



Australian Government

National Health and Medical Research Council

Transcript from 18 August 2017 webinar on NHMRC's new grant program

Anne Kelso:

Hello and welcome everyone to this webinar on NHMRC's new grant program. I'd like to start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the many lands on which we're meeting today and pay my respects to their elders, past and present. I'd also like to acknowledge and welcome any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who are with us in this webinar today.

Now, this webinar is intended to bring you up to date on a whole lot of details of the new grant program, which we've been developing over the last few months. I hope it's going to answer at least some of your questions, but we'll follow up with the FAQs and also later in the year with more details on other aspects that won't be covered today, as they're settled.

The restructured grant program will provide a new framework for NHMRC's \$800 million investment in Australian health and medical research, for funding starting from 1 January 2020.

As you will know, it's been developed with the advice of a fantastic expert advisory group, made up of people from across the research sector in Australia, and also followed extensive consultation with the sector last year and early this year. Our Council and Principal Committees, especially Research Committee have also played critical roles in advising us on the development of this new grant program.

So that work culminated with the announcement of the new grant program by the Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, on 25 May this year. The Minister noted that these were changes which the research community had itself proposed and agreed upon, and which he, as Minister, has accepted in full and unchanged. So we do appreciate the Minister's support for this major reform.

I now want to recap on the structure of the new grant program - and this will be familiar to many people by now. I also want to comment on how this structure is going to address the objectives of the reform.

First of all, we're going to have Investigator Grants, to support the research program of outstanding investigators at all career stages. Synergy Grants, to support outstanding multidisciplinary teams to work together on major questions. Ideas Grants, to support focused innovative research projects on a specific question and then a range of schemes that we've collected together under the heading of Strategic and Leveraging Grants, which are to support research that addresses identified national needs.

Now the objectives of this reform were threefold: first of all to encourage innovation and creativity across all fields of health and medical research. Secondly, to provide opportunities for talented researchers at all career stages and across all disciplines relevant to health and medical research. Thirdly, to minimise the burden on researchers of excessive writing of applications and peer review, to free up more time for research, while remembering that our core focus at NHMRC is to improve human health and wellbeing through research. Let me run through how I think the new grant program is going to support these three objectives.

First of all, for encouraging innovation and creativity. Both the Investigator Grants and the Synergy Grants offer a lot of flexibility to the investigators for strategic, creative, collaborative research and the Ideas Grants are specifically focused on fresh thinking and on the science and the innovation and the creativity, rather than the track record of the investigators.

The second objective of providing opportunities for talented researchers will be supported by the Investigator Grants, which will be provided at all career stages, from immediate post doc through to the most senior researchers. Synergy Grants will encourage diverse teams - more diverse than our current Program Grants, for example, taking into account discipline, career stage and gender, and Ideas Grants will be an opportunity for people at any stage of their career with less-developed track records.

Then the third objective, of minimising burden on researchers will be achieved by the consolidation of funding in the Investigative Grants, with the person receiving a salary, if required, and a Research Support Package, therefore reducing their need to apply for multiple Project Grants year in, year out.

Then the combination of consolidation plus capping of grants is - of numbers of grants - is expected over time to reduce the application numbers once we reach a steady state. I do think that we can't expect to see a big reduction in application numbers in the first year or so, as we transition into the new grant program, but it's been designed to achieve that reduction over time.

Now, the information that's going to be provided in this presentation covers quite a number of topics. First of all, for Investigator Grants, I'm going to go over the structure of this scheme, the salaries and the sizes of the Research Support Packages, part-time and non-salaried grants and Investigator Grants and relevance for working overseas.

For Synergy and Ideas Grants I'm going to talk very briefly about eligibility and budgets. Then I'm going to talk in some detail about transitional arrangements, with the final rounds of the program and Project Grants, and then the quite complex situation of the transition from old to new schemes.

This slide will be familiar to people from the launch, some time ago. I want now to focus on Investigator Grants. These are five-year grants given to outstanding individuals, and will provide a salary, if required, and a Research Support Package. I'll go into those details shortly.

One of the important changes we're making is the substantial streamlining of our current scheme. You'll know that over time the NHMRC Fellowship scheme has become quite complex, with many different levels and different types of fellowships for different purposes. A major outcome of this restructure is the streamlining into just five levels, from the early career, immediately post-PhD level of Emerging Leadership Level 1, up to the most senior - Senior Principal Research Fellowship level, of Leadership Level 3. You'll see on this slide how each of our current fellowship levels aligns with the new levels in the Investigator Grant scheme.

