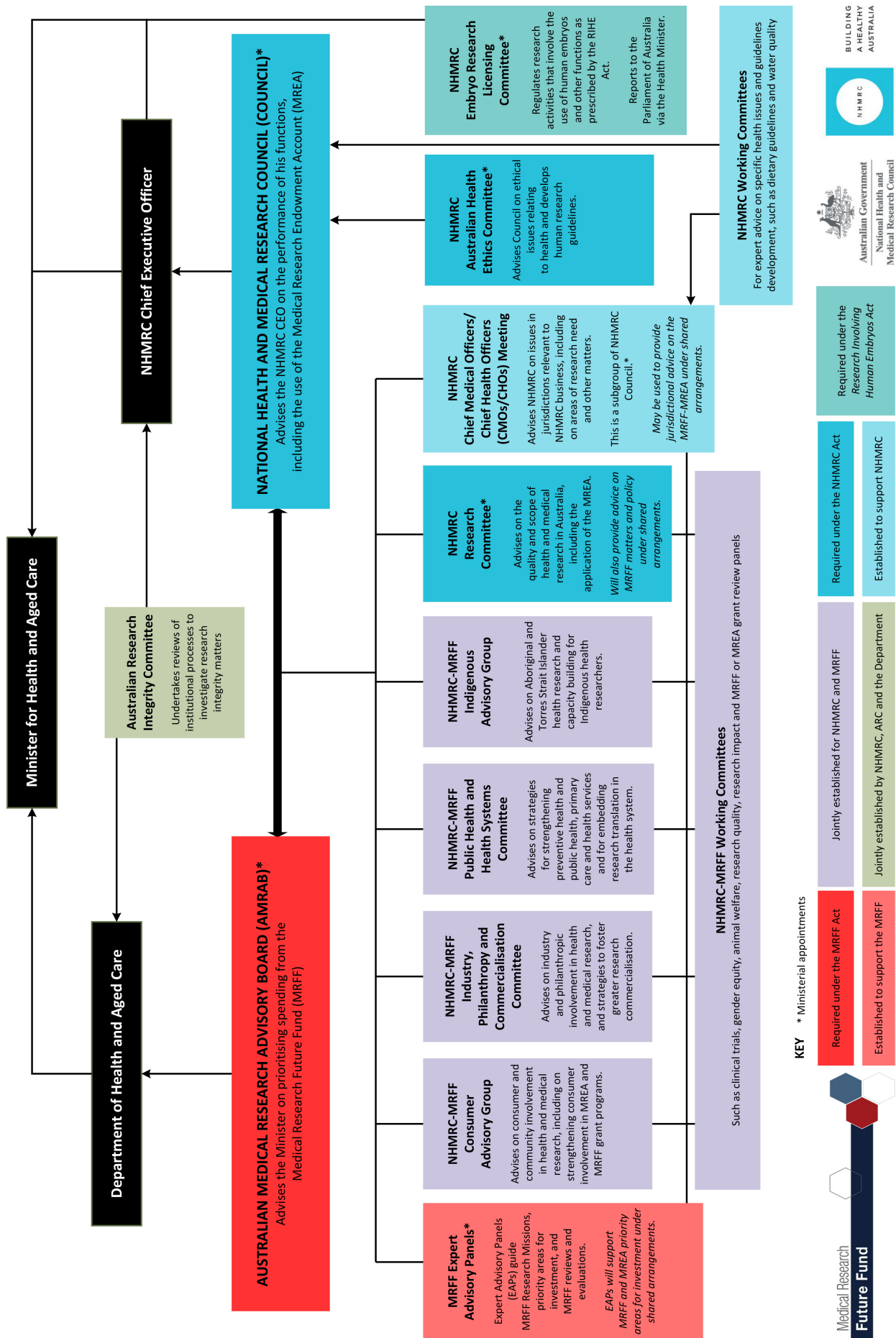
Strategic priorities

NHMRC's strategic priorities are areas of focused activity where NHMRC will lead (or make significant contributions to) policy, programs, initiatives or activities that directly contribute to *building a healthy Australia*.

The NHMRC CEO, in consultation with NHMRC Council and committees, has endorsed new strategic priorities for 2024–25 and beyond, as outlined in Table 1. In general, these priorities are expected to guide NHMRC activity for up to 3 years (until 2027) but may be reviewed annually. Actions to address these priorities are incorporated in NHMRC's key activities.

