NHMRC-beyondblue
TARGETED CALL FOR RESEARCH
into depression, anxiety and suicide among elderly Australians.

Call-Specific Funding Rules

These Call-Specific Funding Rules must be read in conjunction with the Funding Rules for NHMRC’s Targeted Calls for Research Program and the NHMRC Funding Rules 2017.

1 Background and Justification for the Call

This Targeted Call for Research (TCR) will be co-funded with beyondblue. The call focuses on exploring ways to prevent depression, anxiety and suicide among elderly Australians and on improving the detection and effective management of these conditions, through new and existing interventions and models of care.

Elderly Australians are an increasing cohort of the Australian population. Over the 20 years between 1996 and 2016, the proportion of the population aged 65 years and over increased from 12.0% to 15.3%. In the year ending 30 June 2016, there were 484,600 Australians aged 85 years and over, an increase of 15,100 people (3.2%) since 1996. There were almost twice as many females (305,000) as males (179,700) in this age group, which reflects the higher life expectancy for females.

While most elderly Australians experience good mental health, a sizeable minority are at risk of depression, anxiety and suicide, particularly those in residential aged care settings. For some, their experience of depression and anxiety may be a continuation of these same conditions they have experienced over some, or much, of their life. For others, these conditions may develop for the first time as they get older, often in response to experiences of loneliness and social isolation, poor physical health, chronic pain, caring for an ageing partner, family member or friend, grief and loss as friends and loved ones pass away, diminished independence, and the transition into residential aged care.

Data from the 2007 Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing suggest that around 3% of Australians aged 65-74 and around 2% of those aged 75-85 are likely to experience a depressive disorder in any year, while around 6% of those aged 65-74 and 4% of Australians aged 75-85 will experience an anxiety disorder. Other studies suggest 10 to 15% of older people experience depression and about 10% experience anxiety. Rates are higher among elderly people living in residential aged care compared to those living in the community. In one study, just over half (52%) of all aged care residents assessed had a Cornell Scale for Depression (CSD) score that indicated symptoms of depression. Suicide is also tragically common among the elderly. Men aged over 85

have the highest suicide rate of any other age group. In 2015, 16% of all male suicides occurred in men aged 65 and older and 14% of all female suicides occurred among the over 65 age group.

Left untreated, depression and anxiety may impact on quality of life, impair day-to-day functioning, and contribute to increased mortality, including through suicide. Depression and anxiety can also increase the burden on carers and workers supporting older people. Given the increasing number of people aged over 65, and the prevalence and burden associated with depression, anxiety and suicide, efforts are required to find ways either to prevent these conditions developing in the first place (either de novo or a relapse of an existing condition) or to ensure accurate and early detection and appropriate management are provided when they do occur.

At present, efforts to prevent depression, anxiety and suicide among elderly Australians are limited and uncoordinated. Likewise, the detection and management of these conditions are suboptimal. The development of depression, anxiety and suicide risk is often missed in the elderly. Symptoms of depression and anxiety are either dismissed as part of ageing, or are confused with or confounded by the symptoms of dementia, including psychotic symptoms. Suicidality is poorly assessed. Even when appropriately detected, evidence-based treatment is not always provided (or available). Many elderly people are prescribed antidepressant medications, or anxiolytics, when lifestyle changes (e.g. exercise or social interaction), peer support or psychological therapy would be more appropriate. Furthermore, not all people benefit from existing treatments.

There are therefore considerable opportunities to research new and better ways to prevent, detect or manage depression, anxiety and suicide among elderly Australians. Additionally, there are opportunities to translate already existing evidence-based approaches into everyday community care, psychosocial and clinical practice, and organisational and government policies. A review undertaken by the National Ageing Research Institute, on behalf of beyondblue, identified several areas of research requiring particular attention including:

- Late life anxiety conditions.
- Primary care detection and management of depression and anxiety conditions among elderly Australians.
- Lifestyle, psychological and psychosocial treatments for depression and anxiety conditions among elderly Australians, and/or a combination of these.
- The detection and management of depression, anxiety and suicide risk among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (over 50 years of age) and culturally and linguistically diverse older people, and older people living in rural and remote areas.
- The detection and management of depression, anxiety and suicide risk among older people living in residential aged care, including the effects of these conditions on those with medical co-morbidities, and those living with dementia.

