



Joint communiqué

Towards a more trusted, collaborative and connected research system

Landmark joint meeting of the ARC Board and NHMRC Council

27 August 2026 | Canberra

The Australian Research Council (ARC) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) met in Canberra on 12 August 2026 for a landmark joint workshop bringing together the ARC Board and NHMRC Council, along with the CEOs and other senior officials from the agencies. Given NHMRC Council's close working relationship with the Australian Medical Research Advisory Board (AMRAB), AMRAB members and the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing also participated in the workshop.

At a time of rapid technological change, growing public expectations and increasing pressure on research funding systems globally, participants reaffirmed the central role of research in improving the economic and social prosperity, health, wellbeing and resilience of Australia's communities. The workshop focused on three priorities that will help shape and support the future of Australian research: trust in research, assessment and selection reform, and strengthened collaboration across the research sector.

Strengthening trust in research

Participants agreed that public trust is fundamental to releasing the full benefits of Australia's research system. Trust is earned through research excellence and integrity, but requires genuine involvement of communities, transparency and clear communication about how research benefits society.

There was strong support for a more proactive and holistic approach to building trust, including working with consumers, community leaders and people with lived experience to help shape research and communicate its value. Participants emphasised the importance of sharing compelling stories of research outcomes and impact, communicating openly about uncertainty and risk, meeting expectations around research security, and strengthening public understanding of the safeguards that underpin the integrity of Australian research. A better understanding of the drivers of trust, mistrust, misinformation and disinformation was also identified as an important priority.

Supporting fair, effective and sustainable assessment

The workshop recognised growing challenges facing research assessment and peer review, including increasing application volumes and pressure on reviewers. Challenges posed by rapid technology changes, including artificial intelligence, to peer review capacity and the efficient operation of grant funding schemes were also recognised. Participants discussed how assessment will need to adapt and agreed that assessment systems must continue to support excellence while remaining fair, transparent, fit for purpose and sustainable.

There was broad support for reform guided by principles. These principles include excellence, fairness, transparency, proportionality and sustainability; recognising a diverse range of research contributions; minimising bias; encouraging collaboration; and ensuring assessment approaches are aligned with the objectives of different funding schemes. Participants suggested funders work with universities, medical research institutes and other research organisations on a framework for addressing increasing application volumes, noting that increasing volumes was placing pressure on funders as well as institutions.

Participants also recognised the need for ongoing innovation, collaboration and evaluation, with commitments to sharing learning among national and international research funders, institutions and the broader sector as assessment systems evolve.

Working together on big challenges

Participants identified significant opportunities for deeper collaboration across the research system to address complex national challenges that cannot be solved by any discipline, sector or organisation alone. Key areas discussed included healthy ageing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing, pandemic preparedness, housing and health, nutrition and agriculture, climate change, regional and remote Australia, and emerging technologies.

Participants agreed that future collaborative initiatives should be aligned to government priorities and driven by issues of national importance, bring together diverse expertise, involve communities and end users from the outset, and create stronger links between research, policy and practice. There was a shared commitment to work more closely with governments, industry, philanthropy, communities and other partners (including international) to maximise the impact of Australian research.

To support these ambitions, ARC and NHMRC announced a joint commitment of \$50 million over 5 years, with each agency contributing \$25 million, to support collaborative funding opportunities that bring together researchers across disciplines and generate benefits across a range of sectors. The agencies will now work together to develop priority initiatives and funding mechanisms that aim to maximise the impact of this investment for Australia.

Looking ahead

The workshop reaffirmed the shared commitment of ARC and NHMRC to a research system that is trusted, secure, inclusive, innovative and responsive to national and international challenges. Participants agreed that the opportunities before Australia are too important to tackle in isolation. By working together and alongside the communities we serve, Australia can strengthen public confidence in research, support a thriving research workforce, and deliver outcomes that improve lives now and for future generations.

Professor Ute Roessner AM
CEO, ARC

Professor Peter Shergold AC
Chair, ARC Board

Professor Steve Wesselingh
CEO, NHMRC

Professor Caroline Homer AO
Chair, NHMRC