We won't be talking about Postgraduate Scholarships today, because there are no changes currently planned for that scheme, but they are a component of this Investigator Grants scheme.

So now the scheme structure and showing the salaries that correspond to each level of Emerging Leadership and Leadership level Investigator Grants. As I showed on the previous slide, these levels align with existing fellowships, and we've selected the highest salary level for each of those groups, in determining the salaries at the levels of the Emerging Leadership and Leadership schemes.

For Emerging Leadership - these are for people who are less than or up to 10 years post PhD or equivalent. That means for EL1 up to five years, normally, and EL2 normally up to five to 10 years.

The individual will self-select these levels, according to their career stage. For the Leadership levels L1, L2 and L3, again it will be for the applicant to select which Leadership level to apply for, but NHMRC will be providing guidance on the expectations for each of those Leadership levels.

The salaries are shown per annum. They'll increase in line with indexation and they're shown as one full-time equivalent, so of course if somebody was a half-time fellow then they would have half that salary.

Now, there's another very important change that we've made that's shown on this slide. At the moment in our fellowship scheme people can keep on applying, without a total cap on the number of times they can hold an NHMRC fellowship. In this case we're introducing an

ultimate cap on the number of terms that somebody can hold an Investigator Grant. You'll see for the Emerging Leadership levels that these levels can each be held once - in each case a five-year term.

Once people move into the Leadership level, one, two and three, they can hold a maximum of five terms in total, but those can be in different combinations. For example, they can hold an L1 level for up to two times, they can hold L2 up to two times, and L3 up to five times, but if, for example, they've held L1 twice, L2 once, then they could only hold L3 another two times, to reach a maximum of five.

It's very important to note that that new limit on the number of terms that people can hold an Investigator Grant will not be applied retrospectively. In other words, no consideration will be taken of how long somebody has already been in the existing NHMRC fellowship scheme - so the clock starts ticking on 1 January 2020.

The other thing to note here is that this will allow somebody to have up to 35 years in total of NHMRC Investigator Grant support, or 25 years at the Leadership level.

Now I want to turn to a slide that I know many people will have been asking about and that is the Research Support Packages. These are not strictly aligned with the salary levels which I showed on the previous slide, so let me explain that.

For the Emerging Leadership levels there will be two Research Support Packages offered. These will be automatically allocated according to the Emerging Leadership level. So the immediately post-doc EL1 fellow will receive a fixed, \$50,000 per annum package. The next level, the EL2, will receive a \$200,000 per annum fixed package.

When we move into the Leadership levels, L1 to L3, there are four levels of package that may be awarded - between \$300,000 and \$600,000 per annum.

Now, the allocation of the package to the person will be determined on the overall score achieved through peer review. A really important feature of this is that they - these packages won't be aligned automatically with seniority, so in principle it will be possible, for example, for a level one Leadership Investigator Grantee to receive the highest Research Support Package of \$600,000 per annum. For the most senior person, at L3 level, the highest level, equivalent to senior principal research fellow, to receive a lower package. That's a very important feature of this new scheme.

Now, these numbers have been guided in part by analysis of what fellows currently receive from Project Grants and Program Grants in our current scheme, and we just draw to your attention the fact that the average Project Grant size at the moment is about \$600,000 per annum, if we exclude the very large clinical trials grants. That would typically be over a three-year grant. So it would be \$200,000 per annum over a three-year grant. So now, for the Leadership levels people will receive something between \$300,000 and \$600,000 per annum over a five-year grant.

Another very important point that I'll come back to later is that it's possible for somebody who holds Ideas Grant to apply for an Investigator Grant. -We want to certainly to allow that to happen, so that people can move over into the Investigator Grant system - but if they already have an Ideas Grant at that stage, then their Research Support Package will be reduced by 50 per cent for each Ideas Grant held. So that if they currently hold two Ideas Grants at the time they're awarded an Investigator Grant, they will have a - they won't receive a Research Support Package until those Ideas Grants have expired. If one expires before the other then they'll move up to a 50 per cent Research Support Package and then back to 100 per cent of the package which was awarded at peer review.

So just to make it really clear by putting this all on to one slide, the alignment of levels of salary is not strictly connected to the levels of Research Support Package. The Research Support Package for EL1 and EL2 are awarded, based on seniority and Emerging Leadership and then the RSPs, the Research Support Packages for the levels one, two and

three Leadership Investigator Grants are awarded based on a score in a like-for-like assessment with other candidates, rather than seniority.