2 NHMRC Aims in Implementing this Call

Aims of implementing the call are to:

1. Encourage researchers to work across a range of disciplines and sectors to generate evidence for new or improved interventions and models of care to prevent depression, anxiety and suicide among elderly Australians, or to improve the detection and management of these conditions.
2. Promote and advocate for the accelerated translation of evidence-based interventions including increasing the uptake of already existing evidence-based approaches to community care, psychosocial and clinical practice, and organisational and government policies to prevent depression, anxiety and suicide in elderly Australians, or to improve the detection and management of these conditions.
3. Encourage researchers to develop evidence-based recommendations for initiatives that can be integrated with beyondblue’s existing resources and platforms.
4. Build Australia’s capability for research into the mental health of elderly Australians.

---

This call for research aligns with the NHMRC’s strategic objective to support the translation of health and medical research into clinical practice, policy and health systems, as outlined in the NHMRC Corporate Plan 2016-17.

Mental health is a National Health Priority Area (NHPA). The NHMRC Corporate Plan 2016-17 states that funding for research activities in all of the NHPAs will continue over the four years of the Plan and, if additional major issues arise or substantial gaps in evidence are identified, the NHMRC may initiate targeted calls for research to address these additional priorities.

3 Definition and Scope

This TCR aims to support research that addresses the following question:

- How can the rates and impacts of depression, anxiety and suicide among elderly Australians living in the community and/or in residential aged care services be reduced?

Researchers may address this question with regard to prevention or detection and management, and may focus on depression, and/or anxiety and/or suicide.

The research must include human participants aged 65 years and older. Particular emphasis should be given to those aged 75 years and older, including men aged 85+, who have disproportionately high rates of suicide.

Proposals should also consider how the research can leverage or be linked to beyondblue resources, platforms, programs and services (see https://www.beyondblue.org.au/ and https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/older-people for more details). Researchers should note that the assessment criteria include how the research proposal integrates with beyondblue’s activities.

Research Not Supported Under This Call

This call for research does not support research projects that have any laboratory-based research, including animal-based research or research based on animal models. In line with beyondblue policy, this call for research does not support research into new pharmaceutical treatments.

4 Objectives to be addressed in the Research Proposal

The information below is additional guidance on call-specific details to include in components of the Research Proposal. Refer to Section 3.3 B-GP Grant Proposal in the Targeted Call for Research Scheme-Specific Advice and Instructions for a full description of Grant Proposal requirements.

The objectives of this TCR are to:

1. Support improved approaches to the prevention of depression, anxiety and suicide among elderly Australians in residential aged care services and the broader community.
2. Support improved approaches to the detection and management of depression, anxiety and suicide risk in elderly Australians in residential aged care services and the broader community.

Researchers are expected to focus on new interventions or models of care, or improvements in existing interventions and models of care, in particular those provided by community services, primary care, aged care and specialist mental health services.

Proposals should consider the broad range of disciplines, settings and sectors required to effectively address the research question. These may include: public health, medicine and neuroscience, behaviourial and social sciences, nursing, personal care assistants and community care staff, marketing, information and communications technology, education, local and State government, primary care, aged care and specialist mental health services. Proposals should seek to address a gap in knowledge or knowledge translation. Relevant areas for research include:

- Addressing risk and protective factors for depression, anxiety and suicide among elderly Australians, including factors associated with the transition to residential aged care.
• Prevention of depression, anxiety and suicide through the development of supportive community infrastructure and town planning.
• Improving help-seeking among elderly Australians, particularly through improved mental health literacy and reductions in stigma.
• Enhancing the detection of depression, anxiety and suicide risk through training volunteers and workers in relevant settings, or through screening programs, or other initiatives.
• Enhancing the uptake and impact of lifestyle changes, self-management, peer-to-peer, or low intensity psychological therapies by individuals or aged care and health care providers.
• Novel therapies for depression and anxiety conditions with an emphasis on psychological and/or psychosocial approaches.
• Improving the detection and management of depression, anxiety and suicide risk in key settings, in particular through primary care and residential aged care.
• Improving the detection and management of depression, anxiety and suicide risk through new workforce or service models.
• Effective translation of already existing evidence-based approaches to the prevention of depression, anxiety and suicide among elderly Australians, or to the detection and management of these conditions.
• Economic analyses of new or improved interventions and models of care to prevent depression, anxiety and suicide among elderly Australians, or to improve the detection and management of these conditions.

To address the aims and objectives of this TCR, applicants should provide a research proposal including details on:

• the research design, including a description of the population, study design, methods for recruiting participants, intervention to be used, what the comparison will be, what outcomes will be measured and how, statistical rigour and reproducibility of the study
• how the research aligns with the scope, aims, objectives and expected outcomes of the call
• how the research builds on or translates existing knowledge
• the relevant experience and expertise of the research team
• a description of the disciplines, sectors and policy and practice partners that will be involved in the research and the contributions of each of these
• whether and how the research can be aligned with Beyondblue’s resources and platforms
• how the research findings will be translated into changes in practice and policy, and/or used to develop new health services or programs.

5. Expected Outcomes

It is expected that either one or more of the following outcomes will be achieved by each of the funded grants:

1. Evidence to guide improvements in the prevention of depression, anxiety and suicide risk in elderly Australians living in community and/or residential aged care services.
2. Evidence to guide improvements in the detection and management of depression, anxiety and suicide risk in elderly Australians living in community and/or residential aged care services.
3. Evidence for new or improved interventions and models of care in community care, primary care, aged care and specialist mental health services for elderly Australians living with anxiety, depression and suicide risk in residential aged care services and/or the broader community.
4. Evidence to support the effective uptake by individuals, aged care and health providers, and policy makers of already existing evidence-based approaches to the prevention of depression, anxiety and suicide among elderly Australians, or to the detection and management of these conditions.

6. Budget

A total of $5 million has been allocated to support a small number of research projects identified via this call. Funding will be provided to the top ranked applications until the allocated funding is expended. The number of projects funded is therefore dependent on the size of the grants.

Funding will be available for any period of up to five years over the period 2018-2022. Applications must clearly justify the requested duration and budget and how it will support the proposed outcomes of the research. The Grant
Review Panel will consider the information and may adjust the duration and budget to ensure the research can be achieved while ensuring value for money.

NHMRC reserves the right not to expend the amount allocated to this TCR if, in the assessment of the independent expert grant review panel, applications of sufficient quality are not received.

7 Critical Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open for Submissions in RGMS</td>
<td>19 April 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum data due in RGMS*</td>
<td>5:00PM AEST 17 May 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close of Submissions in RGMS</td>
<td>5:00PM AEST 31 May 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of Peer Review</td>
<td>October 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Minimum data must be entered into NHMRC’s Research Grants Management System (RGMS) by 5.00 pm AEST on the specified due date to allow the NHMRC to start sourcing suitable assessors. Applications that fail to satisfy this requirement will not be accepted. Applicants are also reminded to complete the recommended fields with correct information. Using placeholder text such as “text”, “synopsis” or “xx” etc. is not acceptable as minimum data.

Minimum data for NHMRC TCRs consist of the following:

- General – Application Information: You must complete fields for Administering Institution, Application Title, Synopsis, Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Research (yes/no) and Consent to provide information to International Assessors
- A-RC Research Classification
- A-RT Research Team and Commitment (core team with other members listed as TBA if not yet known)

Please note: Failure to meet this deadline will result in the application not proceeding (see section 10.7 of the NHMRC Funding Rules 2017 for further information).

