Centres of Research Excellence
2021 Peer Review Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening date:</th>
<th>21 October 2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closing date and time:</td>
<td>17.00 ACT local time on 02 December 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth policy entity:</td>
<td>National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant management system assistance and enquiries:</td>
<td>NHMRC Research Help Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone: 1800 500 983 (+61 2 6217 9451 for international callers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:help@nhmrc.gov.au">help@nhmrc.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Note: NHMRC’s Research Help Centre aims to provide a reply to all requests for general assistance within two working days. This timeframe may be delayed during peak periods or for more detailed requests for assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centres of Research Excellence enquiries:</td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:centres.researchexcellence@nhmrc.gov.au">centres.researchexcellence@nhmrc.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 Centres of Research Excellence (CRE) 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:

- Centres of Research Excellence 2021 Grant 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 in order 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

NHMRC recognises the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australia’s health and medical research community and has updated assessment processes to reflect these impacts.

Peer reviewers must follow these updated processes:

- In track record assessment, peer reviewers must consider COVID-19 related circumstances, as outlined by applicants, as part of career disruptions or other relative to opportunity considerations under the provisions of NHMRC’s Relative to Opportunity Policy.
- Peer reviewers should note that applicants have been advised that they may include information on any potential significant and long term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their proposed research, and proposals for managing such risks, as part of their research risk management plan within the grant proposal.
- Peer reviewers are not to let the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the proposed research affect the assessment of the research proposal of an application (e.g. the feasibility of accessing certain patient or population groups with social distancing restrictions in place).
- Peer reviewers must note that changes to the research proposal of a funded application, necessitated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. the commencement of a project needs to be delayed by six months until COVID-19 restrictions are eased) will be considered through NHMRC’s Postaward management and grant variations processes. Such considerations do not form part of the peer review assessment of the proposal, particularly given that the long term impacts of the pandemic are still unknown.

Peer reviewers should note the following significant changes for the CRE 2021 grant opportunity:

- Additional funding is available for CREs in Dementia Research.
- Additional guidance has been provided for peer reviewers in section 4.3.6.2 on mitigating unconscious gender bias in peer review.
- Assessment criteria (Appendix C) – Explanatory text for assessment criterion five has been clarified and additional guidance provided for applicants in the Centres of Research Excellence 2021 Grant Guidelines.
Appendix D on responding to the assessment criteria.

- Category Descriptors (Appendix D) – The seven-point assessment scale definitions have been aligned to those used in Ideas, Investigator and Synergy Grants, with subsequent minor adjustment of the category descriptor points.
- NHMRC Relative to Opportunity policy (Appendix G) – Guidance on the typical circumstances considered under Relative to Opportunity has been clarified.
- The applicants’ record of NHMRC and Other Research Funding will not be provided to peer reviewers.

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).

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.
- **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 Disclosures of Interest

3.3.1 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.

### 3.3.2 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
- Collaborations
- Working relationships
- Teaching or supervisory relationships
- Professional relationships and associations
- Financial relationships or interests
- Social relationships or associations
- Other relevant interests or relationships
- Collaborations
- Teaching or supervisory relationships
- Professional relationships and associations
- Financial relationships or interests
- Social relationships or associations
- 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.

### 3.3.3 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 the Chair or NHMRC.

### 3.3.4 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.

### 3.4 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.
3.5 Complaints

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

4.1 Overview of the CRE peer review process

Applications submitted → Eligibility checks completed

Peer reviewer interests disclosed (conflicts of interest determined) and suitability declared for all applications → Assessments against the *Indigenous Research Excellence criteria*

Applications allocated to peer reviewers in panels for each CRE stream → Independent assessment of applications against assessment criteria

Peer reviewers provided opportunity to revise scores → Least competitive applications deemed Not For Further Consideration

Peer reviewers allocated to panels

Peer reviewers review all applications allocated to their panel to be discussed at panel meeting → Panel meetings → Outcomes announced
Table 1: CRE 2021 Peer Review Key Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 December 2020</td>
<td>Deadline for CRE application submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 December 2020</td>
<td>Application eligibility review and confirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2020/January 2021</td>
<td>Peer reviewers disclose interests and suitability against applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2021</td>
<td>Assessments against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria obtained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2021</td>
<td>Allocation of applications to peer reviewers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February/March 2021</td>
<td>Peer reviewers review applications and submit scores and comments against CRE assessment criteria for each allocated application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2021</td>
<td>Peer reviewers review initial assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March/April 2021</td>
<td>Least competitive applications deemed Not For Further Consideration</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2021</td>
<td>Peer reviewers review applications for discussion at panel meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 April – 6 May 2021*</td>
<td>Panel meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July/August 2021*</td>
<td>Notification of outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dates are indicative and subject to change.

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

4.2 Roles and responsibilities

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

Table 2: CRE Peer Review Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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| Chair   | The Chair’s role is to ensure NHMRC’s procedures are adhered to and that fair and equitable consideration is given to every application being discussed at the panel meeting. Chairs do not assess applications but manage the process of peer review in accordance with this Guide. Prior to the panel meeting Chairs need to:  
  - familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff  
  - identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they have with applications assigned to their panel  
  - familiarise themselves with ALL the applications assigned to their panel, excluding those for which they have been determined to have a high CoI, and  
  - assist peer reviewers with their duties and in understanding what is expected of them.  
During the panel meeting Chairs will:  
  - take appropriate action for each CoI  
  - keep discussions on time and focused  
  - ensure NHMRC procedures are followed  
  - promote good engagement by peer reviewers in all discussions  
  - ensure that all peer reviewers consider ‘relative to opportunity’, including career disruptions, when discussing applications  
  - ensure that any discussion and assessment is based on the CRE assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (Appendices C and D)  
  - ensure the panel consistently considers the assessment against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus  
  - ensure peer reviewers are satisfied with the consistency and appropriateness of
discussions for each application
- record and notify NHMRC of any requests for clarification or advice, and
- approve Meeting Attendance Record sheets.