So in the steady state, when we fully move to the new grant program, this will be the eligibility for people as they move through this Investigator Grant scheme. If they have never held an Investigator Grant before then they'll be eligible for all levels EL1 through to L3, subject to their number of years post-doc, because really EL1 and EL2 are for people who are up to 10 years post-PhD or equivalent.

As people move through the scheme, then they'll have eligibility to apply again at the same level, or at a higher level, subject to the caps on total numbers of terms at each level, which I've described on an earlier slide. So I hope that slide will be useful when you're working out your own position in this scheme. I'll come back to the transition of - from fellowships to Investigator Grants shortly.

Now I want to talk about a couple of other aspects of these Investigator Grants. The first is part-time Investigator Grants. These are aimed to cater for people who have caring or professional commitments, such as clinical commitments, that mean that they can't apply 100 per cent of their time to research. In this case the applicants can select their percentage salary in the range 0 per cent to 90 per cent, in 10 per cent increments. If they go for, let's say a 50 per cent salary, they're not obliged to go for a 50 per cent Research Support Package.

We realise there are circumstances, and this might include people who have caring responsibilities for a few years and wish to go part-time on their salary, but nevertheless are able to sustain supervision of a research group that they may be appropriate to receive 100 per cent Research Support Package, even if their salary is less than 100 per cent.

Regardless of the percentage of salary or Research Support Package, this is a five-year application and award and both stages will finish on the same date, after five years, rather than being extended to accommodate the part-time salary.

The second point I want to talk about is Investigator Grants where no salary is requested. The idea here is to support research about standing investigators who don't actually need a salary from NHMRC. This could be somebody who already had an academic appointment in a university or a clinical appointment in a hospital. Or might be a director of an independent medical research institute, or it could be somebody who has a non-NHMRC fellowship, but is nevertheless an outstanding investigator and it will be appropriate for them to receive a Research Support Package, rather than to be applying for other grant schemes. In this case, the non-salaried Investigator Grant will be provided with Research Support Package only.

We currently offer early career fellowships which are for - to be partly spent overseas, and we're no longer going to do that specifically with specific schemes. What we're going to do instead is enable people who receive an Investigator Grant in the Emerging Leadership level to spend up to 50 per cent of their grant time overseas, provided that they spend the final two years of the grant back in Australia. These are five-year grants.

Then at the Leadership level, we'd enable people to spend up to 20 per cent of their grant time overseas. If they are somebody who's received an Investigator Grant with less than 100 per cent salary, then of course they're welcome to spend all of their non-NHMRC time overseas - this might be particularly relevant for people who hold joint appointments with overseas research institutions.

Now I want to turn to Synergy Grants. These will be offered to teams of strong investigators. They may be people who hold Investigator Grants or Ideas Grants. They may be people who hold grants from the AIC, for example. They'll be offered on top of the Investigator Grants or Ideas Grants that the Chief Investigators already hold. This is an important distinction from our current Program Grant scheme.

I also want to highlight that these are fixed dollar value grants, \$5 million per grant. We'll be awarding up to 10 each year from the Medical Research Endowment Account in the first instance.

The budget of these grants can be used for personal support packages and for direct research costs - much like a Project Grant - and also like a Project Grant, Chief Investigator salaries can be paid from that budget, up to PSP5 level - provided of course that the person isn't receiving their salary from another NHMRC source, such as an Investigator Grant.

Each Chief Investigator at whatever level they are in the list, may apply for and hold one Synergy Grant.

Now to turn to Ideas Grants briefly - these are again up to five years - maybe teams of up to 10 people. These, as for current Project Grants, the grant size will be based on the requested budget. The budget request will be based on personnel support packages and direct research costs. Again, as for the Synergy Grants and as for current Project Grants, Chief Investigators may request their salary from the Ideas Grant up to PSP5 level.

In the new system, Chief Investigators at whatever level they are, CIA to CIJ, may apply for and hold up to two Ideas Grants concurrently.

Then finally on this table, I'll move to the Strategic and Leveraging Grants. As you all know, these include a series of grants which we've had established for quite some time and which we will continue in their current form. These are listed here. CREs, development grants, our various international collaborative schemes, targeted calls for research, partnerships projects and partnership centres.

We'll also be adding a new scheme, which is specifically for clinical trials and cohort studies, which are currently funded through the Project Grant scheme. We've been out for public consultation recently on a new framework for this scheme and we'll providing more details following analysis of the submissions to that consultation and further work by the working group that's been advising us on the development of that scheme.

