Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

NHMRC

Investigator Grants 2026 Peer Review Guidelines

Opening date:	4 June 2025
Closing date and time:	5:00pm ACT Local time on 30 July 2025
Commonwealth policy entity:	National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
Sapphire assistance and enquiries:	NHMRC Research Help Centre Phone: 1800 500 983 (+61 2 6217 9451 for international callers) Email: help@nhmrc.gov.au Note: NHMRC's Research Help Centre aims to provide a reply to all requests for general assistance within 2 working days. This timeframe may be longer during peak periods or for more detailed requests for assistance.
Investigator Grant enquiries	Email: investigator.grants@nhmrc.gov.au

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1. Introduction

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

This guide outlines the overarching principles and obligations under which the Investigator Grant peer review process operates, including:

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

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

This guide should be read in conjunction with the:

- Investigator Grants 2026 grant opportunity guidelines, available on GrantConnect, which set out the rules, objectives and other considerations relevant to NHMRC funding.
- *Policy on the Disclosure of Interests requirements for prospective and appointed NHMRC committee members* (Section 39 Committees). This Policy outlines peer reviewers' responsibilities to ensure all disclosures of interests are addressed in a rigorous and transparent way throughout the period of a peer reviewer's participation in NHMRC Committees.

2. Key changes

Peer reviewers should note the following significant changes for the Investigator Grants 2026 grant opportunity:

Research Impact

- The 'Research Impact and pathway to impact' assessment criteria has been revised following NHMRC's review of its Research Impact Track Record Assessment (RITRA) framework, extensive consultation and in consultation with the NHMRC Score Descriptor Working Group (see Appendix C and Section 6 of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines).
- Revisions include streamlining and simplifying the research impact assessment criteria, reducing 3 sub-criteria to 2:
  - 'Reach and significance' (10%)
  - 'Applicant's contribution to the impact' (10%).
- These revisions aim to reduce the overlap and confusion expressed in feedback from applicants and peer reviewers and shift the focus of the assessment to the contributions the *applicant* has made along a 'pathway to impact' (see Appendix C).

Score Descriptors

- Following consistent sector feedback, the score descriptor tables have been revised and reformatted to include greater detail at each description, to better support peer reviewers to understand the expectations of applicants at each score (see Appendix C).
- Performance indicators have been introduced at Appendix C, to sit 'above' the score descriptor tables. The indicators can be used together with the score descriptors to further

understand what is expected of applicants at each score. They provide peer reviewers with descriptions that address 3 broad 'elements' of independent assessment (quality of the proposed research, the potential for impact, and the demonstrated capability of the applicant). It is not mandatory that peer reviewers use these indicators, they are designed to provide additional support where necessary/appropriate.

Leadership

- The Leadership criterion has been streamlined to simplify the assessment. Applicants are required to provide a single narrative that outlines their leadership achievements framed against one or more of the 4 leadership elements in a single text field (see Appendix C).

Knowledge Gain

- The Knowledge Gain criterion has been updated to improve the clarity of the assessment. Applicants are asked to make a clear distinction between their broad 5-year vision/plan and the 'proposed new research' they intend to carry out with the Investigator Grant (see Appendix C).

3. Principles, conduct and obligations during peer review

The peer review process requires all applications to be reviewed by individuals with appropriate expertise. This carries an obligation on the part of peer reviewers to act in good faith, in the best interests of NHMRC and the research community and in accordance with NHMRC policies (outlined below). This includes adhering to the key principles and applicable requirements of the *Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024* (CGRPs) and the published grant opportunity guidelines.

3.1. NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review

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

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

- **Quality and excellence.** NHMRC will continue to introduce evidence-based improvements into its processes to achieve the highest quality decision-making through peer review.

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

3.2. The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research

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

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

3.3. Use of generative artificial intelligence in peer review

Peer reviewers must not input any part of a grant application, or any information from a grant application, into a natural language processing and/or artificial intelligence technology system to assist them in the assessment of applications, as per NHMRC's *Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Grant Applications and Peer Review*.

3.4. Disclosures of interest

3.4.1. What is an interest?

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

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

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

3.4.2. What is a conflict of interest (CoI)?

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

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

- Involvement with the application under review
- Working relationships
- Professional relationships and associations

- Social relationships or associations
- Collaborations
- Teaching or supervisory relationships
- Financial relationships or interests
- Other relevant interests or relationships

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

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

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

3.4.3. Disclosure of interests in the peer review process

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

3.4.4. Failure to disclose an interest

A failure to disclose an interest without a reasonable excuse will result in the termination of the peer reviewer's appointment under section 44B of the NHMRC Act (section 44B also covers failure to comply with section 29 of the PGPA Act).

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

3.5. Freedom of information (FoI)

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

3.6. Complaints

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

4. Investigator Grant peer review process

4.1. Overview of the Investigator Grant peer review process

30 July 2025

Deadline for Investigator Grant application submission

August 2025

Peer reviewers disclose interests and suitability against applications

September 2025

Application eligibility review and confirmation

August - September 2025

Assessments against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* obtained

September 2025

Applications allocated to peer reviewers (approx. 10 to 25 applications per reviewer)

October 2025

Peer reviewers review applications and submit scores against Investigator Grant assessment criteria for each allocated application

November 2025

Internal quality assurance of assessments, including review of applicant feedback for inappropriate comments and checks to identify potential outlier scores[1]

December 2025 – January 2026

Funding recommendations finalised and progressed through the approvals process

February 2026 (date is indicative and subject to change)

Outcomes announced under embargo

Further information on the steps outlined in this process is provided in section 4.3.

[1] Clarification sought from peer reviewers where required.

4.2. Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of those participating in the Investigator Grant peer review process are identified below.

4.2.1. Peer review mentors

Peer review mentors (PRMs) are senior researchers with experience in conducting Investigator Grant peer review. The PRM's role is to assist with the training and mentoring of peer reviewers on peer review processes, including hosting optional Q&A sessions with peer reviewers during the assessment phase of peer review. PRMs do not assess applications or provide advice on the scientific (or other) merits of individual applications.

PRMs need to:

- familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff
- mentor peer reviewers through the assessment stage of peer review, as required or requested, including responding to peer reviewer enquiries ensuring that:
  - the advice provided is consistent with NHMRC peer review processes and leads to an outcome where applications are appropriately considered against the Investigator Grant assessment criteria and associated score descriptors (Appendix C).
  - peer reviewers consider relative to opportunity, including career disruptions where applicable
  - peer reviewers consistently consider the assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Appendix D) for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus.

4.2.2. Peer reviewers

Peer reviewers need to:

- familiarise themselves with this Guide and other material as identified by NHMRC staff
- identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they have with applications assigned to them
- provide a fair and impartial assessment against the Investigator Grant assessment criteria and associated score descriptors (Appendix C) in a timely manner, for each non-conflicted application assigned
- assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements 'relative to opportunity', including any career disruptions, where applicable
- consider the assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Appendix E) provided for applications confirmed to have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus
- provide written applicant feedback for each application assigned to them
- review applicant feedback from all peer reviewers for all applications assigned to them.

4.2.3. NHMRC Staff

Under direction from the CEO, NHMRC staff will be responsible for overall administration of the peer review process and for the conduct of specific activities.

NHMRC staff will:

- invite individuals to participate in the Investigator Grant scheme peer review process as required
- determine whether disclosed interests pose a conflict and the level of that conflict
- act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers
- provide briefings to peer reviewers
- determine eligibility of applications
- assign applications to the appropriate peer reviewers based on peer reviewers' declaration of interests and suitability
- review peer reviewer applicant feedback for inappropriate comments
- ensure that all peer reviewers are provided with the necessary information to review each application, and assisting and advising on the peer review process as required
- maintain scoring records for each application
- conduct an outlier screening process to identify applications with outlier scores. NHMRC will review those applications where there is a clear discrepancy between the scores and comments provided and will seek clarification from the relevant peer reviewer(s)
- act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers and community observers
- seek feedback from participants in the peer review process on improvements for future processes.

4.2.4. Indigenous health research peer reviewers

Indigenous health research peer reviewers will review how well each application addresses NHMRC's *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Appendix D) where applicable.

Indigenous health research peer reviewers may be invited to participate in scoring of applications. In these instances, they may also provide an assessment against the Investigator Grant scheme assessment criteria and associated score descriptors (Appendix C).

4.2.5. Community observers

NHMRC invites respected members of the general community to observe whether NHMRC policy and procedures are being adhered to during the peer review process. Observers assist NHMRC in ensuring that the assessment of all applications is fair, equitable and impartial.

Observers will be briefed on the processes and procedures of the peer review of Investigator Grant applications. They will not participate in the review of any application.

Observers will:

- identify and advise NHMRC of all conflict of interests and monitor the procedural aspects of peer review.

- provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of peer review processes and policies.

Observers may raise issues of a general nature for advice or action as appropriate with NHMRC staff.

4.3. Reviewing Investigator Grant applications

All Investigator Grant applications are assessed against the Investigator Grant assessment criteria and the associated score descriptors at Appendix C. Applications that are accepted by NHMRC as relating to the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health (see section 4.3.1) are also assessed against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* as set out at Appendix D.

Further guidance on assessing applications against the Investigator Grant assessment criteria is provided at Appendix C.

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

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

For applications confirmed as relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, NHMRC will endeavour to obtain at least one external assessment against the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (Appendix D) from an assessor with expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. For further information on assessing applications that have a focus on the health of Indigenous Australians, see *Guidance for assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* at Appendix E.

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

4.3.2. Receipt and initial processing of applications

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

Applications to the Investigator Grant scheme can be submitted in one of 2 categories, Emerging Leadership (EL) or Leadership (L) category, comprising 5 levels of salary (Level), as set out in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Investigator Grant categories and salary levels (Levels)

Category	Salary level	Title
Leadership	L3	NHMRC Leadership Fellow
	L2	
	L1	
Emerging Leadership	EL2	NHMRC Emerging Leadership Fellow
	EL1	

The EL category is restricted to researchers who are ≤10 years post-PhD or equivalent (adjusted for valid career disruptions) and comprises 2 salary levels (Levels) (EL1 and EL2) with corresponding research support packages (RSPs). Recipients of EL Investigator Grants will have the title 'NHMRC Emerging Leadership Fellow'. The L category comprises 3 Levels (L1, L2 and L3) and an RSP of $400,000 per annum. The *Statements of Expectations* for each Level of Investigator Grant is at Appendix G.