Chairs may need to:
- fulfil the duties and responsibilities of a peer reviewer where required (e.g. to meet quorum requirements of the panel when assessing particular applications) – in such an instance a substitute Chair will be identified for relevant applications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistant Chair</th>
<th>Prior to the panel meeting Assistant Chairs need to:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• familiarise themselves with this document and other material as identified by NHMRC staff</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they may have with applications to be reviewed by the panel, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• familiarise themselves with all applications being considered by the panel.</td>
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</table>

During the panel meeting Assistant Chairs will:
- note the strengths and weaknesses of the application while discussion by the panel is underway |
- act as Chair for applications where the Chair is unavailable or has a CoI, and |
- prepare a report on the effectiveness with which the panel performed its duties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer reviewers</th>
<th>Prior to the panel meeting, peer reviewers need to:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• familiarise themselves with this Guide and other material as identified by NHMRC staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• identify and advise NHMRC of all interests they have with applications assigned to their panel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• provide a fair and impartial assessment against the CRE assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (Appendices C and D) for each non-conflicted application assigned, in a timely manner</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements ‘relative to opportunity’, including any career disruptions, where applicable</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• consider the assessment against the Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria (Appendix E) provided for applications with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health focus, and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• review comments from other peer reviewers for all applications assigned to them and rescore if appropriate.</td>
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During the panel meeting, peer reviewers will:
- disclose interests they have with other peer reviewers |
- prepare for and participate in the discussion for each application where they do not have a high CoI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Spokesperson (1SP)</th>
<th>Prior to the panel meeting:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• assess the allocated applications against the CRE assessment criteria and associated category descriptors (Appendices C and D).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements ‘relative to opportunity’, including any career disruptions, where applicable, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• prepare speaking notes to present the application at the panel meeting.</td>
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</table>

At the panel meeting:
- lead the discussion using prepared notes, and |
- announce final scores for applications based on discussions.
| Secondary Spokesperson (2SP) | Prior to the panel meeting:  
• assess the allocated applications against the CRE assessment criteria and associated category descriptors *(Appendices C and D)*  
• assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements ‘relative to opportunity’, including any career disruptions, where applicable, and  
• prepare speaking notes to present the application at the panel meeting.  
At the panel meeting:  
• add to the 1SP comments using prepared notes, and  
• announce final scores for applications based on discussions. |
| --- | --- |
| 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.  
Prior to the panel meeting, NHMRC staff will:  
• invite individuals to participate in the CRE 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, and  
• assign peer reviewers to the appropriate panel and applications to peer reviewers.  
At the panel meeting NHMRC staff will:  
• support the operation of NHMRC’s grant management system  
• assist the Chair in running the discussions  
• fulfil the role of Chair/Assistant Chair where required (e.g. where the Chair/Assistant Chair is deemed to have a high conflict of interest with an application)  
• implement appropriate management plans for peer reviewers with ‘high’ interests or conflicts with applications and ensure that all participants (including community observers) are aware of disclosed interests  
• ensure that all peer reviewers are provided with the necessary information to review each application, and assist and advise on the peer review process as required  
• maintain scoring records for each application  
• act as the first point of contact for peer reviewers and community observers, and  
• seek feedback from participants in the peer review process on improvements for future processes. |
| Indigenous health research peer reviewers | Indigenous health research peer reviewers will review how well each application addresses NHMRC’s *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* *(Appendix E).*  
Indigenous health research external peer reviewers will not participate in scoring. They will act as external experts and provide guiding comments to the peer reviewers relating to the *Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria.* |
| Community Observers | At the panel meeting, observers will:  
• identify and advise the Chair of all interests they have with applications to be discussed  
• monitor the procedural aspects of the meeting, and  
• provide feedback to NHMRC on the consistency of procedures across meetings.  
Observers may raise issues of a general nature for advice or action as appropriate with NHMRC staff.  
Observers are subject to the same disclosure of interest requirements as peer reviewers. Where a high CoI exists, the observer will not observe discussions of the respective application(s). |
4.3 Reviewing CRE applications

All CRE applications are assessed against the CRE assessment criteria and the associated category descriptors at Appendices C and D. 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 E.

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. Researchers 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 E) 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 F.

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 CRE 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.

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 NHMRC’s grant management system, in accordance with the guidelines provided at Section 3.3 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 for applications, based on the information available to them in the application summary.

4.3.4 Establishment of panels and assignment of applications to peer reviewers

Taking into account CoIs and peer reviewer suitability, NHMRC staff will assign peer reviewers to a Clinical Research, Health Services Research, Public Health Research, and Dementia Research stream panel. Each application will be assigned four peer reviewers.

4.3.5 Briefing

NHMRC will provide peer reviewers briefing material with further details on their duties and responsibilities in the CRE peer review process. This will be made available to peer reviewers prior to assessing applications. Further information may be provided as necessary throughout the peer review process.

4.3.6 Assessment of applications

Peer reviewers will be given access to assigned applications (where no high Col exists) and will be required to assess and enter their scores and comments in NHMRC’s grant management system. Peer reviewers will assess all applications assigned to them against the assessment criteria, using the category descriptors, taking into account career disruptions and other ‘relative to opportunity’ considerations (Appendix G), where applicable.
Peer reviewers will be given an opportunity to review their assigned applications in the context of the other reviewers' comments only. Peer reviewers can revisit their scores and may rescore the application against the assessment criteria if they consider this to be appropriate.