Now I want to turn to the complex issue of transition to the new grant program. The goal here is to reach the new steady state, while ensuring that we have transparency and equity, minimal disadvantage or selective advantage for any group of researchers or researcher. We also want to achieve something that is simple to understand and to administer, because there's potential for enormous and unmanageable complexity here.

A few important conclusions are first of all that we will honour all existing grants. We will try, through the transitional arrangements to stage entry to the new schemes. Where that's possible to try not to have great peaks and troughs of applications as we move through the first few years of transition.

We're also seeing a model which treats access to the Investigator Grant and Ideas Grant schemes as equitably as we can.

Just want to remind you, with this slide that our purpose is to reach a steady state that's shown here with the capping arrangements between the Investigator, Synergy and Ideas Grants, which were presented at the launch on 25 May, so I won't spend any more time on that, but it's available there for you to refer to, as needed.

I want to turn first of all to the transition to the new grant program for the next round, which is next year, which is the final round of our existing grant schemes and before we fully implement the new grant program. That means the final Project Grant round will be in 2018 for funding in 2019, and after that no new Project Grants will be awarded.

As we previously announced, applicants may submit up to two Project Grant applications in this future round. We're introducing a cap there, that's intended to smooth the transition to the new grant programs, but that will still have a total cap for existing Project Grants of six - so people can apply for up to two, but only if they've got capacity in that current cap of six

grants held. So if they currently hold four, they can apply for another two. If they currently hold five they can only apply for one. This capping applies to all Chief Investigators on Project Grants. So it's CIA to CIJ positions, not only for CIAs.

Again, as we also already announced there will be no Program Grant round in 2018. That's because that round, if it were held, would be for funding in 2020, and that scheme's going to be replaced by the Synergy Grant scheme, which will open in 2019 for funding in 2020, so there won't in fact be a gap between the end of the Program Grant scheme and the introduction of the Synergy Grant scheme.

The development of a transition plan from the old to the new grant program has been probably the most challenging exercise so far in the development of the implementation plan here. Working with the Research Committee we've spent a lot of time on this over the last months. I'm particularly grateful to the Research Committee for their help with this set of issues.

We realise that investigators will hold many different numbers and combinations of fellowship project and Program Grants, and these will all be honoured, so they'll be allowed to complete their term of course. However, the constraints on NHMRC's total research funding budget means that we can't ignore those grants as we move into the new grant program. So we have to take them into account as we award new grants and grant budgets. We need here to try to stage the entry to even out the peaks and troughs, as I've said already.

The intention then is that a researcher's portfolio of fellowship project and Program Grants held on 1 January 2020 will affect their eligibility to apply for Investigator, Synergy and Ideas Grants. It will also affect the percentage of a Research Support Package awarded for an Investigator Grant, and I'll spell that out shortly. In corresponding manner it will affect the number of Ideas Grants for which those investigators can apply - but these effects will cease as the existing grants from the old grant scheme expire. Then people will come up to their full eligibility and full Research Support Packages.

Let's talk first about NHMRC fellows and transitional eligibility. I've already shown eligibility once we're in the new grant scheme and how people will move through EL1 up to L3, but if - for current fellows you'll be wanting to know where you can enter this new system. Of course, if you don't already hold any fellowship, or haven't previously held a fellowship, then all levels of the new investigators grant scheme are open to you, subject to years' post-PhD, as the EL1 and EL2 levels people, who are up to 10 years post PhD or their equivalent.

So if you have an early career fellowship already or have already held one, then you'll have eligibility for EL2, as long as you're still under 10 years post PhD. For L1, L2, L3 - as you can see, as you go down through this table, eligibility for lower levels slips away, but you'll continue to have eligibility at your own level or the next level, subject to the caps on total position - total terms of each level, which I described on an earlier slide.

Existing NHMRC fellows can't hold a concurrent Investigator Grant, but they may, while they hold their fellowship, apply for Ideas Grants and/or a Synergy Grant, subject to the capping rules that are on an earlier slide. They may apply for an Investigator Grant in the penultimate year of their fellowship, which would then, if it was successful, commence in the next year, and they skip the last year of the NHMRC fellowship. Or they could wait till the final year of their fellowship and apply for an Investigator Grant and an Ideas Grant, as a fall-back, and then if both of those applications are successful, then it's the Investigator Grant that will be awarded.

We want here to enable existing NHMRC fellows to see out their fellowship, to have access to the grant schemes, to move over into the Investigator Grant scheme - either after year four or year five of their existing research fellowship, but in that last year of application have the fall-back position of applying for an Ideas Grant, as well as an Investigator Grant.