4.3.3. Disclosure of interests and peer reviewer suitability

Peer reviewers will be provided with a summary of each application and disclose their interests within Sapphire, in accordance with the guidelines provided at section 3.4 and Appendix B.

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

Peer reviewers are also required to select their level of suitability to assess each application, based on the information available to them in the application summary. Instructions and tutorials for selecting this in Sapphire are provided in the *Sapphire Learning and Training Resources*.

4.3.4. Assignment of applications to peer reviewers

Considering CoIs and peer reviewer suitability, NHMRC staff will assign applications to peer reviewers. It is expected each peer reviewer will be assigned approximately 10 to 25 applications. However, this is subject to change, depending on the number of applications and range of fields of research.

Applications are allocated to a reviewer primarily based on the applicant's nominated peer review areas. Allocation may also be informed by the proposed field of research and other key words entered into Sapphire.

4.3.5. Briefing

NHMRC will provide peer reviewers briefing and supporting materials, as necessary, with further details on their duties and responsibilities in the Investigator Grant peer review process. This will be made available to peer reviewers prior to assessing applications. Additional information may be provided as necessary throughout the peer review process. Further information and tutorials are available from Sapphire.

4.3.6. Assessment of applications

Peer reviewers will be given access to applications (where no high CoI exists) and will be required to assess and enter their scores in Sapphire. Peer reviewers will assess all applications assigned to them against the assessment criteria, using the score descriptors, taking into account the Level applied for, the applicant's category/Level justification, career disruptions and other 'relative to opportunity' considerations, where applicable.

NHMRC will aim to obtain 5 independent assessments for each application.

Peer reviewers will be able to seek clarification from independent PRMs on peer review processes during the assessment phase.

Peer reviewers summarise the strengths and weaknesses of the application against each assessment criteria (applicant feedback). This feedback will be provided to the applicant. Peer reviewers must remember their obligation to remain fair and impartial when providing their feedback to applicants.

To ensure that independent scores are provided, peer reviewers are not to discuss applications with other peer reviewers.

Peer reviewers must ensure scores and applicant feedback are completed by the nominated due date. It is essential that peer reviewers plan their workloads as best as possible and commence their assessments shortly after receiving their assigned applications. If peer reviewers are unable to meet this requirement, they must contact NHMRC promptly to discuss alternative arrangements. Following the completion of assessments, peer reviewers will be provided with the opportunity to view the assessments provided by other assessors on their assigned applications.

Peer reviewers' scores will be used to create ranked lists of applications from which funding recommendations will be based. The overall score for each application will be determined using each peer reviewer's score for each of the assessment criteria. The overall score, as calculated arithmetically to 3 decimal places, will take account of the weighting of each criterion.

Following NHMRC's national consultation on options to reach gender equity in the Investigator Grant scheme during 2022, NHMRC implemented changes going forward from the 2023 Investigator Grant round to address systemic disadvantage of women and non-binary researchers and ensure the scheme supports a gender diverse and inclusive health and medical research workforce (see section 4.3.11). How NHMRC prepares rank ordered lists for the Investigator Grant scheme to ensure gender diversity and inclusivity should have no bearing on how peer reviewers assess applications.

4.3.6.1. Relative to opportunity and career disruption

Peer reviewers must assess productivity relative to opportunity and, where applicable, career disruption considerations, in the assessment of all applications. This is reflected in *NHMRC's Relative to Opportunity Policy* (and at Appendix F), that peer reviewers should assess an applicant's track record of research productivity and professional contribution in the context of their career stage and circumstances, by taking into consideration whether the applicant's productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to them.

Investigator Grant peer reviewers are to consider, where relevant, years spent completing a PhD, in their assessment of applicant track record, relative to opportunity. Applicants have been advised

to include time spent completing a PhD in their calculation of full-time equivalent research-active years.

Applicants are advised to provide a broad overview of the circumstances that have impacted their engagement in research within their 10-year assessment timeframe in their Career Context free text field. However, applicants are not to provide additional track record information in summaries of projects and outputs.

Applicants must justify in their applications their selected category and Level of Investigator Grant. This applicant justification will be considered by peer reviewers when reviewing an applicant's track record relative to opportunity.

The *Statements of Expectations* clarify NHMRC's expectations of applicants applying at each Level. Information on how to review applications where peer reviewers consider an applicant has applied at the inappropriate Level and has not adequately justified the Level for which they have applied, is at Appendix G.

To assist peer reviewers with their assessment, further details regarding relative to opportunity and career disruptions as well as track record assessment for Investigator Grant applications are provided at Appendices G and H of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines.

4.3.6.2. Mitigating bias in peer review

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

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

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

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

NHMRC is committed to its vision of a gender diverse and inclusive health and medical research workforce to take advantage of the full range of talent needed to build a healthy Australia. Fostering gender equity in peer review is a strategic objective underpinned by *NHMRC's Gender Equity Strategy*.

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

By completing the test, peer reviewers gain a better understanding and increased awareness of how unconscious attitudes may affect their decisions, which prepares them to carry out their duties to the high standards of fairness and rigour expected by NHMRC. Peer reviewers should

continue to follow all peer review principles and processes outlined in these guidelines, ensuring that each application is accurately reviewed against the assessment criteria (Appendix C). NHMRC does not have access to, nor does it seek, peer reviewers' information and results for the IAT for gender and science in the peer review process.

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

4.3.6.3. Industry-relevant experience

Peer reviewers are to recognise an applicant's industry-relevant experience and outputs. To assist peer reviewers with their assessment, the *Guide to Evaluating Industry-Relevant Experience* is provided at Appendix H.

4.3.6.4. Assessment of the publication component of an applicant's track record

Peer reviewers are to consider their expert knowledge of their field of research, as well as the citation and publication practices of that field, when assessing the publication component of an applicant's track record.

Track record assessment considers the overall impact, quality and contribution to the field of the published journal articles from the grant applicant, not just the standing of the journal in which those articles are published. It is not appropriate to use publication metrics such as Journal Impact Factors. Journal-based metrics, if included by an applicant, should not be taken into consideration in the assessment of publications.

Reviewers should ignore additional track record information provided in the publication explanation field where they are not satisfied that it is directly linked to the nominated publication or where it is outside of the assessment of the publications criteria (e.g. career publication metrics).

Instead, peer reviewers are to focus on the creativity and innovation of ideas, rigour of experimental design, appropriate use of statistical methods, reproducibility of results, analytical strength of interpretations and significance of outcomes, all of which serve as surrogates for measuring research quality of a publication, irrespective of the field of research.

ONHMRC also encourages the use of research quality guidelines such as the Hong Kong Principles for assessing researchers, which recommends focussing on responsible research practices, transparent reporting, open science, diversity of research and recognition of all contributions to research as hallmarks of publication quality.

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

4.3.6.5.Enhancing reproducibility and applicability of research outcomes

Peer reviewers are required to consider the general strengths and weaknesses of the experimental design of the proposal to ensure robust and unbiased results. Assessment of the experimental design should include consideration of the following, as appropriate:

- scientific premise of the proposed research (i.e. how rigorous were previous experimental designs that form the basis for this proposal)
- techniques to be used
- details for appropriate blinding (during allocation, assessment and analysis)
- strategies for randomisation
- details and justification for control groups
- effect size and power calculations to determine the number of samples/subjects in the study (where appropriate)
- consideration of relevant experimental variables
- sex and gender elements of the research to maximise impact and any other considerations relevant to the field of research necessary to assess the rigour of the proposed design.

4.3.6.6.Research integrity issues

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

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

4.3.6.7.Contact between peer reviewers and applicants

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

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

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

4.3.7. Minimum number of assessments

The minimum number of assessments for an application is regarded as 50% plus one of the peer reviewers assigned to score an application. If there is an uneven number of peer reviewers assigned to an application, the minimum number of assessments is the next full number after 50% (e.g. 3 assessments in the case of 5 peer reviewers).

4.3.8. Principles for setting conditions of funding for NHMRC grants

Setting a condition of funding (CoF) on a grant through the peer review process is, and should be, a rare event. When this does occur, peer reviewers or NHMRC will use the principles set out below to decide the CoF. These principles aim to achieve a consistent approach, minimise the number of conditions set and ensure conditions are unambiguous and able to be assessed.

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

The principles are:

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

4.3.9. Providing feedback on applications

When conducting assessments, peer reviewers are required to provide constructive qualitative feedback to applicants that focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the application against each assessment criteria (applicant feedback).

Peer reviewers are asked to focus their feedback on the key elements of the application that influenced scoring, in particular, any area of weakness in the application that the applicant should focus on before reapplying to the scheme, or whether the applicant's selected Category or Level impacted the score.

When providing feedback, you should use neutral language and focus only on what has been provided in the application, avoiding extraneous comments or considerations you might have about the research/er. Feedback should be factual and dispassionate. Avoid reference to your own experience of reviewing the application or overly expressive words that convey emotion. You should be always mindful to frame your feedback against the **assessment criteria and score descriptors** (Appendix C). If the applicant introduces information from outside of what is asked by the assessment criteria, this should not be considered in your review. Reviewers may include in their applicant feedback where information provided was not considered in their assessment, because it fell outside of the scope of the assessment criteria.

The NHMRC Peer Review disclaimer provides information to applicants who receive qualitative feedback.

4.3.10. Documentation

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

4.3.11. Funding recommendation

Application scores from all peer reviewers are used to create a ranked list. This final ranked list will be used to prepare funding recommendations to the Minister for Health and Ageing.

4.3.12. Notification of outcomes

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

Feedback will be provided to all applicants in the form of an Application Assessment Summary and a written summary from each assigned peer reviewer (applicant feedback). The Application Assessment Summary will contain numerical information on the competitiveness of the application that will be drawn from the scores given by peer reviewers.

Appendix A Understanding the Principles of Peer Review

Fairness

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

Transparency

- NHMRC will publish key dates, all relevant material for applicants and peer reviewers, and grant announcements on its website and/or via GrantConnect.
- NHMRC publicly recognises the contribution of participants in the peer review process, through publishing their names on the NHMRC website.[2]

Independence

- Peer reviewers must provide independent and impartial assessment of applications. Peer reviewer assessments may be informed by input from other experts (e.g. in panel meetings or when considering expert reports) but must not be unduly influenced by the views of other researchers or stakeholders.
- The order of merit determined by peer reviewers is not altered by NHMRC. However, additional applications may be funded 'below the funding line' in priority or strategic areas.

Appropriateness and balance

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

Confidentiality

- NHMRC provides a process by which applications are considered by peer reviewers in-confidence. In addition, NHMRC is bound by the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988* in relation to

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

its collections and use of personal information, and by the commercial confidentiality requirements under section 80 of the NHMRC Act.