To ensure they provide independent scores, peer reviewers are not to discuss applications with other peer reviewers, except at the panel meeting.

Peer reviewers must ensure scores are completed by the nominated due date. If peer reviewers are unable to meet this requirement, they must contact NHMRC promptly to discuss alternative arrangements.

Four independent assessments will be sought for each application. Peer reviewers' scores will be used to create provisional ranked lists of applications for each panel following the rescoring period.

A small percentage of peer reviewers will remain on the panel based on the required expertise for the applications proceeding to panel discussion. The remaining peer reviewers will not be required to participate beyond this part of the peer review process.

### 4.3.6.1 Relative to opportunity and career disruption

Peer reviewers must take into account productivity relative to opportunity and, where applicable, career disruption considerations in the assessment of all applications. This reflects NHMRC’s policy that assessment processes should accurately assess an applicant’s track record and associated productivity relative to stage of career, including consideration as to whether productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to the applicant. To assist peer reviewers with their assessment, further details regarding relative to opportunity and career disruptions are provided at Appendix G.

### 4.3.6.2 Mitigating unconscious gender bias in peer review

NHMRC is committed to addressing gender equality to promote fairness, transparency, equality and diversity in health and medical research. Fostering gender equality in peer review is a strategic objective, underpinned by NHMRC's [Gender Equality Strategy 2018–2021](#).

Consistent with international practice and to ensure that NHMRC grant applications continue to receive objective and impartial assessments, NHMRC is raising peer reviewers' awareness of unconscious bias in the assessment process.

This is also consistent with the NHMRC 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.

**Peer reviewer participation in the online Harvard Implicit Association Test for gender and science**

In support of the objective, NHMRC encourages peer reviewers to complete the online Harvard Implicit Association Test (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 for gender and science during the peer review process.

**Use of gender-neutral language**

To reduce unconscious gender bias, NHMRC has strongly advised applicants to use gender-neutral language. This will limit the opportunity for unconscious gender bias to affect the assessment process.
NHMRC also encourages peer reviewers to use gender-neutral language in the assessment of applications. This means that during panel discussions or when preparing written material peer reviewers should:

- avoid the use of gendered pronouns such as he/she or her/his, and instead use gender-neutral alternatives such as CIA/CIB, CI last-name or plural pronouns (they/their) when referring to applicants
- avoid the use of first names, and
- use gender-neutral nouns where appropriate e.g. parental leave rather than maternity/paternity leave.

The use of gender-neutral language in applications is encouraged, but does not form part of the assessment criteria and therefore should not influence the scoring of applications. Peer reviewers are required to consider the proposal on its merits, taking relative to opportunity considerations into account.

Where gender dimensions are important for the research being proposed, applicants have been advised they should be included in the application. Please refer to scheme-specific category descriptors for information on whether gender dimensions are to be considered as a part of assessment.

### 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 Use of Impact Factors and other metrics

Peer reviewers are to take into account 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 takes into account 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. The [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment](https://www.ascb.org/sfdoaranimal) (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, and
- 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 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. Advice about how to raise concerns and a description of how this process is managed are provided on the NHMRC website.

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 available on the NHMRC website.

### 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 Panel meetings

CRE panel meetings will occur face-to-face or via videoconference.

Each panel will meet for up to two days (depending on the number of applications to be discussed per panel).

#### 4.3.7.1 Discussion of applications at panel meeting

The least competitive applications within the provisional ranked list of applications for each panel will form a Not For Further Consideration (NFFC) list. Applications not on the NFFC list will proceed to panel discussion.

Peer reviewers will be given access to all applications proceeding to panel discussion (where no high CoI exists).

It is expected that the following number of applications will proceed to discussion for each panel:

- Panel A – Clinical Research: 12 applications
- Panel B – Health Services Research: 8 applications
- Panel C – Public Health Research: 8 applications
- Panel D – Dementia Research: 8 applications

An application may be excluded from NFFC for the following reasons:

- NHMRC has not received a score and an assessment for all criteria from at least three peer reviewers
- a peer reviewer has a high CoI after the initial assessment has been undertaken
- if it relates to an NHMRC strategic priority, as determined by NHMRC, and achieves a notional score of 4.001 or higher.

#### 4.3.7.2 Panel meeting process

The purpose of the panel meeting is not for individual peer reviewers to regress their scores to the panel mean. It is an opportunity to discuss divergent opinions or aspects of an application that a peer reviewer may have overlooked and adjust their scores as necessary. Peer reviewers are expected to read all applications proceeding to panel discussion for which they do not have a high CoI. All peer reviewers are expected to contribute to discussions and provide scores for each application, and should be able to justify how their scores align with the category
Each application is assigned a 1SP and 2SP. Where possible, spokespersons are assigned from the four peer reviewers initially assigned to that application.

The process for the panel meeting is as follows:

Declaration of inter-relationships
Suggested time limit: 30 minutes

When panel members (including the Chair, Assistant Chair and secretariat) meet face-to-face for the first time, each panel member will be invited to briefly describe their expertise and previous peer review experience. During their introductions, members will be asked to declare any relationships with other panel members including:

- current and previous collaborations
- former student/teacher/mentoring relationships
- common employment/institutional relationships
- other relationships that may, or be perceived to, impair fair and impartial assessment.

Chair to announce the application
Suggested time limit: 2 minutes

The Chair will announce the application to be discussed including the title, Administering Institution/s and the CIs. The Chair will identify any panel members who have a previously identified CoI with the application. Those members with a high CoI will be asked to leave the room/ be temporarily blocked from the videoconference by the secretariat (the videoconference connection will remain active).