Turning now to transitional eligibility from Program Grants into the scheme, new Investigator Grants - Chief Investigators on Program Grants may apply for an Investigator Grant, but if

they're holding their Program Grant at the time that the Investigator Grant is to start, then they won't receive the Research Support Package until the Program Grant expires. This is based on the assumption that every Chief Investigator on a Program Grant is receiving some of the budget of that Program Grant.

Chief investigators on Program Grants may not hold a concurrent Synergy Grant or Ideas Grant - again because they are receiving funding from the Program Grant. Once they're in the final year of the Program Grant, they may apply for a Synergy Grant and they may also apply for Ideas Grants in the final year of the Program Grant, if they're - subject to the eligibility and capping rules that are on various slides. We want to facilitate people transitioning from a Program Grant into a new grant program as their Program Grants expire.

Now, the most complex situation is for Project Grants and I want to spend a bit of time on this. First of all, in transition, an investigator Research Support Package will be reduced by 25 per cent for each Project Grant held - up to 50 per cent maximum. In other words, if somebody holds six Project Grants, they'll still get half of their Investigator Grant Research Support Package. So this is a very gentle reduction in the Research Support Package in this transition phase, recognising the fact that people didn't know that these new rules would be coming in at the time they acquired their Project Grants. Also recognising that many Chief Investigators don't actually receive any budget, or a significant budget from the Project Grants on which they are CIs.

Access to Ideas Grants - using the same principle - will be unaffected by one Project Grant held, but the access Ideas Grants will be reduced from two to one if two or more projects grants are held. So again, somebody could hold six Project Grants but they could still apply for one Ideas Grant.

So this has a softer transitional capping effect than the one I've already described that we'll reach in a steady state. When an Investigator Grant Research Support Package will be reduced by 50 per cent for each Ideas Grant held and therefore be reduced back to zero. Likewise, in the steady state, access to Ideas Grants will be reduced one for one for each Ideas Grant held. So we've chosen a much softer pathway for the transition from Project Grants to Ideas Grants, but as I said before, because of the constraints on budget, we have had to take these existing grants into account.

Here are three examples. First of all, let's look at the left hand side and ask about a CI who doesn't currently hold a Project or a Program Grant. In this case, they're eligible to apply for an Investigator Grant and an Ideas - and to the Ideas Grant scheme. If they receive an Investigator Grant then they'll receive their full Research Support Package as awarded by the peer review panel, because there's no need to reduce that package because of pre-existing project or Program Grants. Likewise, if they're successful for Ideas Grants they'll be eligible for two Ideas Grants.

Now, the box in the middle was meant to say, somebody who's a Chief Investigator on one Project Grant. In this case, if they apply to the Investigator Grant scheme and they're successful, they'll have a 25 per cent reduction of the Research support package. If they apply to the Ideas Grant scheme and are successful, then they will be in fact eligible for two Ideas Grants. So they get to keep their one Project Grant for free, if you like, in that pathway.

If the Chief Investigator is on two or more Project Grants and they're successful in the Investigator Grant scheme they'll have a 50 per cent reduction in their awarded Research Support Package. Even if they have six Project Grants it will only be a 50 per cent reduction. If they apply to the Ideas Grant scheme, they'll still be eligible for one Ideas Grant.

This attempts to illustrate at least the first three, simpler pathways into the new grant program, and also to show how as far as possible we have tried to treat access to the Investigator Grant scheme in a symmetrical way, with access to the Ideas Grant scheme.

When we provide all this material in more detail on our website, we'll provide a whole lot of other combinations and show pathways through them that will help people work out their own particular circumstances.

I now just want to say a few words about the next steps for this implementation project - the very large project. The first is that we now need to develop funding rules for all of the new schemes. We'll be holding targeted consultations with groups in the research sector, peak bodies and research officers over the next months and we'll also need to seek government approvals for the funding rules.

We will now proceed with designing peer review processes for the new Investigator, Ideas and Synergy Grant schemes. We - quite deliberately - last year didn't consult on peer review processes, because we thought that that should wait until we knew the structure of the new grant program. Now we do know the structure, we have most of the overarching frameworks for these grant schemes worked out, and so it's time to consider what peer processes would support finding the most appropriate grantees.

So we're forming a series of expert advisory groups to advise on particular aspects of this. For example, a track record working group met for the first time last week, for very important work on track record assessment. We're going to undertake a public consultation on peer review a little later in the year - put out a consultation paper in September, and hold some town hall meetings, if you like, in key capital cities in October and November, so please watch out for the details of those - and then some targeted consultations in the first part of 2018.