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

Impartiality

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

Quality and Excellence

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

Appendix B Guidance for declaring and assessing disclosures of interest

Peer reviewers[3] are required to disclose all interests that are relevant, or could appear to be relevant, to the proposed research.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[3] For the purposes of disclosing interests, in Appendix B the term peer reviewers also includes observers and NHMRC staff.

HIGH Conflict of Interest – situations and examples

Associated with Application and/or Chief Investigator (CI)

- Peer reviewer is a CI on the application under review.
- Peer reviewer has had discussions/significant input into the study design or research proposal of this application.

Collaborations

- Peer reviewer is actively collaborating or has collaborated with the CI in the last 3 calendar years on publications (co-authorship), pending grant applications and/or existing grants.

Working relationships

- Peer reviewer and a CI currently work or are negotiating future employment in the same:
  - research field at an independent Medical Research Institute.
  - Department or School of a university.
  - Department of a hospital.
- Peer reviewer is in a position of influence within the same organisation as a CI or has a pecuniary interest in the organisation (either perceived or real) e.g. Dean of Faculty or School/Institute Directors.
- Peer reviewer and a CI are on the same committee/board and the peer reviewer or their affiliated organisation would stand to benefit from, or be affected, by the outcome of the application (i.e. vested interested in the proposed research). For example, peer reviewer and CI/Primary Supervisor are both on the same governing board within their organisation.

Professional relationships and interests

- Peer reviewer or a peer reviewer's employer is directly affiliated or associated with an organisation(s) that may have, or may be perceived to have, a vested interest in the research. For example, a pharmaceutical company, which has provided drugs for testing, has a vested interest in the outcome.

Social relationship and / or interests

- The peer reviewer or a peer reviewer's immediate family member has a personal or social relationship with a CI on the application.

Teaching or supervisory relationship

- Peer reviewer has taught or supervised a CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies within the last 3 years.
- Peer reviewer and a CI co-supervise an undergraduate or postgraduate student and collaborate with each other on the student's research.

Direct financial interest in the application

- Peer reviewer has the potential for financial gain if the application is successful, such as benefits from: payments from resulting patents, supply of goods and services, access to facilities, and provision of cells/animals as part of the collaboration.

- Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company and the research proposal may involve collaboration/association with that company.
- Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company and the research proposal may affect the company.

Other interests or situations

- Peer reviewer had or has an ongoing scientific disagreement and/or dispute with a CI. This may still be ruled as a high conflict if the events in question occurred beyond the last 3 years.
- There are other interests or situations not covered above that could influence/or be perceived to influence the peer review process. In these instances, sufficient details must be provided to allow NHMRC to make a ruling.

LOW Conflict of Interest – situations and examples

Collaborations

- Peer reviewer and a CI on the application have collaborated more than 3 years ago.
- Within the last 3 years, the peer reviewer was part of large collaborations involving the CI, BUT did not interact or collaborate with the CI directly. Examples of large collaborations include:
  - Publication(s) as part of a multi-author collaborative team (i.e. ≥10 authors)
  - Pending grant applications or existing grants involving more than ten CIs (e.g. large collaborative research centres and network grants)
- A colleague is planning future collaborations with a CI.
- Peer reviewer and a named AI on the application are actively collaborating or have previously collaborated within the last 3 years.
- Without financial gain or exchange, a peer reviewer and a member of the research team have shared cells/animals/reagents/specialist expertise (biostatistician) etc. but have no other connection to each other.
- Collaboration between a peer reviewer's colleague/research group and a CI on the application, where the peer reviewer did not participate or have a perceived interest (e.g. direct leadership or responsibility for the researchers involved in the collaboration) in the collaboration, or vice versa.
- Peer reviewer is considering, planning or has planned a future collaboration with a CI on the application but has no current collaborations, including joint publications/applications under development.
- Peer reviewer and CI have previously proposed or planned a collaboration that did not progress.

Working relationships

- Current working or professional relationship between peer reviewer and AI.
- Peer reviewer and a CI or AI currently work or are negotiating future employment in:
  - the same institution but have no direct association or collaboration.
  - the same Faculty or College of a university but in different Schools or Departments
- Peer reviewer and a CI or AI work for 2 organisations that are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration.
- Peer reviewer and a CI or AI are on the same committee/board, but otherwise have no working or social relationships that constitute a high conflict and the peer reviewer or their affiliated organisation would not benefit from, or be affected by, the outcome of the application (i.e. do not have a vested interest in the proposed research). For example, the peer reviewer and CI are both on an external government advisory committee.

Professional relationships and interests

- Peer reviewer and a CI or AI's organisations are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration between the CI or AI and peer reviewer and there is no other link that would constitute a high conflict.

Social relationship and/or interests

- Peer reviewer's partner or immediate family member has a known personal/social (non-work) or perceived relationship with a CI or AI on the application, but the peer reviewer themselves does not have any link with the CI or AI that would be perceived or constitute a high conflict.

Teaching or supervisory relationship

- Peer reviewer taught or supervised the CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, co-supervised a CI or the peer reviewer's research was supervised by a CI, more than 3 years ago.
- Peer reviewer taught or supervised the AI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, co-supervised an AI or the peer reviewer's research was supervised by an AI.
- Peer reviewer and a CI or AI are co-supervisors of an undergraduate or postgraduate student, but they are not collaborating with each other on the student's research (e.g. where one of the supervisors may provide additional expert input or guidance to the student's project or thesis).

Financial interest in the application

- Peer reviewer has an associated patent pending, supplied goods and services, improved access to facilities, or provided cells/animals etc. to a named CI or AI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies.
- Peer reviewer has intellectual property that is being commercialised by an affiliated institution. Peer reviewer has previously provided and/or received cells/animals to/from a CI or AI on the application, but has no other financial interests directly relating to this application that would constitute a high conflict.

Other interests or situations

- Peer reviewer may be, or may be perceived to be, biased in their review of the application. For example, peer reviewer is a lobbyist on an issue related to the application.

Appendix C Investigator Grants Score descriptors

Applications for Investigator Grants 2026 are assessed by peer reviewers on the extent to which they address the assessment criteria:

- Track record, relative to opportunity (70%), including selected Level
  - Publications (35%)
  - Research Impact (20%)
    - 'Reach and significance' of the research impact (10%)
    - 'Applicant's contribution' to the research impact (10%)
  - Leadership (15%)
- Knowledge Gain (30%).

NHMRC defines 'track record' for the Investigator Grant scheme as the value of an individual's past research achievements, relative to opportunity, using evidence (not prospective achievements). Track records are assessed relative to opportunity, taking into consideration selected Level and any career disruptions, where applicable (see Appendix F and Appendix G).

NHMRC defines 'knowledge gain' for the Investigator Grant scheme as the quality of the proposed research and significance of the knowledge gained. It incorporates theoretical concepts, hypothesis, research design, robustness and the extent to which the research findings will contribute to the research area and health outcomes (by advancing knowledge, practice or policy).

Score descriptors

Score descriptors are used as a guide to scoring an application against each of the assessment criteria. Peer reviewers will consistently refer to these score descriptors to ensure thorough, equitable and transparent assessment of applications.

NHMRC strives to use a consistent range of adjectives in the descriptions of each score, across category descriptors. This is to help provide clarity and consistency for peer reviewers on what is expected at each score. However, due to the varying difficulty of addressing some elements of the assessment criteria, this is not always appropriate. In some instances, multiple adjectives are used within the description of a single score. This is to allow peer reviewers to consider the applicant's performance along a range of excellence against the assessment criteria, as opposed to relying upon single adjectives.

While the score descriptors provide peer reviewers with some benchmarks for appropriately scoring each application, they are a guide to a 'best fit' outcome only, and it is not essential that all descriptors relating to a given score are met.

Performance indicators

The performance indicators (**Table 1**) can be used together with the score descriptors to further understand what is expected of applicants at each score. Performance indicators are designed to allow peer reviewers to anchor their expectations of applicants around the objectives of the scheme. Investigator Grants, for example, fund the 'highest-performing researchers at all career stages'. Therefore, these indicators are primarily framed around the expectation that awardees will be leaders in their research fields, relative to their career stage, and where relevant, their opportunities to conduct research.

The performance indicators provide peer reviewers with descriptions that address 3 broad 'elements' of independent assessment (quality of the proposed research, the potential for impact, and the demonstrated capability of the applicant(s)). As such, not all descriptions in the performance indicators will be relevant for each assessment criteria.

As with category descriptors, performance indicators provide peer reviewers with some benchmarks for descriptions relating to a given score are met.

Table 1. Performance indicators

Performance indicator					
With reference to what the assessment criteria is asking (and where relevant, having consideration for the applicant's opportunities for research, their research field, access to resources and/or career stage), the applicant has demonstrated in their response, that they are:					
7 Highest performing	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations	2–1 Poor (2) **OR** not addressed or evidenced (1)
as strong a candidate as could reasonably be expected. You are entirely convinced by their response (there is no real need to change or alter in any way). In your view, the candidate has demonstrated they are fully capable of conducting research with significant positive impact and that they, and their proposed research, would be comparable with the best similar research or researchers anywhere in the world.	an incredibly strong candidate. You are extremely convinced by their response (with only a small number of minor weaknesses). In your view, the candidate has demonstrated they are exceedingly capable of conducting research with significant positive impact and that they, and their proposed research, would be comparable with the best similar research or researchers anywhere in Australia^.	a very strong candidate. You are very satisfied by their response (with only a small number of weaknesses). In your view, the candidate has demonstrated they are very capable of conducting research with significant positive impact and that they, and their proposed research, exceed your expectations of what you would consider to be a 'good' researcher or research.	a good candidate. You are mostly satisfied by their response (with some moderate weaknesses throughout). In your view, the candidate has demonstrated they are quite capable of conducting research with significant positive impact and that they, and their proposed research, meet your expectations of what you would consider to be a 'good' researcher or research.	a satisfactory candidate. You are somewhat satisfied by their response (with some moderate to significant weaknesses throughout). In your view, the candidate has demonstrated they may be capable of conducting research with positive impact but that they, and their proposed research, do not meet your expectations of what you would consider to be a 'good' researcher or research.	developing to the standard of a satisfactory candidate **OR** not able to adequately address the assessment criteria or corroborate their statements / claims
Key adjectives used in score descriptors					
Paradigm-shifting Transformative Central or Crucial Highest Fully Entirely	Extremely Outstanding Major(ly) Significant(ly)	Very	Important Well Good	Adequate Satisfactory Somewhat	Limited Marginal Poor Not (well) evidenced Not addressed

^NHMRC acknowledges that in some research areas, the best Australian research and researchers are the benchmark internationally. In these instances, peer reviewers are encouraged to align the applicant's response to a score of 7 for this element. When applicants simultaneously meet the descriptions for multiple scores (e.g. an applicant who satisfies the description of 'very strong' simultaneously satisfies the description of 'good'), peer reviewers are encouraged to consider aligning the applicant's response with the higher score.