The Chair will invite panel members to disclose any late interests with the application. If a panel member discloses a new interest, or wishes to discuss any concerns related to an existing CoI, the matter will be discussed with the panel. It is up to the remaining panel members to determine if the new interest constitutes a high CoI and if the declaring panel member should leave the room/ be temporarily blocked from the videoconference by the secretariat. The details of the late interest will be recorded by NHMRC. As this decision making can take extra time, it is important that all interests are disclosed and decided upon well in advance of the meeting, where possible.

If an interest is disclosed at the panel meeting by a SP and it is determined to be a high CoI, a new SP will be assigned to the application and the scores from the initial SP will be discarded. Discussion of the application will be moved to a later time where possible to give the new SP time to prepare.

Once highly conflicted members have left the room (those with a low CoI remain in the panel room)/ been temporarily blocked from the videoconference by the secretariat, the Chair will then identify the 1SP and 2SP and announce the Spokesperson scores for each of the five assessment criteria.

1SP and 2SP to comment on the application
Suggested time limit: 5 minutes (1SP) and 4 minutes (2SP)

The Primary and Secondary Spokespersons will:

- discuss the application’s strengths and weaknesses against the assessment criteria, referring to the category descriptors
- 2SP only to add anything not addressed by the 1SP, or explain why they disagree with the 1SP, if applicable.

Full panel discussion
Suggested time limit: 10 minutes

The Chair will open discussion to the panel. Panel members have an opportunity to ask questions of all Spokespersons, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the application and ensure that relevant considerations are taken into account.

The Chair must ensure adequate review of the application occurs, that all members have a fair opportunity to
comment and that no member exerts undue influence over others.

**Scoring by panel members**

Suggested time limit: 5 minutes

Following the panel’s discussion, the Chair will ask the Primary and Secondary Spokespersons to confirm their five criterion scores noting that these may change as a result of the panel discussion.

The Chair will then ask if any member intends to score two or more away from the 1SP criterion scores. If so the panel member must declare this and provide a brief justification, which will be recorded by the secretariat.

All panel members in the room/ videoconference, excluding the Chair, must independently score the application through e-scoring in NHMRC’s grant management system. All scoring panel members will provide scores against the five assessment criteria using the seven-point scale outlined in the Centres of Research Excellence 2021 category descriptors (Appendix D), as a reference. While the category descriptors provide panel members with some benchmarks for appropriately scoring each application, it is not essential that all descriptors relating to a given score are met. Panel members should consider this and ensure the entire seven-point scale is considered when scoring applications.

At the completion of scoring, the panel secretariat will announce the following results:

1. Rating - the rating will be determined by including each panel member’s score for each of the assessment criteria. The rating, as calculated arithmetically to three decimal places will take account of the weighting of each criterion.

2. Category - this will be based on the calculated rating as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating range</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.001 - 1.500</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.501 - 2.500</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.501 - 3.500</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.501 - 4.500</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.501 - 5.500</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.501 - 6.500</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.501 - 7.000</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where panel members have concerns regarding the final score, the Chair should invite further discussion. If the panel collectively determines that reassessment is warranted, members will be invited to independently rescore that application. Panel members should not aim to achieve a consensus score, nor take into consideration the potential overall ranking or funding outcome of an application.

**4.3.7.2 Reconciliation**

At the end of the deliberations, a reconciliation of applications reviewed will take place. This process gives panel members a final opportunity to raise any concerns regarding applications that have been reviewed throughout the meeting.

Where a panel member believes an application may have been reviewed in an inconsistent manner, they should raise the matter with the panel Chair. The panel secretariat will ensure that members with high CoIs leave the meeting before any details of the application and the circumstances of concern are outlined to the panel.

In the event that an application needs to be reassessed the application will be reopened for discussion and
rescored by the panel at the next opportunity.

### 4.3.8 Quorum

A quorum is regarded as 50 percent plus one of the appointed panel members. If there is an uneven number of
panel members, a majority is the next full number after 50 percent (e.g. seven in the case of 13 members).

NHMRC will endeavour to identify, prior to panel meetings, those applications that do not have a scoring quorum
and obtain a suitably qualified member from another panel to participate in panel discussion and to score that
application. However, in situations where a number of members have a high CoI with an application and a suitably
qualified member(s) cannot be recruited from another panel, the scoring quorum cannot be less than one-third of
the panel membership present at the meeting.

### 4.3.9 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, the panel 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.

### 4.3.10 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

After the panel meetings, application ratings will be used to create a ranked list for each CRE stream. These final
ranked lists will be used to prepare funding recommendations to NHMRC’s Research Committee and Council for
advice to the CEO, who will then make recommendations to the Minister for Health.

### 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. 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.
- 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 on the NHMRC website. 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.¹

Independence

- 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.
- Chairs are independent and are not involved in the peer review of any application. Chairs act to ensure that NHMRC’s processes are followed for each scheme, including adherence to the principles of this Guide.

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 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.

¹ Such information will be in a form that prevents applicants determining which particular experts were involved in the review of their 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 relationships with other members of the panel, and 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

Conflicts of interest frequently are regarded as a positive indicator that peer reviewers are recognised leaders who:

- have expert advice or skills
- have been given professional opportunities
- have received government funding, and
- are supported by the companies working to raise the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia.

A disclosure of interest does not mean that a peer reviewer has engaged in an inappropriate activity. It is a collaboration or relationship which may, or could be perceived to, impact 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 the peer reviewer’s responsibility to disclose all interests. 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.