Table 1: NHMRC's strategic priorities for 2024–25 and beyond

Strategic priority	Overview
Support the National Strategy	Work with the Department of Health and Aged Care to develop a new and cohesive National Strategy for Health and Medical Research.
Harmonise the MRFF and MREA	Work with the Department of Health and Aged Care to optimise synergies and create alignment in policy, operation, and governance between the MRFF and MREA.
Champion consumer involvement	Strengthen the involvement of consumers and the community in health and medical research.
Maintain excellence in peer review	Continue to innovate, evaluate, and optimise peer review, including improving impact assessment, consumer and community involvement, assessment of Indigenous research, and trialling new approaches.
Bolster confidence in research integrity	In partnership with the Australian Research Council, engage the sector to enhance quality and integrity in research and promote institutional best practice.
Embed equity in health research	Address the structural racism and other systemic barriers that drive health inequity through initiatives that promote equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, women, and rural and remote communities.
Foster translation and commercialisation	Develop evidence-based strategies that strengthen translation of research and promote greater commercialisation of innovative research.
Promote prevention and public health	Promote prevention and public health through the development of evidence-based advice, guidelines and strategies to strengthen research in these areas.

Health priorities

NHMRC's health priorities articulate areas of focus across NHMRC activities that deal with major national health issues.

In identifying health priorities, the NHMRC CEO takes into consideration other Australian Government priorities and activities, including Australia's national science and research priorities, and the MRFF strategy and priorities, and where NHMRC activity can build on or contribute to these activities, as well as unique areas of activity that reflect NHMRC's purposes and mission of *building a healthy Australia.*

In general, 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 NHMRC's role in promoting the highest standards and ethics in health and medical research.

The NHMRC CEO, in consultation with NHMRC Council and committees, has endorsed refreshed health priorities for 2024–2027, as outlined in Table 2. The refreshed priorities were informed by advice from NHMRC committees on actions to support implementation of the previous triennium's health priorities, including previous and existing investments and horizon scanning of these and other emerging health issues.

Table 2: NHMRC's health priorities for the 2024–2027 triennium

	Health priority	Overview
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health	Promoting wellness and health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
	Artificial intelligence in health	Promoting the integration of artificial intelligence into health and medical research, and its safe, ethical, equitable and effective application in health care.
	Emerging health threats and emergencies	Identifying and targeting emerging health threats and emergencies, including working with partners towards a One Health research approach to climate change, health and our environment, biodiversity, and antimicrobial resistance.
	Multiple long-term conditions	Identifying, preventing, and managing multiple chronic conditions and greater integration of living with multiple long-term conditions into research.

Cooperation

NHMRC partners with others to support the achievement of its purposes and ensure our priorities and national leadership align with government directions and meet the research and health needs the community.

NHMRC's major collaborative partnerships and other cooperative relationships and engagement mechanisms are outlined in this section. NHMRC does not have any subsidiaries.

Consumers and community groups

NHMRC engages with the community across all areas of its activity, including undertaking public consultation during the development of health guidelines, and on ethical issues in health research and health care.

We engage with consumer and community groups to identify representatives to participate in our committees, in peer review processes, in guidelines development and in public consultation. We also promote opportunities to be involved in NHMRC activities openly, including issuing open calls for nominations to our Principal Committees, and notifications of public consultations on open forums such as social media.

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. We also provide leadership and guidance to the health and medical research sector on consumer and community involvement.

Industry organisations

NHMRC engages with industry organisations to foster research translation and impact, including involving business representatives in our committees and peer review processes, and inviting submissions from industry in public consultation processes.

NHMRC will be expanding its industry engagement activities over the period of this plan, including engaging with biotech and other health-connected companies, with a focus on fostering the translation and commercialisation of Australian research to ensure local production and supply of treatments and devices that benefit the Australian community.

Government and other research funders

NHMRC engages with other government agencies, including other Commonwealth agencies, state and territory health departments, international partners, and philanthropic organisations to deliver its strategy for health and medical research.

Department of Health and Aged Care (and other portfolio agencies)

NHMRC collaborates with the Department on national strategies and priorities for health and medical research, including coordination and harmonisation between the MRFF and the MREA grant programs.

By working together, we aim to simplify access for researchers, make efficient use of government resources and achieve our shared objectives to support Australian research and improve the health of Australians.

We collaborate with the Department, and other health portfolio agencies and statutory office holders, to support governance, ethics review and legal frameworks for human research, clinical trials and gene technology.

NHMRC also works with the interim Australian Centre for Disease Control, and other areas of the Department, to promote the use of evidence to improve public health, environmental health and clinical practice, including undertaking evidence-based reviews and developing health guidelines.

Australian Research Council

We collaborate with the Australian Research Council (ARC) and Universities Australia to promote the highest standards of ethics and integrity in research in line with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and the *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes* (also co-authored with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation).

Through the Australian Research Integrity Committee, jointly established by NHMRC and 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.

Other Commonwealth agencies

NHMRC works with other Commonwealth agencies to coordinate priorities and investment in health and medical research and to contribute to and support government policies affecting the research sector. This includes the Departments of Industry, Science and Resources, Education, Foreign Affairs and Trade, and others.