Also, while doing this, we have quite a number of further issues to consider and work through, on the advice of a Research Committee. They include, for example, the role of associate investigators, ensuring strong support and opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers, and a number of other issues that will perhaps come up in questions, but which are still to be fully worked through and not ready for further discussion today.

Just to show you the timeline, this is pretty much the timeline as it was presented at the announcement. It shows now the date today - this webinar in August, the introduction of Project Grant capping in December this year, for the final round of the Project Grant scheme. New grant program applications opening from late 2018 into 2019, and then new grants commencing in January 2020.

Some of the things that will happen between these milestones are first of all, for funding rules - the drafting of those will commence soon and will require a targeted consultation with a number of groups. We then have to go through a process of revision and submission to the Department of Finance and the Minister for Health, to make sure that we can proceed in this way. Then those funding rules will be published as soon as we have those approvals, and with the intention of providing plenty of time for people to absorb them, before applications open in late 2018.

Then for peer review guidelines, as I've said, we are going to undertake public consultation on peer review over the coming months, and targeted consultations in early 2018, for use in peer review of applications for the new grant program during 2019.

Information, as always, will be available on our website. This slide set will be available today and we'll be providing media releases and updates - we'll provide updates in the place showed on our webpage there. Updated details of the new grant program accommodating everything that I've described today will be available soon, on the website, at the address shown there.

I want to thank everybody. I especially want to thank the expert advisory group for the groundwork that they did in providing the framework of this new grant program.

I want to highlight the incredible role and hard work of Research Committee over these last months, as we've worked through the many details of policies and processes, which I've outlined before. We really appreciate their wise advice very much.

Finally, I want to thank all of you, for your support and patience as we go through this very complex process of implementing the new grant program.

So thank you.

Question and answer session

Tony Willis: Well, thank you, Anne Kelso. My name's Tony Willis and I'm leading the taskforce that Anne has set up to implement the NHMRC's new grant program. I'm going to be asking Anne whether there have been any questions or fielding the questions that have come through to Anne, during the webinar. I'd also like to take the opportunity to remind you that from today's presentation we're going to have a diagram outlining in slightly more detail than Anne has presented in her webinar today, the transitional eligibility arrangements, and these are also going to be put on our website.

Turning to the first of the questions, Anne, the first of these concerns is whether or not researchers are able to take their salary from an Ideas Grant?

Anne Kelso: Yes, thank you Tony, and thanks for that question. It is certainly the case that Chief Investigators can draw a salary from an Ideas Grant, just as they can now, from Project Grants - up to PSP5 level - and that's also true for Synergy Grants.

Tony Willis: Thank you Anne. We've also, inevitably, had several questions relating to the Investigator Grant program and the details that you've outlined there. I'm going to try and consolidate as many of these questions together into a group under some of the technical arrangements relating to Investigator Grants that you've outlined.

The first of those is we've had a question - or a series of questions around whether we have any estimates around the numbers of Investigator Grants that might be awarded, and whether we would be proposing to impose limits at this stage on the numbers awarded in each level.

Anne Kelso: First of all, we consider, based on the internal modelling that we've done, that we expect to be able to award a similar number of Investigator Grants as we currently award Fellowships. There are of course a lot of uncertainties there, because it's affected very much by the number of people who are successful in getting an Investigator Grant, for example, the Research Support Package, but without a salary, or the number of people who are applying for part-time fellowships.

These sorts of issues, which affect the number which can be awarded from an essentially fixed budget, will determine the ultimate number which can be awarded through that scheme. But we expect it to be rather similar. In other words, these are not going to be easy to get, but we don't expect them to be a lot harder to get than the current fellowships.

As now we will have the capacity to move - to allocate funds to different levels, if it looks as if that's the appropriate way to respond to the application burden. We have some flexibility at the moment to do that and it's always a very important discussion at the beginning of the year with Research Committee about how to allocate the budget between the different schemes and between the different levels of the fellowship program, and we'll continue to have that capacity in the new grant program.

Tony Willis: Thanks, Anne. Some more questions again about Investigator Grants and this question is really about whether professorial appointment or professorial title will affect your eligibility to apply through any of the levels in the Investigator Grant program.

Anne Kelso: No, we're not going to take any account in any kind of eligibility sense - professorial or socio-professorial title. That's a constraint which has been progressively moved - removed from our schemes over the last year or so, because it became very complex and had unintended consequences. So we will not consider professorial status in considering eligibility for any of the levels of the Leadership - or for that matter, Emerging Leadership levels of the Investigator Grant scheme.