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:

- **Excellence through expert peer review:** The benefits of peer reviewers’ expert advice need to be balanced with the risk of real and 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’ CoI, 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 NHMRC’s grant management system to enable a judgement of its significance. Wherever possible, peer reviewers are encouraged to provide sufficient detail in the explanation such as date (month and year) of collaborations. Disclosures of interest are to be documented for conflicts of interest with both CIs and AIs.

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.
## HIGH Conflict of Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associated with Application and/or Chief Investigator (CI)</td>
<td>✔ Peer reviewer is a CI or AI on the application under review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔ Peer reviewer has had discussions/significant input into the study design or research proposal of this application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborations</td>
<td>✔ Peer reviewer has collaborated, in a significant way, on publications within the last three calendar years (co-authorship), or on pending current-round applications, existing NHMRC grants or other grants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔ There is an in/direct association/collaboration between the peer reviewer and a member of the CI team, such that the peer reviewer may have, or may be perceived to have, a vested interest in this research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working relationships</td>
<td>✔ Peer reviewer has the same employer, is part of the same organisation, or is negotiating for employment at the applicant's institution, including:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• in the same research field at an independent Medical Research Institute.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• in the same Department or School of a university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• in the same Department of a hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔ Peer reviewer is in a position of influence within an organisation, or has a pecuniary interest, e.g. Dean of Faculty or School/Institute Directors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔ Peer reviewer would benefit if the proposal was successful as an associate on the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee, Data and Safety Monitoring Board etc. for example, a board of the hospital in which the research would be conducted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional relationships and interests</td>
<td>✔ Peer reviewer's organisation is affiliated or associated with organisations 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 and therefore has a vested interest in the outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relationship and/or interests</td>
<td>✔ The peer reviewer has a known personal/social/perceived relationship with a CI on the application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching or supervisory relationship</td>
<td>✔ Peer reviewer has taught or supervised the applicant for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, or co-supervised a CI, within the last three years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct financial interest in the application</td>
<td>✔ 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔ Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company and the research proposal may involve collaboration/association with that company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other interests or situations</td>
<td>✔ Peer reviewer has had an ongoing scientific disagreement and/or dispute with the applicant/s. This may still be ruled as a high CoI if the events in question occurred beyond the last three years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔ The peer reviewer feels that there are other interests or situations not covered above that could influence/or be perceived to influence, the peer review process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LOW Conflict of Interest

## Situation | Example
--- | ---
**Collaborations**

![ ](✔) Peer reviewer and a CI on the application have collaborated more than three years ago.

![ ](✔) Within the last three years the peer reviewer has published with the CI as part of a multi-author collaborative team (i.e. ≥10 authors) where the peer reviewer did not interact or collaborate with the CI directly.

![ ](✔) A co-worker 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 three years.

![ ](✔) Without financial gain or exchange, a peer reviewer and a contributor 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, where the peer reviewer did not participate or have a perceived interest in the collaboration.

![ ](✔) Peer reviewer is considering/planning/or has planned a future collaboration with a CI on the application but has no current collaborations or joint applications.

**Working relationships**

![ ](✔) Peer reviewer has the same employer, is part of the same organisation or is negotiating employment at the applicant’s institution.

**Peer reviewer and a CI work:**
- at the same institution and do not know each other.
- in the same Faculty or College of a university but in different Schools or Departments and do not know each other.
- in the same organisation, but the peer reviewer or applicant holds an honorary appointment.

![ ](✔) Peer reviewer and a CI work for two organisations that are affiliated but there is no direct association/collaboration.

![ ](✔) Peer reviewer and a CI are on the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee, Data and Safety Monitoring Board etc., but otherwise have no association that would constitute a High decision.

**Professional relationships and interests**

![ ](✔) Peer reviewer’s organisation is affiliated with the CI's organisation.

**Social relationship and / or interests**

![ ](✔) Peer reviewer’s partner or an immediate family member has a known personal/social (non-work)/perceived relationship with a CI on the application, but the peer reviewer themselves does not have any link with the CI that would be perceived or constitute a ‘High’ decision.

**Teaching or supervisory relationship**

![ ](✔) Peer reviewer taught or supervised the applicant for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, or co-supervised a CI, or the peer reviewer’s research was supervised by a CI, more than three years ago.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial interest in the application</th>
<th>✔ Peer reviewer has an associated patent pending, supplied goods and services, improved access to facilities, or provided cells/animals etc. to a named CI for either undergraduate or postgraduate studies.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔ 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 on the application, but has no other financial interests directly relating to this application that would constitute a ‘High’ decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔ Peer reviewer receives research funding or other support from a company, and the research proposal may impact upon the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other interests or situations</td>
<td>✔ 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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C - Centres of Research Excellence 2021 Assessment Criteria

Applications for CRE grants are assessed by peers against the assessment criteria listed below (weighted equally) using the category descriptors as a guide. In addressing the assessment criteria, applicants should consider how the proposal addresses the associated points as described below.

1. **Generate new knowledge that leads to improved health outcomes (20%)**
   - clarity of research objectives and theoretical concepts
   - strengths and weaknesses of the research design(s), or the appropriateness and robustness of the proposed methodology(ies) or appropriateness of the broader strategy of the research program of the Centre
   - feasibility of the proposed research
   - aims and concepts of the research are innovative or pioneering on an international level
   - likelihood that significant new findings will be produced and substantially advance knowledge in the field.

2. **Promote effective transfer of research outcomes into health policy and/or practice (20%)**
   - the quality of the plan for research translation
   - plans for promoting the Centre’s activities to the wider community, including where appropriate, for commercial gain
   - the involvement of consumers and the community in the planning, implementation and uptake of the research program.

3. **Develop the health and medical research workforce by providing opportunities to advance the training of new researchers, particularly those with a capacity for independent research and future leadership roles (20%)**
   - strategy to generate new researcher capability, mentoring and encouragement of further career development
   - clarity of measures for integrating new researchers into the teams including mentoring strategies.