States and territories

NHMRC works with state and territory governments to foster best practice in the conduct of research, use of evidence and national consistency in health standards. Together, we identify gaps and priorities for research investment and support the translation of research into policy and practice.

International and global partners

NHMRC contributes to global health strategies and benefits from membership in international science programs, such as the Human Frontier Science Program, which promotes excellence and international collaboration in innovative life sciences research.

We collaborate with international funding agencies to support high-quality collaborative international research, through bilateral and multilateral joint funding schemes.

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.

Philanthropic organisations

NHMRC collaborates 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.

Researchers and research organisations

NHMRC collaborates with researchers and research organisations, both formally and informally on research policy and support for health and medical research.

NHMRC-approved 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.

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.

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.

Image credit: Professor Roger Chung, Macquarie University

Operating context

NHMRC takes into consideration its operating context in determining its priorities and key activities to achieve its purposes. This section outlines the environment in which NHMRC operates and our risk oversight and management systems and key risks over the 4-year period of this plan.

Governance and accountability

NHMRC operates within a strong governance, integrity and accountability framework that supports efficient and effective performance. NHMRC's governance committees (shown in Figure 4) play an important role in supporting achievement of our purposes.

Figure 4: Overview of NHMRC's governance structure
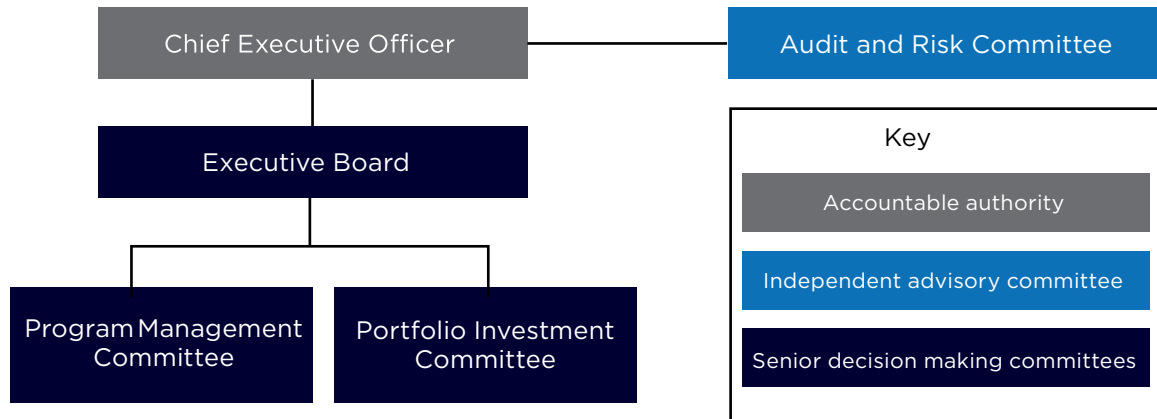
Executive Board provides oversight, managing risk and monitoring performance of the agency. It is the key management committee that supports the CEO in fulfilling their responsibilities as the accountable authority under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* and other relevant legislation.

Executive Board is supported by senior decision-making committees, including the Program Management Committee (supporting effective delivery of the NHMRC grant program and supporting systems) and the Portfolio Investment Committee (overseeing agency resourcing and effective project management).

The Audit and Risk Committee provides independent advice to the NHMRC CEO on the appropriateness of financial and performance reporting, risk management and internal control mechanisms.

Environment

NHMRC's operating environment is influenced by a range of factors that affect how we deliver our activities.

Over the 4-year period of this plan, NHMRC's is likely to be affected by:

- Emerging individual and population health issues, the lived experience of consumers and the community in the health system, changing demographics (e.g. aging population), and trends and changes in burden of disease.

- Changes to health policy, care, services and systems, including the interplay between government (including the role of states and territories), industry and community organisations and providers.

- Advances in technology and/or innovations in the use of technology in research and in health, including the risks and opportunities posed by artificial intelligence in health and medical research.

- Trends and policy in data access, sharing and transparency, including greater sharing of public sector data and open science movements affecting research data and results access and sharing.

- The Australian Government's reform initiatives and policy developments, including responses to major reviews and consultations, especially those affecting research, science, industry and health sectors.

- The Australian Public Service (APS) Reform outcomes and initiatives, which focuses on integrity and a diverse and inclusive APS with the capability to deliver modern, people-first policy and services.

- The broader Australian and global social and economic context.

Each of these factors has been taken into consideration in planning NHMRC's key activities and identifying risks, which are regularly reviewed and adjusted as needed.

Risk oversight and management

NHMRC engages with risk to achieve its purposes and improve business purposes, in line with our risk appetite and tolerances.

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'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 risk tolerance varies with a greater willingness to accept risks in pursuit of strategic objectives than for operational matters.