Assessing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions

It is recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants make additional valuable contributions to policy development, clinical/public health leadership and/or service delivery, community activities and linkages, and are often representatives on key committees. If nominated by the applicant, these contributions should be considered when assessing research output and track record.

Track record, relative to opportunity (70%), including selected Level

Publications (35%)

Applicants have been asked to nominate up to 10 of their best publications from within their 10-year assessment timeframe (see section 6.8 of Appendix G of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines). The focus on up to 10 nominated publications, rather than the applicant's total list of publications from their 10-year assessment timeframe, is to ensure emphasis of the publications track record assessment is on the **quality and contribution to science**, rather than quantity of publications.

Each nominated publication has an accompanying explanation field which the applicant uses to describe its quality, its contribution to science, and the applicant's contribution to it.

Additional track record elements (e.g. conference participation, awards, patents, publications not already nominated in the applicant's Top 10), may only be introduced in these explanations where they:

- support the applicant's claims of quality and contribution to science
- are a direct result of the nominated publication
- are verifiable by the peer reviewer.

Applicants are required to explain the link between the nominated publication and the additional track record information being introduced.

Peer reviewers will ignore additional track record information provided in the publication explanation field where they are not satisfied that it is directly linked to the nominated publication or where it is outside of the assessment of the publications criteria (e.g. career publication metrics). Field weighted metrics and citation metrics may be included within the explanation field.

Applicants have been asked that, where possible, references to publications within the entry fields should be provided as a complete citation. Where this is not possible, include sufficient citation information to locate the publication, such as authors, publication title, journal name, year and digital object identifier. The applicant must ensure that citation details are correct, particularly the ordering of the authors on the paper. Where it is identified that an applicant has misrepresented the publication citation in their application, the assigned peer reviewers may be advised not to consider this publication in their assessment. The matter may also be referred to NHMRC's Ethics and Integrity section if there are any research integrity concerns, as outlined in the Factsheet - Concerns about research integrity arising during NHMRC peer review.

Publications (and other research outputs such as patents) outside the applicant's 10-year assessment timeframe (see section 6.8 of Appendix G of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines), can be referred to in the applicant's research impact section if relevant.

Applicants may nominate any publication type that best illustrates their involvement, the quality of the research and its contribution to science. Applicants can also nominate pre-prints in their top 10.

A preprint is a complete and public draft of a scientific document, yet to be certified by a journal through peer review. To be considered in this category, a preprint:

- must be available in a recognised scientific public archive or repository such as arXiv, bioRxiv, Peer J Preprints, medRxiv, etc
- should be uniquely identifiable via a digital object identifier (DOI). For preprints that are incrementally updated as work progresses, each version should have a unique DOI and only the latest version of the work should be included in the grant application.

Applicants should use the most recent version of the publication. For example:

- if referencing the preprint, use that date
- if the preprint is subsequently published in a journal, use that date
- for an early view publication that does not yet have a volume/edition/page number, use that date
- when the early view publication is subsequently given a volume/edition/page, use that date.

Peer reviewers are to assess nominated publications, including accompanying explanations, with reference to the below score descriptors, to form a judgement on their overall quality and contribution to science, including the applicant's contribution to each.

Table 2. Publications score descriptors (35%)

Score descriptor	Score					
Relative to opportunity, the applicant's career stage and area of research, there was sufficient evidence that, overall:	7 Highest performing	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations	2–1 Poor (2) **OR** not addressed or evidenced (1)
the quality^ of the nominated publications was:	of the highest standard	outstanding	above expectations	at expectations	below expectations	marginal/poor, **OR** not (well) evidenced
the contribution to science of the nominated publications was:	paradigm shifting or transformative	majorly influential or significant	very important	important	somewhat important	limited **OR** not (well) evidenced/justified
the author's contribution to most/all publications was:	central or crucial	majorly influential or significant	very important	important	somewhat important	limited **OR** not (well) evidenced/justified

^quality refers to characteristics such as the rigour of design, appropriate use of methods, analytical strength of interpretations and significance of outcomes, rather than the number of publications or the standing of the journals in which they are published.

Reviewers should remember:

1) To assess eligible nominated publications (i.e. any publication type and from within the applicant's 10-year assessment timeframe), including accompanying explanations, to form a judgement on their overall quality and contribution to science, including the applicant's contribution to each.
2) That publication quality refers to characteristics such as the rigour of experimental design (both qualitative and quantitative), appropriate use of statistical methods, reproducibility of results, analytical strength of interpretations and significance of outcomes, rather than the number of publications or the standing of the journals in which they are published.
3) To use score descriptors to appropriately score each application, noting score descriptors are only a guide to a 'best fit' outcome, and it is not essential that all descriptors relating to a given score are met.
4) If appropriate, adjust scoring for relative to opportunity considerations or for applicants applying at an inappropriate Level (Appendix G).
5) To ignore additional track record information supplied in the publication explanation field (e.g. conference participation, awards, patents and publications not already nominated in the applicant's 'Top 10') that has not been shown to be as a direct result of the nominated publication (see section 6.10.1 of Appendix G of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines).

According to feedback from Investigator Grant peer reviewers, applicants who scored well for the publications criteria:

- were first/last author on at least some of their nominated publications
- showed a clear upwards career trajectory
- clearly described and substantiated their role in the described work/nominated publications
- justified the quality, significance and impact of their nominated publications.

Research impact and pathway to impact (20%)

It is important to NHMRC's mission to build a healthy Australia that NHMRC-funded research positively effects the health and wellbeing of Australians. To help achieve this, Investigator Grant applicants are required to demonstrate a verifiable example of where they worked to help ensure their research has had a significant impact, as a key indicator of their potential for future success (key definitions at **Figure 1**).

The research 'discovery' or 'finding' alone is not assessed. Rather, the assessment of 'Research impact and pathway to impact' focuses on:

- the **'reach and significance'** of the impact (10%)
- the **'applicant's contribution'** to realising the impact (10%).

Applicants are expected to demonstrate their contribution to the claimed impact along a 'pathway to impact' (see **Figure 2**). Applicants may include multiple programs of research within a single coherent impact narrative when addressing the research impact assessment criteria. The impact can result from multiple collaborations, projects or research programs that together make an impact. Whether the impact is derived from one or more research programs, applicants should create a single coherent narrative for their 'pathway to impact' to allow a robust assessment. Peer reviewers are asked to consider the recency of the applicant's contribution to the impact at the score descriptors (**Table 5**).

It may assist peer reviewers to better understand the concept of 'impact' by reviewing one or more of NHMRC's impact case studies. These case studies outline the 'translation journey' of a selection of NHMRC-funded research projects and show that the creation of knowledge is vital, but also that there are many other activities necessary to generate impact.

Figure 1: Key definitions

Table 3. Types of research impact and examples of evidence of research impact

Type of impact	Examples of evidence (not exhaustive and in no particular order)	
Knowledge impact – research that has contributed to new knowledge and/or demonstrable benefits emerging from adoption, adaption or use of the discovery to inform further research, and/or understanding of what is effective.	▪ recognition of research publications (for example, citation metrics, particularly field weighted) ▪ sharing of research data, software or code ▪ contribution to registries or biobanks ▪ awards/prizes and conference presentations	▪ uptake of research tools and techniques ▪ creation of intellectual property and/or patents ▪ a paradigm shift in a research field or evidence of uptake of the research by other disciplines ▪ creation of a new area of research
Health impact – research that has contributed to improvements in health through new therapeutics, diagnostics, disease prevention or changes in behaviour; or improvements in disease prevention, diagnosis and treatment, management of health problems, health policy, health systems, and quality of life.	▪ policy or program adopted ▪ a clinical guideline adopted ▪ international or national practice standards adopted ▪ improved service effectiveness ▪ Phase I, Phase II and Phase III clinical trial outcomes reported ▪ improved productivity due to research innovations (for example, reduced illness, injury)	▪ quality-adjusted life years (QALYs), disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), potential years of life lost, patient reported outcome measure and other relevant indicators ▪ relative stay index for multi-day stay patients, hospital standardised mortality ratio, cost per weighted separation and total case weighted separation (also relevant for economic impact (health care system savings)) ▪ research report – commissioned by Government, Industry or Other; Technical Report; and Text Book
Economic impact – research that has contributed to improvements in the economic performance of the nation in which the research program was conducted, and/or for which the impact was intended, through creation of new industries, jobs or valuable products, or reducing health care costs, improving efficiency in resource use, or improving the welfare/well-being of the population within current health system resources. An economic impact may also contribute to social or health impacts, including human capital gains and the value of life and health.	**Healthcare system savings** ▪ reduction in Medicare Benefits Schedule/ Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme costs ▪ improved productivity due to research innovations (for example, reduced illness, injury) ▪ improved service effectiveness ▪ personalised medicines **Product development** ▪ a research contract with an industry partner and an active collaboration ▪ granting of a patent ▪ execution of a licensing agreement with a company ▪ income from intellectual property	▪ raising funding from venture capital or other commercial sources or from government schemes that required industry co-participation ▪ successful transition from start-up company (public market flotation, merger or acquisition) ▪ development of pre-good manufacturing practice prototype ▪ successful generation or submission of: – a regulatory standard data set – applications for pre-market approval of a medical device – a new drug or device for registration (for example, by Food and Drug Administration, European Medicines Agency, Therapeutic Goods Administration) ▪ product sales
Social impact – research that has contributed to improvements in the health of the society, including the well-being of the end user and the community. This may include improved ability to access health care services and to participate socially (including empowerment and participation in decision making) and to quantify improvements in the health of society.	▪ uptake or demonstrated use of evidence by decision makers/policy makers ▪ qualitative measures demonstrating changes in behaviours, attitudes, improved social equity, inclusion or cohesion ▪ improved environmental determinants of health ▪ improved social determinants of health	▪ changes to health risk factor ▪ improved health outcomes understanding and/or uptake for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Isander communities ▪ dissemination of research to consumers and the community via mainstream and/or specialist media ▪ capacity building of community members or health service partners

Figure 2. The research lifecycle and the pathway to impact

Reach and significance of the research impact (10%)

The applicant must demonstrate (with verifiable evidence) the reach and significance of the claimed research impact, framed against one or more of the 4 research impact types (see **Table 3**).