Tony Willis: Another group of questions around eligibility to apply for Investigator Grants. We've had some questions around whether the age of an applicant would affect their ability to apply,

particularly given the limits that will be applied to the number of occasions that you can apply to different levels in the new scheme.

Anne Kelso: Yes. There won't be an age limit.

Tony Willis: Again relating to Investigator Grants, some people are interested - for clarification on the duration of those grants - are they all for five years?

Anne Kelso: Yes, they are all for five years, so that's a slight change from our current suite of fellowship schemes where the most junior ones are four years, but now all of them will be five-year grants.

Tony Willis: Then, continuing with the Investigator Grant eligibility thing, will any of the eligibility requirements be applied retrospectively, as we introduce the new scheme? Will the limits, in particular, be applied retrospectively, or will the clock start ticking from the opening of that new program?

Anne Kelso: It varies a bit with scheme, because, as I described, previous terms held as an NHMRC fellow will not have any impact on the number of terms people can receive an Investigator Grant. As I've said, we've applied a total of five terms for people at the Leadership level - L1, L2 and L3, but that won't take into account whether they've already, for example, held an SPRF, or research fellowship, for one or more terms. So we will start the clock ticking on 1 January 2020, but of course, the eligibility for other schemes is affected by numbers of Project Grants and Program Grants that are currently held as I described.

Tony Willis: Again, continuing with the theme of Investigator Grants. We've had a question around the proportion of the salary that they might be able to apply for. Specifically the question, or the group of questions were seeking some clarification around whether you could apply for a relatively small proportion of salary, perhaps to enable other arrangements, clinical or professional arrangements to be pursued if you don't need the full salary.

Anne Kelso: Yes, in fact we really want to make it simple for people to do just exactly that. Some people may have a 50-50 research clinical position for example and could apply for a 50 per cent salary on an Investigator Grant, because they're paid for their clinical work for the other 50 per cent. There'll be many different circumstances for different people around the country, and there's a lot of flexibility for part-time salaries in the new Investigator Grant scheme.

Tony Willis: Getting a few questions through now concerning some of the other schemes, and I'm going to move briefly to those, Anne. The first of those is around when we would be expecting to open up the Ideas Grant scheme for the first - to receive the first set of applications for it?

Anne Kelso: Yes, we'd expect that to open in late 2018 for applications in 2019, for funding to commence on 1 January 2020.

Tony Willis: Again, perhaps with particular reference to the Ideas Grant scheme and reflecting perhaps on current arrangements with the Project Grant scheme, what are our strategies around trying to ensure that relatively specialist researchers, such as bioinformaticians aren't going to be disadvantaged? In the same vein, are we giving thought to how associate investigators might be managed in the new grant program?

Anne Kelso: Yes, this is a really important question that came up many times during our public consultation last year and has had some discussion so far, internally, and with Research Committee, but with a lot more discussion still to be held. It's a really important point, because we want to support specialist people like biostatisticians, bioinformaticians, health economists - and there'll be a number of other specialist technical people who are often involved with multiple grants. We want to enable that and encourage it, and not in any way reduce those people's ability to build their careers as independent researchers.

So there will be cases where such a person may be competitive for an Investigator Grant, and so there will certainly be a possibility for some. There will be the option to be a chief investor on up to two Ideas Grants, or to join a Synergy Grant team. There'll also be the

option to be employed as - up to PSP5 on an Ideas Grant or a Synergy Grant, or indeed through somebody's Investigator Grant Research Support Package - or to be contracted out through direct research costs from any of those grant schemes.

But there's more thought and more work to be done on the position of associate investigator - how to take that into account in peer review and how to place appropriate value on these special skills. We'll be talking more about that internally, discussing it with Research Committee and bring it all back to you later in the year.

Tony Willis: Some questions are coming through around allowing people to become eligible for grants under the new grant program, particularly whether we would allow them to vary off their current grants, to become eligible to apply for new grants - and in that context whether or not our current variations policy will stand.

Anne Kelso: Our current variations policy will continue, which does not make it easy for somebody simply to say, well, I want to remove myself from this grant so that I can apply for another. The existing variations policy will continue.

Tony Willis: Again, continuing with a bit of a focus on the Ideas Grant scheme and the current Project Grant scheme, some questions around whether we would still be interested in being an agent for other funding bodies - perhaps Cancer Australia, for example - to assist with their funding schemes?