4. **Facilitate collaboration (20%)**
   Teams are required to outline past and/or proposed collaborative arrangements within the applicant team, and address the means whereby the collaborators will ensure the cohesive running of the research during its funding period, including but not limited to:
   - likely effectiveness of working collaborations and intellectual exchange
   - the relationship with other groups in the particular field of research
   - integration and cohesiveness of the team.

5. **Record of research and translation achievement – relative to opportunity (20%)**
   This criterion assesses whether the previous research and translation experience of applicants demonstrates that the team has the appropriate mix of research skills and experience to deliver the proposed project. Record of achievement encompasses the national and international standing of the applicants based upon their research and translation achievements, relative to opportunity, including but not limited to:
   - research outputs – most recent significant publications; publications that illustrate innovation and significance to past accomplishments; outcome and impact of previous research achievements, including effects on health care practices or policy
   - contribution to discipline or area – invitations to speak at international meetings, editorial appointments, specialist and high level health policy committee appointments
   - evidence of research translation, such as: influence on clinical/health policy or practice; provision of influential advice to health authorities and government; impacts on health via the broad dissemination of research outcomes e.g. via mainstream media, the community or industry involvement.
Appendix D - Centres of Research Excellence 2021 Category Descriptors

The following category descriptors are used as a guide to scoring an application against each of the assessment criteria. Note that all criteria are of equal weighting. Categories 1–3 are not fundable. Categories 4–7 are potentially fundable, subject to the availability of resources.

While the category descriptors provide peer reviewers with some benchmarks for appropriately scoring each application, it is not essential that all descriptors relating to a given score are met.

The category descriptors are a guide to a “best fit” outcome. Peer reviewers will consistently refer to these category descriptors to ensure thorough, equitable and transparent assessment of applications.

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 track record.
### Criterion 1. Generate new knowledge that leads to improved health outcomes

- clarity of research objectives, and theoretical concepts
- strengths and weaknesses of the research design(s), or the appropriateness and robustness of the proposed methodology(ies) or appropriateness of the broader strategy of the research program of the Centre
- feasibility of the proposed research
- aims and concepts of the research are innovative or pioneering on an international level
- likelihood that significant new findings will be produced and substantially advance knowledge in the field.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Performance Indicator</th>
<th>Category Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- has objectives that are well-defined, highly coherent and strongly developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- is exemplary in design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- is state of the art in concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- will be the subject of invited plenary presentations at international meetings, often with relevance across several fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- is highly innovative and introduces advances in concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- is highly feasible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- is clear in its intent and logical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- has an outstanding design</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- is appropriate for the experience level of the applicant and team</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- could be the subject of invited plenary presentations at international and national meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- is innovative with respect to the question being addressed and the approach to it</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- is highly feasible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- has clear objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- any reservations regarding study design are minor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- could be the subject of invited plenary presentations at national specialty meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- contains innovative ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- will likely be successfully achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- is sound in terms of its objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- may have some novel aspects, while others underpin or extend existing knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- has areas of minor concern in the experimental design and/or its feasibility.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3 | Good | The proposal:  
  • is satisfactory in terms of its objectives, but may not be successful with all of them  
  • contains some study design problems or flaws  
  • has a number of areas of concern  
  • has relatively little novelty or innovation. |
| 2 | Satisfactory | The proposal:  
  • provides a program of research which will at best, only incrementally advance current knowledge  
  • contains a study design which is inadequate in a number of areas  
  • is not innovative or significant  
  • contains a research plan which does not seem to be feasible in some areas. |
| 1 | Weak or Limited | The proposal:  
  • will not advance current knowledge in the field  
  • contains a study design which is inappropriate in most areas  
  • is not innovative or significant  
  • raises major concerns about the feasibility of the research plan. |
**Criterion 2. Promote effective transfer of research outcomes into health policy and/or practice**

- the quality of the plan for research translation
- plans for promoting the Centre’s activities to the wider community, including where appropriate, for commercial gain
- the involvement of consumers and the community in the planning, implementation and uptake of the research program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Performance Indicator</th>
<th>Category Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- addresses an issue of utmost importance to human health</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- will translate into fundamental outcomes in the science and/or practice of clinical medicine or public health or fundamental changes in health policy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- the published research will be highly influential in the promotion of change in policy and/or practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- has exceptional involvement of consumers and the community in all key project phases: priority-setting; design and development; governance; communication and implementation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 6     | Outstanding           | The proposal:        |
|       |                       | - addresses an issue of major importance to human health |
|       |                       | - is highly likely to translate into fundamental outcomes in the science and/or practice of clinical medicine or public health or fundamental changes in health policy |
|       |                       | - the published research should be very influential in the promotion of change in policy and/or practice |
|       |                       | - has extensive involvement of consumers and the community in all key phases of the project. |

| 5     | Excellent             | The proposal:        |
|       |                       | - addresses an issue of considerable importance to human health |
|       |                       | - is likely to translate into fundamental outcomes in the science and/or practice of clinical medicine or public health or fundamental changes in health policy |
|       |                       | - the published research will be influential in the promotion of change in policy and/or practice |
|       |                       | - has relatively extensive involvement of consumers and the community in all key phases of the project. |

| 4     | Very Good             | The proposal:        |
|       |                       | - addresses an issue of some importance to human health |
|       |                       | - has potential to translate into fundamental outcomes in the science and/or practice of clinical medicine or public health or fundamental changes in health policy |
|       |                       | - the published research may be influential in the promotion of change in policy and/or practice |
|       |                       | - has some involvement of consumers and the community in all key phases of the project. |