Key enterprise risks and risk tolerances relevant to the 4-year period covered by this plan are outlined in Table 4. 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. NHMRC continues to implement strategies for identifying, managing and escalating emerging risks across our operations.

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. All staff have a role in identifying and managing risks as part of their day-to-day activities. We augment our enterprise risk oversight and management with project-level risk management.

Table 4: Enterprise risks and risk tolerances

	Risk description	Risk tolerance	Primary control/s
Investment	Funding opportunities are not available to talented researchers to contribute to the improvement of human health.	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.
			Identify the best researchers and research through robust, independent, expert peer review.
	Grant application and review processes are an unreasonable burden on researchers and peer reviewers.	Low	Undertake regular surveys of peer reviewers to assess the burden and opportunities to improve processes.
			Continue to refine the grant management system, Sapphire, to support peer review processes.
			Implement a streamlined process where appropriate, to reduce the workload, broaden participation and shorten the time needed for peer review.
	Poor fiscal control or financial management adversely impacts NHMRC's ability to operate.	Very low	Manage resources in accordance with agreed budgets, ensure oversight by the relevant governance body and make financial decisions at the appropriate level.
			Undertake regular independent review of the internal control and financial frameworks, including as part of internal and external audits.
			Maintain systems and processes to ensure accurate and timely payment of NHMRC and MRFF grants administered by NHMRC.

Risk description	Risk tolerance	Primary control/s
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.	Low	Use the best available scientific methods for rating the certainty of evidence and making recommendations and follow transparent development and decision-making processes.
		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.
Needs and feedback of stakeholders, including researchers and consumers, are not adequately taken into account which adversely affects achievement of the end goals for the community.	Low	Promote, and provide resources to support, consumer and community involvement in research at all stages.
		Release guidelines for a period of public consultation to allow the Australian community to comment.
		Obtain advice from Council and Principal Committees on emerging sectoral concerns and issues.
Risk description	Risk tolerance	Primary control/s
Research misconduct, including alleged fraud or corruption in research, is not adequately investigated and addressed and/or inadequate controls are placed on NHMRC-funded researchers.	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.
		Manage allegations of research misconduct, fraud or corruption reported to NHMRC in accordance with approved policies and processes.
		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.
		Use data collected, including from the institutional annual compliance reporting, to monitor appropriateness of policies and controls.
There is unethical, fraudulent or corrupt conduct or systematic non-compliance by staff, service providers or contractors.	Very Low	Maintain a robust internal control framework, including fraud and corruption control, supported by regular education for staff, service providers or contractors and availability of resources.

(Row group label: Translation)

	Risk description	Risk tolerance	Primary control/s
			Undertake regular independent review of the fraud and corruption control and assurance frameworks and ongoing compliance monitoring, including as part of audits.
			Uphold the APS values in everything we do, reinforced by a respectful work culture and leadership behaviours that model ICARE and the NHMRC values.
Integrity	Foreign interference in NHMRC-funded research or other activities compromises Australia's national interests.	Low	Require NHMRC Administering Institutions to meet obligations of the University Foreign Interference Taskforce's Guidelines to counter foreign interference in the Australian University sector (UFIT guidelines).
			Monitor and measure Administering Institutions' awareness of, and compliance with, the UFIT Guidelines.
	Critical business systems, data or grant scheme integrity is compromised through the inappropriate use of new technology (such as artificial intelligence).	Low	Require all external users to adhere to the NHMRC policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Grant Applications and Peer Review.
			Maintain appropriate system security plans, system risk management plans and security assessments and perform annual reviews of the NHMRC Cyber Security Strategy.

	Risk description	Risk tolerance	Primary control/s
Capability	Building innovative information and communications technology (ICT) to support business capability exceeds time, solutions operate suboptimally or increase the burden on stakeholders.	Moderate	Maintain an appropriate governance structure to oversee project management and budgets, including regular review of risks and issues.
			Design and test ICT solutions with internal and external users and implement enhancements over time, as feasible and where most needed.
	Sustainability of operations and/or security of information held by ICT platforms is threatened by malicious cyber activity.	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.
			Deliver and, where required, stabilise, and enhance core ICT systems to provide reliable, highly available services to support NHMRC operations.
	A suitable, appropriately skilled workforce that enables the achievements of NHMRC's objectives is not maintained.	Low	Recruit and retain staff to support the range of NHMRC activities and support staff to learn relevant skills.
	The health, safety, or wellbeing of NHMRC staff, contractors or visitors is compromised**.**	Very low	Maintain, and when needed activate, the Business Continuity Plan to respond to public health emergencies and other critical events.
			Monitor the work environment and rectify identified safety issues in a timely manner.
			Actively continue to monitor staff welfare and wellbeing and address any issues as a priority.