It is the reach and significance of the impact that determines the score (as outlined in the score descriptors at **Table 4**), not whether the applicant has framed their impact around one or more impact types. Research impact also includes research that leads to a decision not to use a particular diagnostic, treatment or health policy.

There is no requirement for the applicant's research impact to align with their 5-year research vision/plan. NHMRC recognises that changes in research area or field are a valid career path and/or progression.

Table 4. Reach and significance of the research impact (10%)

Score descriptors	Leadership (and Emerging Leadership)[4] score indicators					
Relative to opportunity, the applicant's career stage and area of research, there is **robust verifiable evidence** of:	7 Highest performing	6 (7) Outstanding	5 (6) Above expectations	4 (5) At expectations	3 (4) Below expectations	Poor 2 (3) **OR** not addressed or evidenced 1 (2–1)
▪ a **Knowledge** impact that has led to new knowledge within the field that is:	paradigm-shifting or transformative and recognised internationally	major or significant and recognised nationally	very important and recognised across multiple fields	important within the field	somewhat important within the field	Recognised sporadically **OR** not (well) evidenced
▪ influence on the FoR/research that is:	transformative and beyond the specific FoR	major or significant and beyond the specific FoR	very important and somewhat beyond the specific FoR	important within the specific FoR	somewhat important within the specific FoR	limited importance within the specific FoR
▪ an influence on the development of a new field that is:	central or crucial and recognised internationally	major or significant and recognised nationally	very important	important	somewhat important	marginal **OR** not (well) evidenced
▪ a **Health** impact that has led to a development that has improved health or health systems, services, policy, programs or clinical practice that is:	paradigm shifting or transformative	major or significant	very important	important	somewhat important	marginal **OR** not (well) evidenced
▪ had an impact on health that was:	transformative with moderate reach or major with extensive reach	major with moderate reach or significant with extensive reach	significant with moderate reach or very important with extensive reach	very important with moderate reach or important with extensive reach	important with limited reach or somewhat important with moderate reach	limited **OR** not (well) evidenced
▪ led to the improvement of the health of Australia's Indigenous people (where relevant) that was:	transformative	major or significant	very important	important	somewhat important	marginal **OR** not (well) evidenced
▪ led to a change in health systems, services that was:	transformative, scalable/sustainable in a large number of communities	major or significant, scalable/sustainable in multiple communities	very important, scalable/sustainable in some communities	important, possibly scalable and sustainable in a small number of communities	somewhat important and possibly sustainable in a small number of communities	marginal and with limited evidence of scalability
▪ an **Economic** impact that has led to the development of a service delivery or system change, device, therapeutic or change in clinical practice that is:	transformative	major or significant	very important	important	somewhat important	limited and/or not (well) evidenced
▪ the generation of commercial income that is:	significant	very good	good	somewhat good	adequate	limited and/or not (well) evidenced
▪ a reduction in healthcare costs that is:	transformative	major or significant	very good	good	adequate	limited
▪ a **Social** impact that has led to changes in social well-being, equality or social inclusion that are:	major, for many people internationally **OR** transformative, for a smaller number of people nationally/ internationally	significant, for many people nationally **OR** major, for a smaller number of people nationally	very important, for people nationally **OR** significant, for people at the sate/ territory or national level	important, for people nationally **OR** very important, for a smaller number of people at the local, state/territory level	somewhat important, for a smaller number of people at the local, state/territory level	marginally important, for people at the local, state/ territory level

[4] For the assessment of research impact, different 7-point scales are used for Emerging Leadership and Leadership applicants. This is to recognise that early and mid-career researchers will have had less time to accumulate research impact than more senior researchers.

Remember to consider in your assessment (based on the corroborating evidence provided):

1) The reach and significance of the research impact in:
   a. informing knowledge to advance research
   b. improving products, processes, behaviours/prevention, policies, practices
   c. improving the nation's economic performance and/or
   d. improving the health and well-being of the community.
2) The verifiable impact of the research (including research that leads to a decision not to use a particular diagnostic, treatment or health policy), rather than the prospective or anticipated effects/outcomes of the research (e.g. a prospective publication linked to the applicant's research program is not demonstrated or corroborated impact).
3) That an applicant's research impact may not necessarily align with the applicant's 5-year research proposal/vision. NHMRC acknowledges that shifting to a different research area is a valid career trajectory and can be a sign of career progression.

Applicant's contribution to the research impact (10%)

The applicant must outline their contribution to achieving their claimed impact.

Peer reviewers should assess the applicant on the extent to which they can demonstrate their contribution to achieving the impact was:

To provide flexibility for applicants who join research projects and/or programs at different stages, applicants are not required to provide examples of their contributions from each stage of the research lifecycle (**Figure 2**). Applicants are also not required to outline each of their contributions along the pathway to impact. Applicants should outline their key example(s), that best demonstrate the CIA's proactive, deliberate, targeted and effective contributions to help realise, sustain and/or maximise the reach and significance of the claimed impact. Applicants should include sufficient examples of their contributions to allow for a robust assessment against the score descriptors at **Table 5**.

The progression of the pathway to impact is determined by the movement of the research project or program between and along the stages of the research lifecycle. This relationship is represented

in **Figure 2**. This image is illustrative only. NHMRC recognises that each 'pathway to impact' is unique, often non-linear or multidirectional, and the underpinning research projects/programs will not always move sequentially through the research lifecycle (i.e. from conception through to dissemination).

NHMRC acknowledges the dynamic nature of 'impact'. It may be difficult to identify when precisely an 'impact' was realised, and the reach and significance may continue to evolve over time as the applicant continues to contribute to sustaining and/or maximising the benefit of their discovery or finding. Additionally, there may be factors outside of the applicant's control which contribute to the reach and significance of the impact.

As such, the assessment of research impact emphasises the applicant's 'recent' or ongoing contributions to realising, sustaining and/or maximising the impact. The emphasis on recent applicant contributions ensures that NHMRC peer review continues to focus on the applicant's recent track record achievements as the best/strongest indicator of their potential for future success. Focussing on recent research achievements also helps to ensure equitable assessment for applicants of all career stages.

NHMRC acknowledges that achieving impact is not solely the responsibility of a single researcher, and that multiple individuals will be involved (research collaborators, intermediaries, regulators, consumers/end users etc). Whether the applicant is part of a small or large team, their task is to create a single coherent narrative of their most significant contributions along a 'pathway to impact'.

Equity in assessment

NHMRC understands that the expectations of applicants when addressing the research impact criteria will vary, based on their career stage, area of research and opportunities to conduct research. To support the fair assessment of applicants, track record score descriptors require peer reviewers to consider these factors when aligning applicant responses to the most appropriate score in a manner that reflects standard practices and expectations within the applicant's research field. NHMRC also acknowledges that early and mid-career researchers have had less time to accumulate research impact. To support the assessment of applicant's 'relative to opportunity', peer reviewers are provided 2 separate scoring scales to assess 'reach and significance of research impact' for Emerging Leadership and Leadership applicants (as indicated by the parentheses at **Table 4**). Investigator Grant applications are also separated into 3 funding competitions (EL1, EL2 and Leadership), with separate funding pools. In this way, EL1, EL2 and Leadership Investigator Grant applicants are not in direct competition.

Table 5. Applicant's contribution to the research impact (10%)

Score descriptor	Score indicators					
Relative to opportunity, the applicant's career stage and area of research, the applicant demonstrated that their contribution along the pathway to impact was:	7 Highest performing	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations	2–1 Poor 2 (3) **OR** not addressed or evidenced 1 (2)
▪ proactive and deliberate:	fully integrated into their research planning and/or activities	extremely well integrated into their research planning and/or activities	very well integrated into their research planning and/or activities	well integrated into their research planning and/or activities	integration into their research planning and/or activities was satisfactory	poorly integrated **OR** not (well) evidenced/not integrated
▪ targeted:	timed optimally for maximum benefit and with the most appropriate stakeholders	timed strategically and with extremely appropriate stakeholders	timed very well and with appropriate stakeholders, with only a few omissions	timed well and with appropriate stakeholders, but with some notable omissions	timed satisfactorily and with somewhat appropriate stakeholders, but with notable omissions	timed poorly, with limited stakeholders **OR** not (well) evidenced/considered/ conducted
▪ effective:	recent* or ongoing contributions that were essential to realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were extremely influential for realising the impact or less recent^ contributions that were essential for realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were very important for realising a recent* impact or less recent^ contributions that were extremely influential for realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were important for realising a recent* impact or less recent^ contributions that were very important for realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were somewhat important for realising a recent* impact or less recent^ contributions that were important for realising impact	poorly evidence/justified in realising the impact or less recent^ contributions that were somewhat important for realising impact **OR** in relation to an impact where the applicant's contributions occurred more than 20 years ago

* continuing into the applicant's 10-year assessment timeframe (see section 6.8 of Appendix G of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines)

^ wholly outside the applicant's 10-year assessment timeframe but less than 20 years ago

Remember: Only where the applicant cannot demonstrate any contributions to realising, sustaining and/or maximising the impact within their 10-year assessment timeframe, should the reviewer consider the applicant's contributions to be 'less recent'.

Evidence for impact claims

Applicants are required to provide verifiable evidence that is sufficient and strong enough to demonstrate their claims. Applicants may use the same evidence across the 2 research impact sub-criteria if appropriate. Any references that are required as verifiable evidence of the impact need not be provided as a complete citation. For example, it would be sufficient to note the publication title and year to prove the existence of a publication. Applicants are provided with a separate field in the application form to list references/evidence for their research impact claims (see Appendix G of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines).

Peer reviewers will need to decide whether the impact claims have been sufficiently demonstrated and corroborated. A poorly corroborated or non-corroborated research impact should receive a score of '1', in alignment with the score descriptors. Research impact evidence may include the adoption or adaptation of existing research.

An applicant who does not wish to provide research impact evidence because it is not in the public domain, or because it is commercially sensitive, may describe the evidence within their application, noting that it is commercially sensitive, without making it available. Any such evidence should be provided to RAOs who should ensure that such evidence is retained by their office to be made available to NHMRC, if requested.

Applicants have been reminded that, in considering whether to provide such evidence, they should note that all NHMRC peer reviewers enter into a Deed of Confidentiality prior to the commencement of the peer review process, which prohibits the discussion of applications or disclosure of any information contained therein, outside of their appointment as a peer reviewer. In addition, NHMRC staff are required under the APS Code of Conduct to observe rigorous confidentiality in relation to their day-to-day work.