Anne Kelso: Yes. Absolutely. We're very interested in maintaining strong partnerships with other funders and we've been in detailed discussions with Cancer Australia and the Cancer Councils about how to do this in those partnerships. We will continue to offer opportunities for partnering through any one of these schemes, as we have in the past. We're very keen to continue those partnerships. I think it's a very important way of mutually leveraging funds into research and allowing other funding agencies or philanthropic groups to draw on the expert peer review processes at NHMRC.

Tony Willis: Again, we're getting some questions come back around Investigator Grants. I'll come back to those in just a minute. A little while ago we got some questions around the continuation of grants and on our strategic and leveraging scheme, for example, development grants and partnership projects in particular and what our expectations are for those programs.

Anne Kelso: Yes. They're both very successful programs. They also both continue to evolve. We plan to maintain them both. They may continue to evolve further, of course, but there are no changes proposed as part of this restructure, and of course there are no caps on application numbers to grant schemes which are in that fourth column of the table - the strategic and leveraging grants. So at this stage we're not expecting there to be any direct impact of the new grant program for Investigator Synergy and Ideas Grants, on those grants and schemes in column four.

Tony Willis: Again some questions around eligibility for Investigator Grants, moving back to that program, and in particular, whether or not holding, for example, an ARC fellowship would impact on the eligibility of an applicant to the NHMRC Investigator scheme?

Anne Kelso: NHMRC is only concerned that the research funds had something to do with the improvement of human health, so there's no bar to an ARC fellow applying for and holding an Investigator Grant, where they receive the Research Support Package but not receive the salary of course, because they're already receiving that from another source. Likewise, such fellows could apply to our other schemes as well.

We'd really encourage people, thinking about Synergy Grants to think about multidisciplinary collaborations with people who are funded by non-NHMRC sources, where that's an appropriate and useful way to develop the research best outcome.

Tony Willis: Thank you Anne. Some questions now of a slightly more general nature, and I can come back to some of the specifics if they continue to come in - there was a question around

whether or not the expert groups have been formed, to help provide advice to you on how peer review arrangements might work?

- Anne Kelso: Yes, the expert group for our track record working group has been formed and has had its first meeting and will meet at least a couple more times this year before providing its advice. That's a very strong group and off to a vigorous start, naturally. There are a couple of other advisory groups that are still being formed at the moment that we hope will be able to start work soon.
- Tony Willis: That's fantastic. We've also, again, at a more general level had some enquiries around how the new grant program is going to align with the program, the MRFF and whether NHMRC has been working with the Health Department to administer any of the MRFF fund schemes?
- Anne Kelso: Yes, we're working - NHMRC is working closely with the MRFF team and the Department of Health. You may know that in the first round of disbursements from the MRFF announced in the May budget there are three schemes which are being administered by NHMRC - clinical trials or clinical fellowships and for targeted corporate research on antimicrobial resistance.
- The clinical trials and clinical fellowships schemes have direct alignment with schemes that are in the new grant program, and so they offer an opportunity for MRFF to continue, using NHMRC processes.
- Tony Willis: Thanks, Anne. Again a query, as we move into our final couple of questions, around the Investigator Grant program. We've had a question as to whether or not we will be placing a higher preference to applicants in that scheme with a clinical background or whether there will be equal preference given to all applicants?
- Anne Kelso: We don't specifically intend to favour a particular type of applicant. We want to have a scheme which is open to the best researchers across the full spectrum of health and medical research. So obviously that includes bench scientists, it includes clinicians, it includes public health researchers, it includes allied health professionals undertaking research - a very wide range - and we would want all of those groups to have access to the Investigator Grant scheme.
- Tony Willis: We're drawing rapidly to the close of the time that we have available, so I'm going to ask one final question. We've had this from a number of different sources now, which is, essentially how we might provide feedback to you and how we might ask further questions of the details that you've outlined in the presentation?
- Anne Kelso: Yes, we have an address - somebody else will have to tell me what it is - for people to send in their questions, and they'll help to inform our frequently asked questions, or Q&A that will be on the website, through the research help centre and through your research office, please. We really want to receive all your questions, and if they're not answered by the slides of the webinar, then we'll do our best to have a clear answer available to you as soon as possible.
- Tony Willis: Thank you very much, Anne.
- Facilitator: Thank you, Anne and Tony for an excellent webinar, keeping the sector update in terms of the very exciting new grant programs.
- Just a reminder to the audience that the recordings and the transcript will be made available through NHMRC's website next week, but the slide is available later today.
- Now, I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank NCRIS, our sponsor from the Australian Government - Commonwealth. We're part of the National Research Infrastructure's program. We are Australian National Inter-Service.
- Thank you and we hope to see you again next time.

END OF TRANSCRIPT