■ Strategic risks ☐ Operational risks

Capability

NHMRC has also identified specific capability priorities requiring focused activity by the office of NHMRC in 2024–25 and over the period of this plan. Each of these priorities will help build and maintain the critical capabilities NHMRC needs to achieve its mission and purposes in both the short and long term.

Table 3: NHMRC's capability priorities for 2024–25 and beyond

Capability priority	Overview
Optimising Information Communication Technology (ICT) and data capability	Improve core ICT and data capabilities through ongoing investment, reorganisation, and maturation of service delivery, ICT governance, project delivery, and data/information management practices.
Building confidence in Sapphire	Strengthen the core foundations of the Sapphire platform by merging smaller systems into a centralised, maintainable, and resilient platform that is value for money, reduces the administrative workload and builds confidence.
Stabilising financial sustainability	Mature NHMRC's approach to oversight and assurance over the agency's annual operating budget and project investment, including developing a robust multi-year internal budget and reviewing cost recovery and shared services arrangements.
Increasing external communication and outreach	Engage with the community and stakeholders through an expanded repertoire of communication and outreach activities, that seek to involve consumers and stakeholders in NHMRC activities and promote the role of NHMRC-funded research in improving the health of the community.
Building an innovation culture	Foster a work environment that energises NHMRC employees, removes organisational barriers and provides tools that support innovative practices, creates opportunities for collaboration, and celebrates new ideas, creative solutions and innovation successes.

In addition to the capability priorities identified in Table 3, NHMRC will continue to build and maintain its capability across the following broad capability areas.

Integrity and transparency

NHMRC is focused on fostering stakeholder confidence through a culture of accountability, transparency and integrity.

NHMRC's strategies and plans in this area include:

- Maintain a culture of integrity and accountability through transparent reporting and systems for addressing concerns.
- Maintain an effective financial/resource management framework, including strengthening internal budgeting processes.
- Deliver a comprehensive audit and risk management program, guided by an independent Audit and Risk Committee, to underpin continuous quality improvement across all activities.

Workforce and culture

NHMRC is focused on fostering workplace strategies that cultivate and strengthen workforce capabilities, including reducing outsourcing of core work and ensuring the delivery of operational outcomes within a culture of excellence.

In 2024–25, NHMRC will reduce outsourcing of core work in line with the APS Strategic Commissioning Framework. Our target for 2024-25 is to reduce outsourcing of core work in the APS job families of finance and accounting and ICT and digital solutions, with an expected reduction of over $1 million outsourcing expenditure in 2024–25, compared with 2023–24.

NHMRC is also committed to fostering a workplace culture that values diversity and inclusion and employee wellbeing, where all employees feel safe, valued and respected. Our workplace culture also champions the values and behaviours that make NHMRC unique and helps us achieve our purposes.

NHMRC's strategies and plans in this area include:

- Embed NHMRC's culture (values and behaviours) across our activities to build a high performing, engaged and productive workforce.
- Develop and implement a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and associated action plans (e.g. LGBTQIA+ and Reconciliation Action Plans).
- Deliver effective internal communication that creates an environment where trust, collaboration and ideas sharing thrive.

Safety and security

NHMRC continues to prioritise safety and security of its personnel, data and information, and business continuity.

NHMRC's strategies and plans in this area include:

- Foster operational capabilities that support a safe and secure workplace.
- Foster operational resilience and innovation that supports and strengthens NHMRC's business continuity management, security, emergency management and approaches to safety to meet relevant legislation and Australian standards.
- Protect NHMRC's data and resources by continuing to implement the objectives outlined in the Cyber Security Strategy.

ICT and data capability

In addition to actions to address the related capability priority, NHMRC's strategies and plans in this area include:

- Finalise and launch the NHMRC ICT Strategy, which will define the technology vision, direction, priorities and initiatives to deliver NHMRC's activities and strategic priorities.

- Deliver the NHMRC Cyber Security Strategy 2024–2027, which outlines the approach the agency will take to mitigate cyber security threats.

- Revise and refresh the NHMRC Data and Information Strategy 2024–2027, which will outline the priorities to improve how NHMRC manages and stores corporate knowledge and grant information.

- Plan and develop the NHMRC Grant System Strategy 2024–2027, which will outline the future strategy for the Sapphire platform.

- Continue to support NHMRC's digital transformation journey to enable efficient and timely services to be delivered to our key stakeholders.

Building confidence in Sapphire

Optimising ICT and data capability

Building an innovation culture

Communication and outreach

In addition to actions to address the related capability priority, NHMRC's strategies and plans in this area include:

- Recognise excellence and celebrate leadership in health and medical research in Australia.

- Enhance external communication to foster trust and positive stakeholder relationships, as well as brand integrity, credibility, and reliability.

Increasing external communication and outreach

Activities

NHMRC achieves its purposes and mission of *building a healthy Australia* by delivering a range of activities. Our key activities are grouped below by broad type of activity, which align with the primary purpose to which the type of activity contributes, noting that many activities support achievement across more than one purpose.