Verification of evidence provided against research impact claims

Peer reviewers can verify evidence provided by applicants. Peer reviewers must not seek evidence to support the research impact claims of an applicant who has not provided evidence.

Peer reviewers should also note that, for corroborating evidence, it is the quality of the evidence provided, not the quantity, that should be considered. Applicants only need to provide evidence sufficient and strong enough to verify the claims, not all evidence that may be on the public record. Examples of evidence are listed in **Table 3** above. Evidence examples may be relevant to more than one research impact type.

Leadership (15%)

The Investigator Grant scheme funds leaders in their research areas, at their career stage. Applicants are required to provide a single narrative that outlines their leadership achievements and their ability to identify and contribute to positive change (for example, organisational or behavioural/cultural change). Applicants should frame their response around one or more of the 4 leadership elements:

- **Research Mentoring** – activities that support fellow researchers (from within or beyond the applicant's research group), to develop their research careers. Examples may be drawn from:
  - formal and informal stewardship of the next generation of researchers
  - supervising, mentoring and/or training
  - career development of staff and/or students
  - identifying, training and nurturing talent
  - fostering collaboration among junior researchers

- **Research Programs and Team Leadership –** activities that contribute to creating better working environments within research programs and/or teams. Examples may be drawn from:
  - creating diverse, inclusive, and collaborative learning environments
  - engagement with the broader community and public advocacy
  - providing opportunities for appropriate research and non-research training
- **Institutional Leadership** – activities that demonstrate the applicant's commitment to improving their research workplace. Examples may be drawn from:
  - driving behavioural and cultural change
  - identifying and mitigating risks
  - contribution(s) to department, centre, institute or organisation
  - improving equity and diversity
- **Research Policy and Professional Leadership –** activities that demonstrate initiative in helping to improve the conduct of research. Examples may be drawn from:
  - improving research quality standards
  - driving innovation and multi-dimensionality in research
  - improving academic reporting standards
  - contribution to the peer review of publications and grant applications, nationally and/or internationally.

NHMRC recognises that a broad range of leadership contributions are necessary to create an environment that enables research excellence and stewardship, and that based on a researcher's working environment, work history and level of seniority, examples of leadership will vary. The inclusion of 4 leadership elements is intended to support applicants of all backgrounds, research environments or career stage, to articulate a strong leadership narrative. The examples listed under each element (above) are illustrative only. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate their strongest examples of leadership.

It is the clarity of the applicant's narrative and the strength of their demonstrated leadership examples that determines the applicant's score, not how many of the leadership elements their narrative addresses.

Peer reviewers are to use their judgement, expertise and experience, with reference to the below score descriptors, when reviewing the applicant's leadership narrative, to assess the applicant's overall leadership performance. This should include consideration of the applicant's career stage, field of research, institution and the applicant's responses to the career overview and career context sections of the application.

The examples listed under each leadership element above are illustrative only, applicants were encouraged to demonstrate their strongest examples of leadership throughout their narrative.

Peer reviewers should ignore Leadership track record information that falls outside of the allowable '10-year assessment timeframe' (see section 6.8 of Appendix G of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines). Applicants have been advised not to provide Leadership track record information that carries over the allowable 10-year assessment timeframe. However, where applicants do list Leadership track record information that carries across the 10-year timeframe (for example, 'I have mentored 20 students since 2004'), peer reviewers should use their judgement in determining what subset of that leadership track record information to consider in their assessment. In the above example, peer reviewers might decide to reduce the number of claimed students mentored in proportion to how much additional time was being claimed (that is, halve the number of students mentored to 10, as the time period claimed was double the allowable 10-year timeframe).

Table 6. Leadership score descriptors (15%)

Score descriptor	Score					
Relative to opportunity, the applicant's career stage and area of research, the applicant demonstrates proactive leadership in:	7 Highest performing	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations	2–1 Poor (2) **OR** not addressed or evidenced (1)
▪ research mentoring that is:	of the highest standard, entirely beneficial and transformative	outstanding, extremely beneficial, appropriate and effective	very good, very beneficial, appropriate and effective	good, beneficial, appropriate and effective	satisfactory, somewhat beneficial, appropriate and effective	poorly articulated **OR** not addressed or evidenced
▪ research programs and team leadership that is:	of the highest standard, decisive, strategic, inclusive, collaborative and transformative	outstanding, creating an extremely conducive team and/or program environment	very good, driving change and improving team and/or program cohesion	good, improves the team and/or program environment	satisfactory, somewhat effective in transforming the team and/or program environment	poorly articulated **OR** not addressed or evidenced
▪ institutional leadership (at any level – e.g. local, school/faculty/department or organisation/institute-wide), that:	creates a paradigm-shift that improves the research workplace	has significant influence in improving the research workplace	is very effective at improving the research workplace	is effective in improving the research workplace	is somewhat effective in improving the research workplace	is poorly articulated **OR** not addressed or evidenced
▪ research policy and professional leadership that is:	entirely effective, creating paradigm-shifts in the conduct of research	extremely effective, creating extremely impactful changes in the conduct of research	very effective, creating very impactful changes in the conduct of research	effective, creating impactful changes in the conduct of research	somewhat effective, creating some changes in the conduct of research	poorly articulated **OR** not addressed or evidenced

Remember: Do not take into consideration Leadership track record information from outside of the applicant's 10-year assessment timeframe (see Appendix G of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines).

According to feedback from Investigator Grant peer reviewers, applicants who scored well for the Leadership criteria were able to provide evidence for their leadership role(s) in their field and/or institution.

Knowledge gain (30%)

NHMRC defines **'knowledge gain'** for the Investigator Grant scheme as the **quality of the proposed research** and **significance of the knowledge gained**. It incorporates theoretical concepts, hypothesis, research design, robustness and the extent to which the research findings will contribute to the research area and health outcomes (by advancing knowledge, practice or policy).

In their response to the knowledge gain criterion, applicants were asked to:

- describe the **research vision/plan** for the next 5 years of their research career
- outline the proposed research objectives, basic methodologies and expected outcomes
  - describe the importance of the vision/plan in addressing an issue to advance the research or health area (not prevalence or magnitude of issue)
- outline the **proposed new research** to be undertaken with the Investigator Grant
  - describe the planned outcomes of the proposed new research and its potential significance
  - where relevant, provide details of ongoing and/or completed research that informs, and/or provides context for, the proposed new research
  - outline how engagement along a research impact pathway will be embedded into the design and planning of the proposed new research
  - outline a risk management strategy that identifies and mitigates potential risks to the success of the research (e.g. scientific, technical, financial, compliance/regulatory, operational)
  - describe the support for the proposed new research (e.g. access to technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities, and if required, access to additional expertise and funding necessary to achieve proposed outcomes)
  - justify that the proposed new research can be achieved with the available time, and funding from the Investigator Grant (i.e. that it is feasible).

For the assessment of 'knowledge gain' peer reviewers are to consider:

- the clarity and justification of the research hypotheses/rationale
- the strengths and weaknesses of the scientific framework, study design, methods and analyses, including the reproducibility and applicability of the proposed research and research design
- the feasibility of the proposed new research, taking into account the applicant's justification of how the research can be achieved with the time and money available from the grant
- whether the proposal tackles a major question addressing an issue of critical importance to advance the research or health area (not prevalence or magnitude of issue)
- the access to the technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities, and if required, access to additional expertise and funding necessary to achieve the proposed outcomes
- the degree to which research impact was integrated into the research design and plan
- the strength of the risk management strategy for the proposed research
- the potential for significant and transformative changes/outcomes in the scientific knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues
- the potential research outputs including intellectual property, publications, policy advice, products, services, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing etc.

The assessment of knowledge gain is of the proposed new research outlined in the research proposal. Where details of previous and/or concurrent research (not funded by the Investigator Grant) are outlined in the research proposal, this may help the peer reviewer to contextualise the

proposed new research. This may assist the reviewer to better understand the rationale for the proposed research and to determine its feasibility.

Peer reviewers are to make no distinction in their assessment of the 5-year research vision/plan, between applicants who have held (or currently hold) an Investigator Grant, and those applicants who have not.

The significance of the study is not a measure of the prevalence/incidence of the health issue (for example, cancer versus sudden infant death syndrome) but the extent to which the study will address the health issue.

Within the experimental design of the proposal, applicants should include sufficient information to demonstrate that robust and unbiased results will be produced.

Applicants are not required to justify their research proposal with line-by-line budget justifications, however, as outlined above, they were advised to provide a justification that the proposed new research can be accomplished with the available time and money. This is to assist reviewers in their assessment of the feasibility of the expected outcomes in the research proposal. Successful applicants will retain the flexibility to pursue important new research directions as they arise, adjust their resources accordingly, and to form collaborations as needed, rather than being restricted to the scope of a specific research project.

NHMRC encourages international collaboration in health and medical research to contribute to global health, achieve better outcomes for the Australian community and build Australia's research capability (see *NHMRC International Engagement Strategy 2020–2023*).

