

Appendix A — Terms of reference

Gain-of-function Research Review Terms of reference

Background

'Gain of function' is a term used to describe a change to any organism through any process that causes it to acquire a new function. Certain gain-of-function experiments have raised concerns because of their potential to increase the danger posed to humans by an infectious agent, such as a virus. These concerns have been heightened by uncertainty about the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic and suggestions that the SARS-CoV-2 virus may have been created in a laboratory as the product of gain-of-function research.

The Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, has asked the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to undertake a review of gain-of-function research in Australia.

Purpose

The purpose of the review is to report to the Minister on:

- the definition of gain-of-function research, with particular reference to research of this nature that could pose a threat to human health
- any gain-of-function research that could increase the harmfulness of an infectious agent to humans that has been funded or conducted by the Australian Government or its agencies over the last 10 years
- the regulatory framework that controls such research in Australia, and how it compares with frameworks in other relevant countries.

Timeframe

The review will report to the Minister in December 2021.