Research Administration Officers (RAOs) are not required to certify applications for the purpose of minimum data; applications should only be certified once complete and ready for submission (see section 10.4 of the NHMRC Funding Rules and section 6 of the Advice and Instructions to Applicants).

Completed applications must be submitted to the NHMRC in RGMS by 5.00 pm AEST on the specified closing date. Late applications will not be accepted.

8 Assessment of Applications

Applications will be assessed by peer review against:

1. The scientific quality and likelihood of the proposed research project successfully answering the research question posed by the TCR (55%).
2. Whether the team has all the necessary skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes of the TCR (35%).
3. Integration of the research with beyondblue’s existing resources and platforms (10%).

Assessment of applications will include the following considerations:

- Relevance of the scientific approach to the scope, aims and objective of the call.
- Strengths and weaknesses of the research design.
- Appropriateness and robustness of the technical and methodological aspects.
- Suitability and calibre of the team to ensure delivery of the TCR, relative to opportunity (outlined in the 2017 NHMRC Funding Rules at section 6.2), and recognising applicant's industry relevant expertise (outlined in the 2017 NHMRC Funding Rules at section 6.1) and relevant career disruptions (outlined in the 2017 NHMRC Funding rules at section 6.2.1).
- Likelihood of successfully completing the proposed research.

**Note:** It is recognised that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander applicants often 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 applicable, these contributions will be considered when assessing research output and record of achievement.

Further information on the scoring of applications against the category descriptors is available at Attachment A.

### 9 Additional Reporting and Licensing Requirements

Administrative obligations and processes specific to depression, anxiety and suicide risk among elderly Australians TCR awardees are outlined below. Unless otherwise stated, these are in addition to the general requirements set out in the NHMRC Funding Agreement, section 12 of the 2017 NHMRC Funding Rules and on the NHMRC website.

Successful awardees will be required to provide an annual report on the progress of the research directly to beyondblue.

In addition, on request from beyondblue, awardees will be required to provide a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free and non-exclusive license to beyondblue in relation to the outcomes of the funded research activities, for the purpose of beyondblue’s delivery of its services.
Attachment A: NHMRC Targeted Call for Research Category Descriptors