Table 7. Knowledge gain score descriptors (30%)

Score descriptor	Score indicators					
The applicant's research proposal demonstrates that the proposed research:	7 Highest performing	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations	2–1 Poor (2) **OR** not addressed or evidenced (1)
▪ is supported by a reasoned hypothesis/rationale that is:	of the highest standard and fully justified	outstanding and extremely well justified	very strong and very well justified, with few minor weaknesses	strong and well justified, with a few minor concerns	satisfactory and somewhat well justified, with some moderate concerns	poor **OR** not (well) justified
▪ has a scientific framework, design, methods and analyses that are:	of the highest standard, fully developed and appropriate	outstanding, extremely well developed and appropriate with only a small number of minor weaknesses	very strong, very well developed and appropriate with a small number of weaknesses	strong, sound and appropriate with some moderate weaknesses	satisfactory, somewhat sound and appropriate with some moderate to significant weaknesses	lacks clarity in some aspects **OR** contains notable weaknesses
▪ has a risk management strategy that identifies and mitigates potential risks to the success of the research (e.g. scientific, technical, financial, compliance/regulatory, operational) that is:	entirely appropriate, identifies all risks and has a comprehensive mitigation plan	extremely appropriate, identifies most risks and has a thorough mitigation plan	very appropriate, identifies several risks and has a very good mitigation plan	appropriate, identifies some risks and has a good mitigation plan	somewhat appropriate, identifies a small number of risks and has a mitigation plan	poor OR not appropriate or addressed
▪ demonstrates that it addresses an issue that is:	of critical importance to advance the research or health area*	of considerable importance to advance the research or health area*	very important to advance the research or health area*	of importance to advance the research or health area*	somewhat important to advance the research or health area*	of marginal importance to advance the research **OR** health area*
▪ has or has access to technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities that are:	of the highest quality, fully aligned with the proposed research and access was fully evidenced / justified	outstanding, extremely well aligned with the proposed research and access was extremely well evidenced / justified	very good, well aligned with the proposed research and access was very well evidenced / justified	good, mostly aligned with the proposed research and access was mostly evidenced / justified	adequate, somewhat aligned with the proposed research and access was somewhat evidenced / justified	poorly aligned with the proposed research **OR** access was not explained / justified
▪ includes plans to contribute to maximising the potential impact of the proposed research (along the impact pathway), that are:	fully integrated into each stage of the research lifecycle and optimally targeted to maximise the potential benefit	extremely well integrated into each stage of the research lifecycle and extremely well targeted to maximise the potential benefit	very well integrated into each stage of the research lifecycle and very well targeted to maximise the potential benefit	well integrated into each stage of the research lifecycle and mostly targeted to maximise the potential benefit	somewhat integrated into most stages of the research lifecycle and somewhat targeted to maximise the potential benefit	marginal or poor, **OR** not appropriate or addressed
▪ will result in changes/outcomes in the scientific knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues & outputs^ that are:	entirely transformative or of critical significance	extremely influential or of major significance	very influential, or very significant	influential, or significant	somewhat influential, or moderately significant	unlikely to be significant **OR** not (well) justified
▪ if required, has access to additional funding necessary to achieve proposed outcomes that is:	already secured or fully evidenced / justified that it will be obtained	extremely well justified / evidenced that it will be obtained	very well justified / evidenced that it can be obtained	well justified / evidenced that it can be obtained	somewhat justified / evidenced that it may be obtained	poorly justified /evidenced or unlikely to materialise **OR** lacks sufficient funding
▪ if required, has access to additional expertise necessary to achieve proposed outcomes that is:	of the highest quality, entirely appropriate and fully aligned with the proposed research	outstanding, extremely appropriate and extremely well aligned with the proposed research	very good, very appropriate and very well aligned with the proposed research	good and aligned with the proposed research	good and somewhat aligned with the proposed research	poorly aligned with the proposed research **OR** not well articulated

* (not the prevalence or magnitude of the issue)

^outputs may include but not limited to, intellectual property, publications, policy advice, products, services, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing)

Focus more on the scientific quality and potential for impact of the proposed (new) research outlined in the research proposal. **Focus less** on whether existing/ongoing research has funding. Research that is not funded by the Investigator Grant can be included in the Research Proposal to help provide context for the proposed new research. However, your assessment is of the proposed new research.

Appendix D Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

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

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

- Community engagement: the proposal demonstrates how the research and potential outcomes are a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with relevant community engagement by individuals, communities and/or organisations in conceptualisation, development and approval, data collection and management, analysis, report writing and dissemination of results.
- Benefit: the potential health benefit of the project is demonstrated by addressing an important public health issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This benefit can have a single focus or affect several areas, such as knowledge, finance and policy or quality of life. The benefit may be direct and immediate, or it can be indirect, gradual and considered.
- Sustainability and transferability: the proposal demonstrates how the results of the project have the potential to lead to achievable and effective contributions to health gain for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, beyond the life of the project. This may be through sustainability in the project setting and/or transferability to other settings such as evidence-based practice and/or policy. In considering this issue, the proposal should address the relationship between costs and benefits.
- Building capability: the proposal demonstrates how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and researchers will develop relevant capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project.

Peer reviewers will consider these in their overall assessment of the application, when scoring the Assessment Criteria set out in Appendix C.

Appendix E Guidance for assessing applications against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria

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

Community engagement

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

Benefit

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

Sustainability and transferability

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

Building capability

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

Appendix F Relative to Opportunity Policy

Purpose

NHMRC's goal is to support the highest quality research that will lead to improvements in health over the short or long term. Peer review by independent experts is used to identify well-designed feasible projects that address a significant question and are undertaken by researchers with demonstrated capacity to perform high quality research.

In most NHMRC grant schemes, peer reviewers are asked to assess the track record of the applicants as well as the proposed research. However, NHMRC recognises that not all research careers are the same and therefore peer reviewers are asked to assess track records 'relative to opportunity', taking into account circumstances that have affected the applicant's research productivity.

The purpose of this document is to outline NHMRC's *Relative to Opportunity Policy* with respect to:

- peer review of applicant track records
- eligibility to apply for Emerging Leadership (EL) Investigator Grants.

Policy approach

NHMRC considers relative to opportunity to mean that peer reviewers should assess an applicant's track record of research productivity and professional contribution in the context of their career stage and circumstances, by taking into consideration whether the applicant's productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to them.

The policy has 2 components:

- **Career circumstances** – personal or professional circumstances affecting research productivity (not meeting the definition of a career disruption – see below). These circumstances are taken into account in track record assessment.
- **Career disruption** – a prolonged interruption to the ability to work due to pregnancy, illness/injury and/or carer responsibilities. Career disruptions are taken into account in track record assessment and in determining an applicant's eligibility to hold an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant (in terms of years since their PhD pass date).

  In addition to NHMRC's principles of peer review, particularly fairness and transparency, the following principles support this objective:

- **Research opportunity:** Researchers' outputs and outcomes should reflect their opportunities to advance their career and the research they conduct.
- **Fair access:** Researchers should have access to the funding available through NHMRC's grant program consistent with their experience and career stage.
- **Career diversity:** Researchers with career paths that include time spent outside academia should not be disadvantaged. NHMRC recognises that time spent in other sectors, such as industry, may enhance research outcomes for both individuals and teams.

  NHMRC expects that peer reviewers will give clear and explicit attention to these principles to identify the highest quality research and researchers. NHMRC recognises that life circumstances can be varied and therefore it is not possible to implement a formulaic approach to applying relative to opportunity considerations during peer review.

Consideration of career circumstances during peer review of grant applications

Under the *Relative to Opportunity Policy*, researchers' career circumstances are considered during track record assessment. This aims to take into account salient research opportunity considerations

over the course of a research career and is not intended to address minor changes to life circumstances.

Career circumstances do not extend the 10-year assessment or eligibility timeframes (see below and section 6.8 of Appendix G of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines).

Circumstances considered during peer review include, but are not limited to:

Research

- research role(s) and responsibilities, career stage, and amount of time spent as an active researcher.

Resources and facilities

- available resources and facilities, including:
  - the extent to which any additional research personnel and/or collaborators contribute to the applicant's research program
  - situations where research is being conducted in remote or isolated communities.

Professional responsibilities

- clinical, administrative and/or teaching workload
- time employed in other sectors
- building relationships of trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over long periods.

Personal circumstances

- disability (including mental health conditions and psychosocial disability) or illness (that do not meet the definition of career disruption – see below)
- caring responsibilities that do not interrupt the applicant's career for an extended period (that do not meet the definition of a career disruption) but still affect research productivity
- for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, community obligations including 'sorry business'
- relocation overseas, including to pursue work opportunities (may be related to either CIA or their immediate family).

Other circumstances

- relocation of an applicant and their research laboratory or clinical practice setting
- periods of unemployment
- calamities, such as pandemics (including increased caring responsibilities or the need to supervise children's education at home during the COVID-19 pandemic), bushfires or cyclones.

Relative to opportunity considerations do not include:

- minor (or short-term) changes that occur during the normal course of conducting research (e.g. broken equipment or delayed ethics approval)
- minor (or short-term) medical conditions, or
- recreational leave or general administrative activities related to research, such as preparation of grant applications and publications or committee-related activities.

Consideration of career disruption during peer review and in determining eligibility for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants

A career disruption is defined as a prolonged interruption to an applicant's capacity to work, due to:

- pregnancy
- major illness/injury
- carer responsibilities.

To qualify as a career disruption, the period of disruption must be a continuous absence from work for 90 calendar days or more, and/or continuous, long-term, part-time employment (with defined %FTE[5]) due to circumstances classified as career disruption, with the absence amounting to a total of 90 calendar days or more[6].

The period of career disruption is used:

- to extend the '10-year eligibility timeframe', when determining an applicant's eligibility for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant, commensurate with its duration
- to extend the '10-year assessment timeframe', allowing for the inclusion of additional track record information for assessment of an application
- for consideration of track record relative to opportunity by peer reviewers.

In determining eligibility of EL Investigator Grant applicants, the 10-year limit on the number of years post-PhD is extended commensurate with the period of the career disruption. This timeframe is not extended for any other career circumstances (i.e. that do not meet the definition of a career disruption – see above). This means that, for applicants with one (1) year of career disruption(s), their '10-year eligibility timeframe' to apply at the EL Level will extend to 11 calendar years, prior to the application close date. Career disruptions also extend the '10-year assessment timeframe' (see above and section 6.8 of Appendix G of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines).

Note: The '10-year assessment timeframe' can be extended back to when the applicant commenced research. The '10-year eligibility timeframe' can be extended back to the applicant's PhD pass date.

[5] For the proposes of Investigator Grant eligibility, 0.2 FTE is equivalent to 1 standard business day (approximately 7.5–7.6 hours).

[6] For example, an applicant who is employed at 0.8 FTE due to essential childcare responsibilities would need to continue this for at least 450 calendar days to achieve a career disruption of 90 calendar days.

Appendix G Statements of Expectations

The *Statements of Expectations* describe the typical attributes expected of applicants at each Investigator Grant Level. They are to be used as a guide for applicants, Administering Institutions and peer reviewers to determine the most appropriate Category and Level for the Investigator Grant applicant. They are not eligibility requirements[7].

The typical attributes expected of applicants at each Level (**Table 1**) fall into 4 categories (in order of prominence):

- research achievements, roles and responsibilities
- standing in their research area
- academic Level
- years' post-PhD.

NHMRC recognises that individuals can achieve academic promotion for a range of reasons unrelated to their research career (e.g. teaching and learning, administration, community engagement). Therefore, Investigator Grant Levels are not strictly correlated with academic levels. Additionally, some applicants experience significant breaks in their research careers after obtaining their PhD. NHMRC expects that all 4 categories of attributes will be considered holistically when determining the most appropriate Level for the applicant. The descriptors provide a broad benchmark and it is not essential that all elements be met.

