



NHMRC Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Strategy 2026

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Foreword

The 2025–26 financial year saw the release of two major reports, commissioned by the Australian Government, that respectively set out long-term visions for Australia’s broader research capability and for its health and medical research (HMR) capability.

The [Strategic Examination of Research and Development](#) includes findings and recommendations related to: the focus and scale of research, development and innovation (RD&I) impact; foundational research; RD&I business incentives; investment and capital; workforce capability; and government as an exemplar.

The [National HMR Strategy](#) includes findings within the following focus areas:

- Strengthen a vibrant research system that delivers for the nation
- Accelerate Indigenous-led research and its translation to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ health and wellbeing
- Deliver high-value care through the timely translation and implementation of research findings into healthcare policy and practice
- Drive impact through strengthened research development and commercialisation
- Maximise the benefits of advanced technologies and be ready for future challenges.

The HMR Strategy also highlights the importance of system enablers such as workforce, funding, research infrastructure, and data and digital technology.

Notably, both reports recommend the development of a research workforce plan/strategy.

The issues raised and recommendations made by these two reports suggest that future monitoring, evaluation and learning (henceforth, ‘evaluation’) activities undertaken by NHMRC may be required to contribute to whole-of-system issues such as longitudinal monitoring of the NHMRC-funded workforce, tracking of knowledge flows across the RD&I system, and demonstrating that public investment is delivering enduring health, social and economic value.

The 2025–26 financial year also saw the release of the [Australian Centre for Evaluation’s \(ACE’s\) Strengthening Evaluation in the Australian Government Action Plan 2026–2030](#), [Commonwealth Evaluation Maturity Model](#) and [State of Evaluation in the Australian Government 2026](#) report.

These resources provide valuable guidance for NHMRC’s evaluation capability development and are the primary drivers of the development of the present strategy, which encompasses and replaces NHMRC’s [2021 Evaluation Strategy](#).

Prue Torrance

Chief Executive Officer (a/g)
NHMRC

Purpose

The primary purpose of this strategy is to guide the activities of NHMRC's operational staff, executive, Council and Principal Committees with respect to strengthening NHMRC's evaluation capability. Its secondary purpose is to inform the Australian public, elected representatives, government departments and agencies, and other NHMRC stakeholders about how NHMRC is using evaluation to increase the agency's efficiency and effectiveness.

As noted in the Foreword, this strategy revises and supersedes NHMRC's 2021 [Evaluation Strategy](#) and takes account of key changes in NHMRC's environment with respect to evaluation, including the publication of the:

- National HMR Strategy 2026–2036 (May 2026)
- Strategic Examination of R&D (March 2026)
- Commonwealth Evaluation Maturity Model (December 2025).

Collectively, these documents provide long-term guidance to NHMRC about what to evaluate, how to evaluate and how to develop the agency's evaluation capability.

What is monitoring, evaluation and learning?

Monitoring, evaluation and learning are evidence-creating activities used by NHMRC to inform policy design and program management, and to enable continuous improvement, accountability and informed decision-making. For NHMRC:

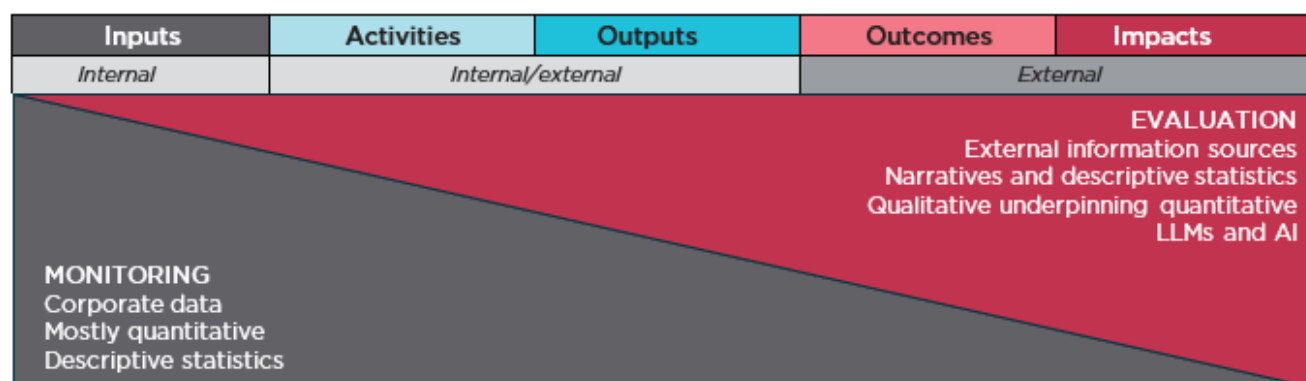
- *Monitoring* involves the ongoing collection and reporting of routine data about the performance and progress of policies and programs across different stages of their development and implementation
- *Evaluation* involves the use of data to enable the systematic and objective assessment of the design, implementation or results of policies and programs
- *Learning* involves the use of data and evaluation to answer questions about policy and program design, implementation or performance.

As shown in [Figure 1](#), monitoring and evaluation are not discrete activities but occur along a continuum that spans the agency's inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. At the input and activity stages, monitoring is predominantly an internal function, relying on corporate sources of mostly quantitative information, and reporting using descriptive statistics.

When the focus is on outputs, outcomes and impacts, monitoring is progressively replaced by evaluation activities that are increasingly external in focus and that draw on a broader range of (often external) information sources that provide qualitative information, narratives and descriptive analysis.