INVESTMENT

Research strategy and policy

Grant opportunities

Grant Hub service delivery

Grant administration

Sapphire capability

TRANSLATION

Research translation strategy

International engagement strategy

Research impact reporting

Guidelines development

Guidelines standards and approvals

INTEGRITY

Research integrity framework

Research quality strategy

Human and animal research ethics guidelines

Embryo research regulation

Key activities

Key activities in 2024–25 and extending over the period of this plan are outlined below. Our key activities are informed by our operating context and include specific strategies, plans and other activities to implement our strategic priorities, health priorities and capability priorities.

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

Research strategy and policy

- Work with the Department of Health and Aged Care (the Department) to develop a National Strategy for Health and Medical Research.

- Work with the Department to harmonise advisory structures, policies and operations across the two grant programs.

- Revise and promote the *Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research (2016)*, in collaboration with the Consumers Health Forum of Australia.

- Address sex and gender diversity in health and medical research, especially for NHMRC and MRFF funded research activities.

- Commit to continuous evaluation and improvement of NHMRC grant program policies, processes and outcomes.

Grant opportunities

- Deliver funding schemes that invest in the best researchers and research to meet Australia's diverse health and medical research needs and invest in innovative and collaborative research projects.

- Deliver targeted calls for research that respond to unmet or emerging health needs and reflect national, state and territory, and consumer and community priorities.

- Deliver funding schemes that focus on translation into policy, practice and products, including encouraging partnerships with policy makers or industry engagement and the commercialisation of research outcomes where appropriate.

Grant Hub service delivery

- Work with the Department to deliver MRFF grant schemes effectively and efficiently, leveraging NHMRC's grant processes and capability, to achieve program and policy outcomes and complement NHMRC funding schemes.

- Provide Grant Hub services to diverse partners (e.g. philanthropic trusts, foundations and other funders) who seek to deliver bespoke grant programs, or leverage NHMRC's established grant program, to support prioritised research.

Sapphire capability

- Refine and consolidate our grant management system (Sapphire) to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of grant application, peer assessment and post-award management processes.

Grant administration

- Manage and respond to inquiries from grant applicants and grantees, and manage active grants.

- Maintain and monitor compliance with NHMRC's policies and requirements.

Translation

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

Research translation strategy

- Embed research in health-related systems by promoting successful collaborations between health services, researchers and end-users, including through the accreditation of NHMRC Research Translation Centres.

- Consider opportunities to foster greater translation and commercialisation of Australian research to ensure local production and supply of treatments and devices that benefit the Australian community.

International engagement strategy

- Assist Australian researchers in collaborative research projects, facilitate collaborative networks and international research partnerships and explore opportunities to work with international partners on policies and strategies.

Research impact reporting

- Promote, communicate and measure the impact of NHMRC-funded research.

Guidelines development

- Develop and update guidelines in public, clinical and environmental health to support consistent standards, promote prevention and public health and inform clinical, policy and regulatory decisions.

Guidelines standards and approvals

- Promote best-practice evidence review and standards, including support for rapidly updated and living guidelines, Guidelines for Guidelines and approval of third-party public health and clinical practice guidelines.

Integrity

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

Research integrity framework

- Promote research integrity, including maintaining the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Code) and other guidance, and supporting the work of the Australian Research Integrity Committee.

Research quality strategy

- Promote the highest standards of research practice, including engaging with the research sector on good practice and developing guidance in key areas.

Human and animal research ethics guidelines

- Maintain national standards, codes and guidelines that promote best practice in research governance and ethics review processes and provide guidance on ethical issues in health.

Embryo research regulation

- Administer the *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002* (RIHE Act) and the *Prohibition of Human Cloning for Reproduction Act 2002* (PCHR Act), through the work of the Embryo Research Licensing Committee.

Table 4: Links between key activities and priorities, 2024–2027

Key activity	Support the National Strategy	Harmonise the MRFF and MREA	Maintain excellence in peer review	Champion consumer involvement	Embed equity in health research	Bolster confidence in research integrity	Foster translation & commercialisation	Promote prevention and public health	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	Artificial intelligence in health	Emerging health threats & emergencies	Multiple long-term conditions	Optimise ICT and data capability	Boost confidence in Saphire	Optimise financial sustainability	Increase communication & outreach	Build an innovation culture
Strategic priority																	
Research strategy and policy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Grant opportunities			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Grant Hub service delivery			✓						✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Sapphire capability		✓	✓										✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grant administration		✓				✓							✓	✓		✓	
Research translation strategy	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
International engagement strategy	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Research impact reporting	✓							✓					✓			✓	✓
Guidelines development				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Guidelines standards and approvals				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Research integrity framework						✓											
Research quality strategy				✓		✓										✓	
Human and animal research ethics guidelines									✓	✓						✓	
Embryo research regulation						✓											

Performance

NHMRC assesses and communicates its performance by measuring its achievement against the performance measures outlined in this section, as well as through evaluation activities guided by the NHMRC Evaluation Strategy.