The following category descriptors are used to assess an application. Categories 1-3 are considered non-competitive and will not be funded (unfundable). Categories 4-7 are potentially fundable, subject to the availability of resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Scientific Quality and Relevance to Successfully Delivering the Expected Outcomes of the TCR (55%)</th>
<th>Record of Achievement of the Team in Areas and Disciplines Relevant to this TCR – relative to opportunity (35%)</th>
<th>Integration of the research with beyondblue’s existing resources and platforms (10%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The research proposal:</td>
<td>The applicant team:</td>
<td>The research proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is <strong>highly relevant</strong> to the call</td>
<td>• has a track record that <strong>specifically targets</strong> the proposed research both in terms of depth and breadth</td>
<td>• <strong>specifically integrates</strong> beyondblue’s existing resources and platforms in a <strong>highly feasible</strong> and well-defined integration strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is <strong>without question, highly feasible</strong> and will successfully achieve the expected outcomes of the call</td>
<td>• has all the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• has objectives that are <strong>well-defined, highly coherent</strong> and strongly developed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• has a <strong>near flawless</strong> design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• will provide very <strong>high quality</strong> evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the call;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is <strong>highly competitive</strong> with the best comparable research proposals internationally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is <strong>highly likely</strong> to be translated into changes in policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• will almost certainly result in highly influential publications.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The research proposal:</td>
<td>The applicant team:</td>
<td>The research proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is <strong>very relevant</strong> to the call</td>
<td>• has a track record that is <strong>highly relevant</strong> to the proposed research in terms of depth and breadth</td>
<td>• <strong>specifically integrates</strong> beyondblue’s existing resources and platforms in an <strong>excellent</strong> and feasible integration strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is <strong>highly feasible</strong> and is <strong>highly likely</strong> to achieve the expected outcomes of the call</td>
<td>• has all the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• has objectives that are <strong>clear, logical</strong> and <strong>well developed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is <strong>excellent</strong> in design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• will provide <strong>high quality</strong> evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is <strong>very likely</strong> to be competitive with strong comparable research proposals internationally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is <strong>very likely</strong> to be translated into changes in policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• is <strong>very likely</strong> to result in highly influential publications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>Research Proposal</td>
<td>Applicant Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5     | Very Good | The research proposal:  
- is relevant to the call  
- is likely to be feasible and is likely to achieve the expected outcomes of the call  
- has objectives that are clear and logical  
- raises a few minor concerns with respect to the study design.  
- will provide some high quality evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR  
- may not be highly competitive with comparable research proposals internationally  
- may be translated into changes in policy  
- may result in several influential publications. | The applicant team:  
- has a track record that is very relevant to the proposed research in terms of depth and breadth  
- has most of the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes  
- may be translated into changes in policy  
- may result in some high quality evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR  
- may not be highly competitive with comparable research proposals internationally  
- may be translated into changes in policy  
- may result in several influential publications. | The research proposal:  
- integrates beyondblue’s existing resources and platforms and provides a very good integration strategy. |
| 4     | Good | The research proposal:  
- is somewhat relevant to the call  
- raises some concerns regarding feasibility and likelihood to achieve the expected outcomes of the call  
- has objectives that are clear  
- raises some concerns regarding the study design  
- will provide some evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR  
- is not likely to be competitive with similar research proposals internationally  
- may be translated into changes in policy  
- may result in some strong or influential publications. | The applicant team:  
- has a track record that is consistent with the proposed research in terms of depth and breadth  
- has some of the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes  
- may be translated into changes in policy  
- may result in some strong or influential publications. | The research proposal:  
- integrates beyondblue’s existing resources and platforms and provides a good integration strategy. |
| 3     | Marginal | The research proposal:  
- is not particularly relevant to the call  
- raises several concerns regarding feasibility and likelihood to achieve the expected outcomes of the call  
- is somewhat unclear in its’ objectives  
- raises several concerns regarding the study design  
- may provide limited evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR  
- is not competitive nationally or internationally  
- unlikely to be translated into changes in policy  
- may result in some modestly influential publications. | The applicant team:  
- have limited track records in the field of the proposed research.  
- has minimal skills and expertise required to successfully achieve the expected outcomes  
- may be translated into changes in policy  
- may result in some modestly influential publications. | The research proposal:  
- acknowledges beyondblue’s existing resources and platforms and provides a satisfactory integration strategy. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Research Proposal</th>
<th>Applicant Team</th>
<th>Research Proposal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2     | Unsatisfactory | - raises several major concerns regarding feasibility and likelihood to achieve the expected outcomes of the call.  
          - is unclear in its’ objectives.  
          - raises several major concerns regarding the study design.  
          - is poorly relevant to the call  
          - is not competitive nationally or internationally.  
          - unlikely to provide evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR;  
          - very unlikely to be translated into changes in policy;  
          - unlikely to result in influential publications. | - have track records which do not relate well to the proposed research.  
          - is deficient in many of the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes. | - acknowledges beyondblue’s existing resources and platforms but does not provide an integration strategy. |
| 1     | Poor       | - contains a research plan that does not seem to be feasible and is unlikely to be successfully completed  
          - is very unclear in its’ objectives.  
          - contains a study design that is not adequate.  
          - is not relevant to the call.  
          - is not competitive nationally or internationally.  
          - very unlikely to provide evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR;  
          - no potential to be translated into changes in policy;  
          - very unlikely to result in influential publications. | - do not have relevant track records in the field of the proposed research.  
          - is deficient in most of the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes. | - does not acknowledge beyondblue’s existing resources and platforms. |