| 3     | Good                  | The proposal:        |
|       |                       | - addresses an issue of some concern to human health |
|       |                       | - published research may be influential in the promotion of change in policy and/or practice |
|       |                       | - has some involvement of consumers and the community but not in all key phases of the project. |
| 2 | Satisfactory | The proposal:  
- addresses an issue of only marginal concern to human health  
- only follows behind previously well documented and studied concepts or previously well used approaches  
- published research is unlikely to be influential in the promotion of change in policy and/or practice  
- there are concerns about successful completion  
- has little involvement of consumers and the community. |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Weak or Limited | The proposal:  
- does not address an issue of concern to human health  
- successful completion is unlikely  
- publication of research won’t be influential in the promotion of change in policy and/or practice  
- has virtually no involvement of consumers and the community. |
 Criterion 3. Develop the health and medical research workforce by providing opportunities to advance the training of new researchers, particularly those with a capacity for independent research and future leadership roles

- strategy to generate new researcher capability, mentoring and encouragement of further career development
- clarity of measures for integrating new researchers into the teams including mentoring strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Performance Indicator</th>
<th>Category Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 7      | Exceptional              | The proposal:  
• includes an exceptional strategy to generate new researcher capability, mentoring and career development  
• includes impressive measures for integrating new researchers into teams. |
| 6      | Outstanding              | The proposal:  
• includes a well-articulated strategy to generate new researcher capability, mentoring and career development  
• includes well-articulated measures for integrating new researchers into teams. |
| 5      | Excellent                | The proposal:  
• includes a persuasive strategy to generate new researcher capability, mentoring and career development  
• includes articulated measures for integrating new researchers into teams. |
| 4      | Very Good                | The proposal:  
• includes a sound strategy to generate new researcher capability, mentoring and career development  
• includes articulated measures that should integrate new researchers into teams. |
| 3      | Good                     | The proposal:  
• includes a strategy that should generate new researcher capability, mentoring and career development  
• includes few measures to integrate new researchers into teams. |
| 2      | Satisfactory             | The proposal:  
• includes a weak strategy that should generate new researcher capability, mentoring and career development  
• has few viable measures to integrate new researchers into teams. |
| 1      | Weak or Limited          | The proposal:  
• does not articulate a viable strategy to generate new researcher capability, mentoring and career development  
• has few if any measures to integrate new researchers into teams. |
Criterion 4. Facilitate collaboration

Teams are required to outline past and/or proposed collaborative arrangements within the applicant team, and address the means whereby the collaborators will ensure the cohesive running of the research during its funding period, including but not limited to:

- likely effectiveness of working collaborations and intellectual exchange
- the relationship with other groups in the particular field of research
- integration and cohesiveness of the team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Performance Indicator</th>
<th>Category Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• would be highly effective in promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchange</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has very strong relationships with other researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has an exceptional degree of team integration and cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• clearly articulates the roles and responsibilities within the team for achieving the objectives of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• would be highly effective in promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has strong relationships with other researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has a very high degree of team integration and cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• articulates the roles and responsibilities within the team for achieving the objectives of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• would be effective in promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has good relationships with other researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has a high degree of team integration and cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• articulates the roles and responsibilities for most of the team for achieving the objectives of the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• would be reasonably effective in promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchange</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has positive relationships with other researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has a good degree of team integration and cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• articulates the roles and responsibilities of some of the team for achieving the objectives of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• would have some effectiveness in promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has some viable relationships with other researchers, although weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has some degree of team integration and cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• requires further clarification of the roles and responsibilities within the team for achieving the objectives of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• may be effective in promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has little evidence of relationships with other researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has minimal team integration and cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• requires further clarification of the roles and responsibilities within the team for achieving the objectives of the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weak or Limited</td>
<td>The proposal:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>• raises doubts about its effectiveness in promoting working collaborations and intellectual exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has no evidence of relationships with other researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• has little or no evidence of team integration and cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• does not define the roles and responsibilities of team members for achieving the objectives of the project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Criterion 5. Record of research and translation achievement – relative to opportunity**

This criterion assesses whether the previous research and translation experience of applicants demonstrates that the team has the appropriate mix of research skills and experience to deliver the proposed project.

Record of achievement encompasses the national and international standing of the applicants based upon their research and translation achievements, relative to opportunity, including but not limited to:

- research outputs – most recent significant publications; publications that illustrate innovation and significance to past accomplishments; outcome and impact of previous research achievements, including effects on health care practices or policy
- contribution to discipline or area – invitations to speak at international meetings, editorial appointments, specialist and high level health policy committee appointments
- evidence of research translation, such as: influence on clinical/health policy or practice; provision of influential advice to health authorities and government; impacts on health via the broad dissemination of research outcomes e.g. via mainstream media, the community or industry involvement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Performance Indicator</th>
<th>Category Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 7     | Exceptional           | Relative to opportunity, the applicants:  
- are generally the most outstanding translation-oriented researchers in the country for their peers/cohort  
- have very strong records of research and translation achievements  
- have strong international reputations or are well on the way to developing them  
- hold leadership positions in highly regarded scientific or professional societies  
- are highly recognised for their contribution to their field of research, including those promoting knowledge translation. |
| 6     | Outstanding           | Relative to opportunity, the applicants:  
- have a record of translation-oriented research achievement that places them in the top 10-20% of peers/cohort  
- have a growing international reputation  
- have established a position of leadership, or are emerging leaders, in their field  
- hold leadership positions in well regarded scientific or professional societies  
- are well recognised for their contribution to their field of research, including those promoting knowledge translation. |
| 5     | Excellent             | Relative to opportunity, the applicants:  
- have a record of translation-oriented research achievement, that places them well above average for their peers/cohort  
- have a growing national reputation and their research appears frequently at national meetings  
- are well recognised for their contribution to their field of research, including those promoting knowledge translation. |
| 4     | Very Good             | Relative to opportunity:  
- the applicants have a solid record of translation-oriented research achievement  
- one or more of the CIs has an existing or emerging national reputation  
- the applicants have made valued contributions to their field of research, including those promoting knowledge translation. |
| 3     | Good                  | Relative to opportunity:  
- the applicants have a moderate record of translation-oriented research achievement  
- one or more of the CIs has an existing or emerging national reputation, albeit in a niche area  
- the applicants have made contributions to their field of research, including those promoting knowledge translation. |
|   | Satisfactory | Relative to opportunity, the applicants:  
|---|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 |              | • have a weak record of translation-oriented research achievement  
|   |              | • have published a number of works in a field relevant to this application in the last 5 years, but many have been less productive than might reasonably be expected  
|   |              | • are deficient in some areas of expertise that will be required to successfully complete the proposed research  
|   |              | • have limited track records in the field of the proposed research, including those promoting knowledge translation. |
|   | Weak or Limited | Relative to opportunity, the applicants: |
| 1 |              | • are not productive in a research translation sense to any significant extent in relevant fields  
|   |              | • have not published more than a few works in relevant other fields of research  
|   |              | • are heavily underpowered in terms of relevant expertise required to successfully complete the research program. |
Appendix E - 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 F – 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 G – NHMRC Relative to Opportunity and Career Disruption Policy

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

- NHMRC peer review, and
- eligibility to apply for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants.

NHMRC’s objective is to support the best Australian health and medical research and the best researchers, at all career stages. NHMRC seeks to ensure that researchers with a variety of career experiences and those who have experienced pregnancy or a major illness/injury or have caring responsibilities, are not disadvantaged in applying for NHMRC grants.

Policy approach
NHMRC considers Relative to Opportunity to mean that assessment processes should accurately assess an applicant's track record and associated productivity relative to stage of career, including considering whether productivity and contribution are commensurate with the opportunities available to the applicant. It also means that applicants with career disruptions should not be disadvantaged (in terms of years since they received their PhD) when determining their eligibility for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants and that their Career Disruptions should be considered when their applications are being peer reviewed.

In alignment with NHMRC’s Principles of Peer Review, particularly the principles of fairness and transparency, the following additional principles further 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 funding support available through NHMRC grant schemes 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 sectors such as industry may enhance research outcomes for both individuals and teams.

The above principles frame NHMRC’s approach to the assessment of a researcher’s track record during expert review of grant applications and eligibility of applicants applying for Emerging Leadership Investigator Grants. NHMRC expects that those who provide expert assessment during peer review will give clear and explicit attention to these principles to identify the highest quality research and researchers to be funded. NHMRC recognises that life circumstances can be very varied and therefore it is not possible to implement a formulaic approach to applying Relative to Opportunity and Career Disruption considerations during peer review.

Relative to Opportunity considerations during peer review of applications for funding
During peer review of applications, circumstances considered under the Relative to Opportunity Policy include, but are not limited to:

- amount of time spent as an active researcher
- available resources, including situations where research is being conducted in remote or isolated communities
- building relationships of trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities over long periods that can impact on track record and productivity
- clinical, administrative or teaching workload
- relocation of an applicant and his/her research laboratory or clinical practice setting or other similar circumstances that impact on research productivity
- for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, community obligations including ‘sorry business’
- the typical performance of researchers in the research field in question
• research outputs and productivity noting time employed in other sectors; for example there might be a reduction in publications when employed in sectors such as industry
• carer responsibilities (that do not come under the Career Disruption policy below)
• calamities, such as pandemics, bushfires or cyclones.

Career Disruption considerations during peer review and eligibility to apply 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.

The period of career disruption may be used:

• to determine an applicant’s eligibility for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant
• to allow for the inclusion of additional track record information for assessment of an application
• for consideration by peer reviewers.

To be considered for the purposes of eligibility and peer review, a period of Career Disruption is defined as:

• a continuous absence from work for 90 calendar days or more, and/or
• continuous, long-term, part-time employment (with defined %FTE) due to circumstances classified as Career Disruption, with the absence amounting to a total of 90 calendar days or more.¹

NOTE: For the purposes of peer review, circumstances not meeting the requirements for consideration under career disruption, may be considered under relative to opportunity.

Career Disruption and eligibility to apply for Investigator Grants
A Career Disruption can affect an applicant’s eligibility to apply for an Emerging Leadership Investigator Grant. For such grants, the 10-year time limit on the number of years post-PhD may be extended commensurate with the period of the Career Disruption.

¹ For example, an applicant who is employed at 0.8 FTE due to childcare responsibilities would need to continue this for at least 450 calendar days to achieve a Career Disruption of 90 calendar days.
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.
## Relevant industry outputs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of experience/output</th>
<th>IP</th>
<th>Collaboration with an industry partner</th>
<th>Established a start-up company</th>
<th>Product to market</th>
<th>Clinical trials or regulatory activities</th>
<th>Industry participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **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 and actively collaborating | • Incorporated an entity and established a board  
• Has raised moderate (>1m) funding from commercial sources or government schemes that required industry co-participation (e.g. ARC Linkage, NHMRC Development Grant) | • Generated regulatory standard data set  
• Successful regulatory submission to Therapeutic Goods Administration or European Conformity (CE) marking  
• Medical device: applications for pre-market approval | • Phase I underway or completed  
• Protocol development  
• Patient recruitment | • Advisory or consultancy role with a national company |
| 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 |