INVESTMENT

- High-quality research
- Broad range of research areas
- Community needs
- Effective and efficient review
- Research capability and equity

TRANSLATION

- Evidence-based health
- Clinical practice guidelines
- Public health guidelines
- Environment health guidelines
- Impact case studies

INTEGRITY

- Responsible and ethical conduct of research, including research involving human embryos

Performance measures

Achievement of NHMRC's purposes will be measured and assessed over the period of this plan using the performance measures outlined below.

The detailed performance measures and targets, including the sources of information and methodologies that will be used to measure and assess performance against each target, are outlined below. A mix of qualitative and quantitative targets are included. The reporting period for each target is also outlined. Most targets are reported against every year, which helps provide an assessment of NHMRC's performance over time.

Investment

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

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.*

	Target/s	Methodology	Reporting years
1	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.*	Quantitative assessment of the distribution of the value of new grants awarded in the financial year by broad research area. Reporting is supplemented by researcher profiles of top grants awarded.	2024–25 2025–26 2026–27 2027–28
2	Targeted and priority-driven research funding calls are initiated that address areas of unmet need.	Qualitative assessment of how targeted and priority-driven funding meets a research gap and how the unmet need was identified.	2024–25 2025–26 2026–27 2027–28

*This performance measure/target is included in the Portfolio Budget Statements.

Research funding is invested effectively and efficiently through expert peer review against published assessment criteria, including an overall consideration of value with money.

	Target/s	Methodology	Reporting years
3	Better matching of peer reviewers to applications, improving application-centric peer review in applicable schemes, and reduced burden on peer reviewers.	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).	2024–25 2025–26 2026–27 2027–28

Research grants are provided to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*

	Target/s	Methodology	Reporting years
4	More than 5% of NHMRC's annual budget is awarded to research that will provide better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*	Quantitative assessment of new grants awarded in the financial year. Funding is categorised as 'Indigenous health research' through a combination of Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria assessment and reviewing each funded grant against a range of investigator provided data classifications including fields of research, keywords, grant titles and media summaries.	2024–25 2025–26 2026–27 2027–28

*This performance measure/target is included in the Portfolio Budget Statements, but has been modified here to focus on new grants awarded only (previously the target included expenditure on all active grants, as well as new grants awarded).

Capacity and capability are built and strengthened by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers.

	Target/s	Methodology	Reporting years
5	3.4% of NHMRC's annual grants awarded to lead chief investigators of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.	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.	2024–25 2025–26 2026–27 2027-28
6	Report on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander chief investigators.	Quantitative reporting on the number of chief investigators of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent currently funded (active grants) across all NHMRC schemes.	2024–25 2025–26 2026–27 2027–28

NHMRC grants support a gender inclusive health and medical research workforce.

	Target/s	Methodology	Reporting years
7	Gender inequities in NHMRC funding outcomes are reduced.	Quantitative assessment of the number of grants, amount of funding awarded and funded rates by gender, and whether measures have been applied to reduce gender disparities. The assessment covers all NHMRC grant schemes (collectively) and key schemes (Investigator and Ideas Grants) separately and considers gender equity in grant distribution across career stages.	2024–25 2025–26 2026–27 2027–28

Translation

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

Support an Australian health system that is research-led, evidence-based, efficient and sustainable.*

	Target/s	Methodology	Reporting years
8	Develop and/or approve public and environmental health and clinical practice guidelines.*	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.	2024–25 2025–26 2026–27 2027–28

*This performance measure/target is included in the Portfolio Budget Statements.

Report on the impact of the research funded by NHMRC.

	Target/s	Methodology	Reporting years
9	At least 5 case studies are published each year that demonstrate 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.	2024–25 2025–26 2026–27 2027–28