Table 1. Typical attributes expected of applicants at each Level

Leadership Level 3 (L3) It is expected that L3 Investigator Grant recipients will typically be more than 20 years post-PhD (or equivalent, see section 4.2 of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines) and appointable at Academic Level E, and be leading international authorities in their research area with demonstrated: • significant original contributions of major importance that have had a positive impact on health and medical research, the health system, economy and/or the health of the population • experience in leading a major independent research program(s) involving national and • international collaborative networks • national and international contributions through leadership in their scientific discipline (e.g. in research policy and on advisory committees) • extensive supervision, mentoring and promotion of early and mid-career researchers • significant leadership roles within their department, centre, institution or organisation, that extend beyond their research.
Leadership Level 2 (L2) It is expected that L2 Investigator Grant recipients will typically be between 15- and 20-years post-PhD (or equivalent, see section 4.2 of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines) and appointable at Academic Level D or E (or equivalent), and be leading national and rising international authorities in their research area with demonstrated: • substantial and original contributions that are of major benefit to health and medical research, the health system, economy and/or the health of the population • experience in leading an independent research program(s) involving national collaborative networks • national and possibly international contributions to their scientific discipline (e.g. research advisory boards, peer review)

[7] Applicants must be ≤10 years of their PhD pass date (adjusted for career disruptions where present) to be eligible to apply at the Emerging Leadership Category, See section 4.2 of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines.

- supervision, mentoring and promotion of early and mid-career researchers
- leadership roles within their department, centre, institution or organisation that extend beyond their research.

Leadership Level 1 (L1)

It is expected that L1 Investigator Grant recipients will typically be between 10- and 15-years post-PhD (or equivalent, see section 4.2 of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines) and appointable at Academic Level C or D (or equivalent), and be national authorities in their research area with demonstrated:

- original contributions that are of major benefit to health and medical research, the health system, economy and/or the health of the population
- ability to independently conceive and direct research programs, coordinate a team of researchers and generate national collaborations
- national contributions to their scientific discipline (e.g. public advocacy, peer review, research advisory boards or professional societies)
- supervision, mentoring and promotion of early and mid-career researchers
- contribution(s) within their department, centre, institute or organisation that extend beyond their research (e.g. membership of regulatory or management committees).

Emerging Leadership Level 2 (EL2)

It is expected that EL2 Investigator Grant recipients will typically be between 5- and 10-years post-PhD (or equivalent, see section 4.2 of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines) and appointable at Academic Level B (or equivalent), and be recognised for their expertise in their research area with demonstrated:

- original contributions of influence in their field of expertise
- ability to contribute to the conception and direction of research projects, while developing independence
- experience in supervising a small research team
- national contributions to their scientific discipline (e.g. public advocacy, community leadership, peer review and professional societies)
- contributions within their department, centre, institution or organisation (e.g. organising journal clubs, seminar series etc).

It is also expected that Emerging Leadership applicants will be working within a larger team under the mentorship of more senior researchers.

Emerging Leadership Level 1 (EL1)

It is expected that EL1 Investigator Grant recipients will typically be between 0- and 5-years post-PhD (or equivalent, see section 4.2 of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines) and will be beginning to gain recognition in their research area with demonstrated:

- original contribution(s) in their field of expertise
- ability to contribute to the conception of research projects
- scientific contributions within their region, state or territory (e.g. community leadership, state level contribution to a professional society)
- limited but developing supervision of research staff and students
- contributions within their department, centre, institution or organisation (e.g. organising journal clubs, seminar series etc).

It is also expected that Emerging Leadership applicants will be working within a larger team under the mentorship of more senior researchers.

Justifying Level selection

All applicants are required to provide a justification of their selected Category and Level in the application form (applicant Level justification). This should clearly explain why they have applied for their selected Level, which may be particularly important when the applicant's research experience and performance don't align with the descriptions for their selected Level. Applicants who have previously held an NHMRC Fellowship or Investigator Grant are restricted from applying at comparatively less senior Levels of Investigator Grant (see section 4.3.2 of the Investigator Grants 2026 Guidelines).

NHMRC expects that applicants will consider the expected attributes at each Level holistically and carefully, before applying at their most appropriate Level, to help achieve parity and fairness for all Investigator Grant applicants. NHMRC acknowledges there are circumstances that may warrant an applicant applying outside of the expected/typical year-range, post-PhD pass date[8].

The justification should be reviewed by the Administering Institution prior to submission of the application, to ensure that it adequately justifies the applicant's selected Level.

The applicant Level justification will be considered by peer reviewers.

Applicants applying at an inappropriate Level

Since the *Statements of Expectations* were updated in 2021, the incidence of applicants applying from outside of the expected year-range (post-PhD) for their selected Level has reduced. NHMRC acknowledges there are circumstances that may warrant an applicant applying outside of the expected/typical year-range, post-PhD pass date. There is no evidence that applicants who apply 'down' to a Level with less experienced applicants (years' post-PhD past date) are more competitive than the remaining applicants at that Level[9].

However, where a peer reviewer determines an applicant has not applied at the most appropriate Level, the guidance at **Table 2** is designed to assist them in determining the most appropriate and consistent score adjustments for the track records of their assigned applications. This guidance is **not intended to be prescriptive**.

Table 2. Guidance for implementing score adjustments for applicants at an inappropriate level

Scenario	Suggested score adjustment
Applicant better fits the description of another Level (per the *Statements of Expectations*) where reviewer has other assigned applications.	Reviewer may consider benchmarking this applicant with other assigned applicants at the Level they feel is most appropriate (per the *Statements of Expectations*) for the Track Record criteria (e.g. for an applicant who has applied at L1, who you feel matches the description of an L2, consider benchmarking applicant against other assigned L2 applications for the track record criteria).
Applicant better fits the description of another Level (per the *Statements of Expectations*) where reviewer **does not** have other assigned applications.	Reviewer may consider applying the score one (1) lower than the matching track record score descriptor, when benchmarked against other applicants at the applied Level, if they feel the applicant has applied at a lower Level than appropriate (e.g. if the applicant fits a score of 6, when benchmarked at the Level they have applied, consider giving the applicant a score of 5 for that criterion). Alternatively, reviewer may consider giving the score one (1) higher than the matching score descriptor, if they feel the applicant has applied at a higher Level than necessary.

Note: The guidance above is not relevant for the scoring of Knowledge Gain, which is not assessed 'Relative to Opportunity'.

[8] Where eligibility requirements are met.

[9] Applicants applying 'down' into a Level with less experienced applicants (years' post-PhD pass date) are less than half as likely to secure funding than less experienced applicants who apply 'up' into the same Level.

Appendix H Guide to evaluating industry-relevant experience

Principles

NHMRC is committed to ensuring that knowledge from health and medical research is translated through commercialisation (e.g. by pharmaceutical or medical devices companies), improvements to policy, health service delivery and clinical practice.

Therefore, as a complement to other measures of research excellence (e.g. publication and citation rates), NHMRC considers industry-relevant skills, experience and achievements in its assessment of applicants' track records.

These measures recognise that applicants who have invested their research time on technology transfer, commercialisation or collaborating with industry, may have gained highly valuable expertise or outputs relevant to research translation. However, NHMRC acknowledges that these researchers will necessarily have had fewer opportunities to produce traditional academic research outputs (e.g. peer reviewed publications).

Therefore, peer reviewers should:

- appropriately recognise applicants' industry-relevant experiences and results
- allow for the time applicants have spent in commercialisation/industry for 'relative to opportunity' considerations.

Who might have industry experience or be preparing for industry experience?

Many applicants to NHMRC may have had industry experiences of various kinds. Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. Researchers who have left academia to pursue a full-time career in industry (e.g. in pharmaceutical, biotechnology or start-up companies). In such instances, outputs must be assessed 'relative to opportunity', as there may have been restrictions in producing traditional research outputs (such as peer reviewed publications), but highly valuable expertise gained or outputs produced relevant to research translation (such as patents or new clinical guidelines).
2. Academic researchers whose work has a possible commercial focus. These researchers might not have yet entered into commercial agreements with industry and have chosen to forego or delay publication in order to protect or extend their intellectual property (IP).
3. Academic researchers who have translated their discovery into a collaborative agreement with industry. The researcher may be collaborating with the company in further research and development; may have a licensing agreement; or may have licensed or assigned their IP to the company. A researcher may ultimately leave the academic institution and become Chief Executive Officer, Chief Scientific Officer, Chief Technology Officer, Scientific Advisory Board Member or consultant for a start-up or other company, based on their experience.
4. Academic researchers who are actively collaborating with companies, for example by providing expert research services for fees. Publications of such work might be precluded or delayed according to contract arrangements. The specialised nature of this research might also restrict publication to specialised journals only, as opposed to generalist journals.

Table 1. Relevant industry outputs

Level of experience/ output	IP	Collaboration with an industry partner	Established a start-up company	Product to market	Clinical trials or regulatory activities	Industry participation
Advanced	• Patent granted: consider the type of patent and where it is granted. It can be more difficult to be granted a patent in, for example, the US or Europe than in Australia, depending on the patent prosecution and regulatory regime of the intended market • National phase entry and prosecution or specified country application	• Executed a licensing agreement with an established company • Significant research contract with an industry partner • Long term consultancy with an industry partner	• Achieved successful exit (public market flotation, merger or acquisition) • Raised significant (>$10m) funding from venture capital or other commercial sources (not grant funding bodies) • Chief Scientific Officer, Executive or non-executive role on company boards	• Produce sales • Successful regulator submission to US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), European Medicines Agency, TGA etc. • Medical device premarket submission e.g. FDA 510(k) approved	• Phase II or Phase III underway or completed	• Major advisory or consultancy roles with international companies
Intermediate	• Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) or 'international application' • Provisional patent	• Established a formal arrangement such as a consultancy or research contract	• Incorporated an entity and established a board • Has raised moderate (>$1m) funding from commercial sources or government schemes	• Generated regulatory standard data set • Successful regulatory submission to Therapeutic Goods Administration or	• Phase I underway or completed • Protocol development	• Advisory or consultancy role with a national company

		and actively collaborating	that required industry co-participation (e.g. ARC Linkage, NHMRC Development Grant)	European Conformity (CE) marking • Medical device: applications for pre-market approval	• Patient recruitment	
Preliminary	• IP generated • Patent application lodged • Invention lodged with Disclosure/s with Technology Transfer/Commercialisation Office	• Approached and in discussion with an industry partner under a non-disclosure agreement. No other formal contractual arrangements	• Negotiated licence to IP from the academic institution	• Developed pre-good manufacturing practice (GMP) prototype and strong supporting data • Established quality systems	• Drug candidate selected or Investigative New Drug application filed • Preclinical testing	