Integrity

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

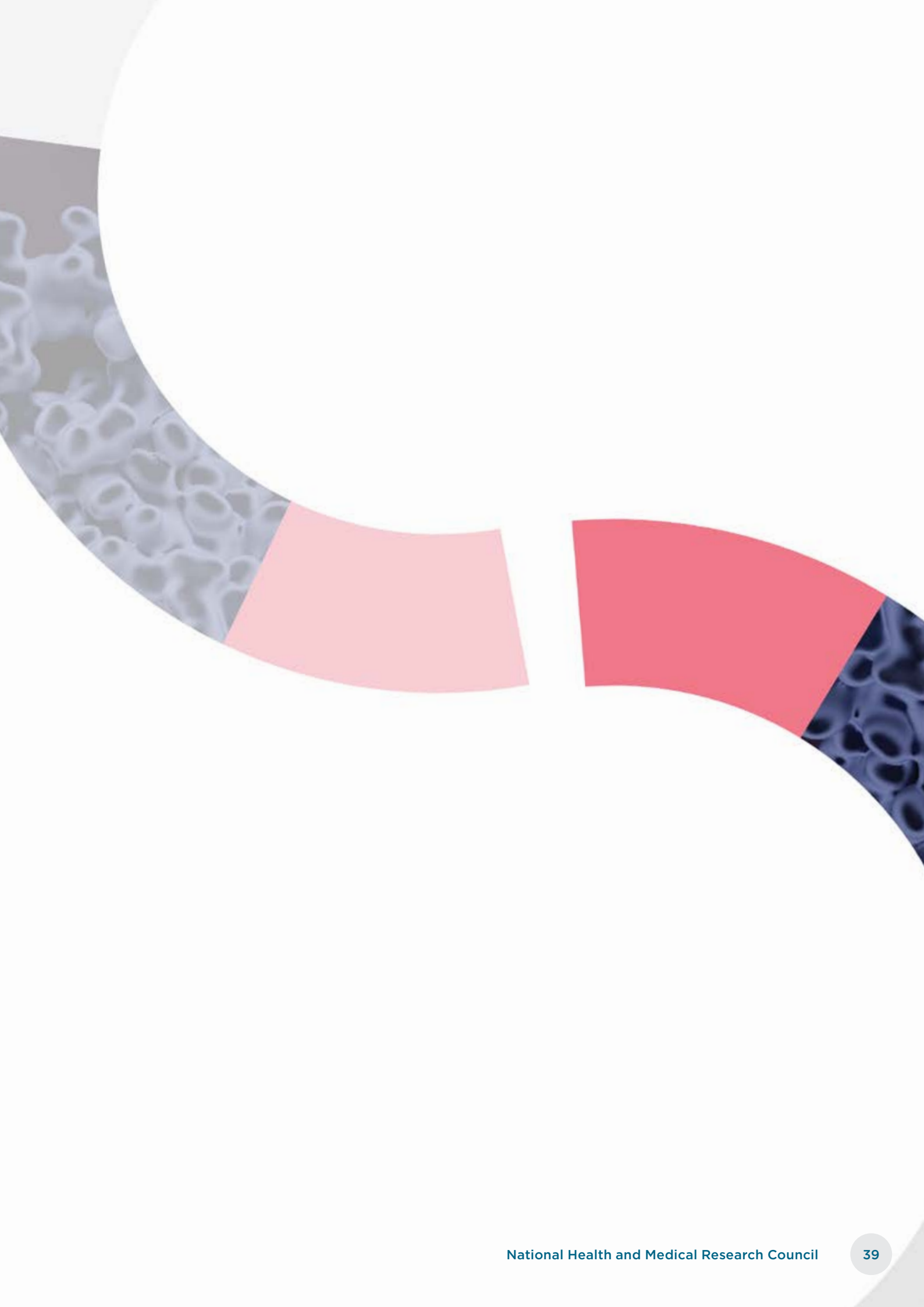**Research is conducted responsibly, ethically and with integrity in Australia.***

	Target/s	Methodology	Reporting years
10	Research integrity matters are managed appropriately by Administering Institutions in line with the requirements of the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the code).*	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, and 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.	2024–25 2025–26 2026–27 2027–28

*This performance measure/target is included in the Portfolio Budget Statements.

Research involving human embryos is conducted ethically and legally in accordance with appropriate licence conditions.

	Target/s	Methodology	Reporting years
11	Compliance with regulatory requirements under the *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002* is demonstrated through outcomes from inspections and 6-monthly reports.	Qualitative assessment of reports from licence holders, as well as through inspections carried by authorised officers, 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.	2024–25 2025–26 2026–27 2027–28

Appendix A: List of requirements

The Corporate Plan 2024–25 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)
Introduction • statement of preparation: a statement that the plan is prepared for paragraph 35(1)(b) of the PGPA Act • the reporting period for which the plan is prepared • the reporting periods covered by the plan	16E(2) PGPA Rule	5
Purposes	16E(2) PGPA Rule	8
Strategy for health and medical research • a national strategy for medical research and public health research	16(2) NHMRC Act	11
Health priorities • the CEO's assessment of the major national health issues that are likely to arise during the period • the manner in which the CEO proposes to perform their functions in dealing with those issues during the period	16(2) NHMRC Act	15
Cooperation	16E(2) PGPA Rule	16
Operating context • environment • risk oversight and management, including key risks and its management • capability • subsidiaries (where applicable)	16E(2) PGPA Rule	21 22 27 N/A
Key activities	16E(2) PGPA Rule	31
Performance • performance measures • targets for each performance measure	16E(2) PGPA Rule	34