Emerging methods such as large language models (LLMs) and artificial intelligence (AI) are now enabling the generation of quantitative findings based upon large amounts of qualitative information.

Figure 1. Continuum of monitoring and evaluation activities



Legislative requirements and guidance

NHMRC is subject to a number of legislative requirements relevant to evaluation, including those set out within the:

- [National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992](#)
- [Auditor-General Act 1997](#)
- [Public Service Act 1999](#)
- [Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013](#)
- [Department of Finance RMG No. 131](#) (2015)
- [Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles](#) (2024)
- [Cabinet](#) and [Budget](#) processes.

NHMRC's evaluation activities are also guided or informed by the:

- RAND Australia [Design and development of an evaluation framework for the NHMRC](#) (2019)
- Productivity Commission [Indigenous Evaluation Strategy](#) (2020)
- CSIRO [Impact Evaluation Guide](#) (2024)
- Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) [Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Strategy](#) (2024).

What NHMRC evaluates

Logic model

A logic model articulates – within the context provided by an entity's overarching objective – the relationship between the inputs or investments received by the entity to support its activities, the immediate outputs of those activities, and the later-stage outcomes and ultimate impacts that the activities are intended to generate. Logic models also articulate how each stage of this process may be measured and are thus an essential tool for evaluation.

Logic models may be accompanied by a theory of change, which articulates the causal connections that are understood to exist between the logic model stages.

A logic model for NHMRC at the whole-of-agency level is presented in [Figure 2](#) and described in more detail below. Importantly, any specific evaluation requires its own dedicated logic model, so the logic model shown below should be understood as indicative rather than functional.

Figure 2. NHMRC logic model

OBJECTIVE: to raise the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia				
Internal to NHMRC		Post-award/release	External to NHMRC	
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
<i>Before each scheme or work program is allocated a budget</i>	<i>Before grant money is provided or health advice is released</i>	<i>Before the final report is provided or after health advice is released</i>	<i>Before health and wellbeing have been improved</i>	<i>After health and wellbeing have been improved</i>
Inputs include:	Activities include:	Outputs include:	Outcomes include:	Impacts include:
Financial - NHMRC's departmental appropriation - MREA annual appropriation - Other administered funds (including MRFF) Material - Staff (NHMRC and contract) - Physical infrastructure - ICT infrastructure Data and Information - Data assets - Information assets Social - Social licence to operate - Relationships with key stakeholders Corporate services - Human resources support - ICT support - Risk management - Property management - Financial management - Administration of Principal Committees - Grant management systems - Protective security	Investment - Development of scheme guidelines - Identification of gaps for targeted and priority funding - Funding agreements with partners - Applications received - Peer review and development of recommendations - Grant administration - Committee meetings - Development and review of policies Translation - Development and approval of guidelines for clinical practice, public and environmental health - Issuance of public statements - Research Translation Centre accreditation - Committee meetings Integrity - Development of ethics and integrity codes and guidelines - Promoting research quality - Committee meetings - Administering Institution applications assessment - IACR monitoring and evaluation - Post-award compliance monitoring	- NHMRC grants awarded - MRFF or partner grants awarded - Funding partnerships formed - Guidelines released - Media and promotional activities held - Translation Centres accredited - Research ethics and integrity guidance documents released - Precautionary and consequential actions in research integrity and post-award	- Increased innovation, reduced administrative burden, increased opportunities for researchers at all career stages - Research capacity increased - New knowledge and skills - New processes, materials and technologies - Publications - Trained and educated researchers - Changes to clinical practice, policies and health systems - Patents and licensing - Contracts and consultancies - Startup and spinout companies - Company acquisition - New products and services - Improved ethical behaviour in HMR - Policy development and discussion in the HMR sector	- Reduced mortality and morbidity - Improvements in health - Improvements in health system efficiency - Improvements to economic, social and environmental wellbeing

Objectives

NHMRC's key overarching objective – as stated within NHMRC's Act – is to raise the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia. The Act states that the agency is to do this by:

- inquiring into, issuing guidelines, and advising the Commonwealth, States, Territories and community on matters relating to:
 - the improvement of health
 - the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease
 - the provision of health care
 - public health research and medical research
 - ethical issues relating to health
- making recommendations to the Minister on expenditure on public health research and training; and on medical research and training.

Inputs

Inputs are the resources NHMRC has available to direct toward doing its work. Key inputs for NHMRC include:

Financial – NHMRC's departmental appropriation, Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA) annual appropriation, and other administered funds, including the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF)

Material – Staff (NHMRC and contract), physical infrastructure, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure

Data and information – Data assets, information assets

Social – NHMRC's social licence to operate, and relationships with key stakeholders

Corporate services – Human resources support, ICT support, risk, property, financial and grants management systems, administration of Principal Committees, protective security.

Activities

NHMRC's Corporate Plan groups NHMRC's business activities under the strategic themes of Investment, Translation and Integrity.

Investment

NHMRC invests in high-quality research and builds research capability and capacity through a variety of funding schemes. Business activities related to this challenge include: development of scheme guidelines; identification of gaps for targeted and priority funding; funding agreements with partners; receipt and processing of grant applications; peer review and the formation of recommendations; post-award grant administration; and the development and review of policies.

Translation

NHMRC supports HMR translation into better health outcomes through a range of activities including: development and approval of guidelines for clinical practice, public and environmental health; issuance of public statements; and Research Translation Centre accreditation.

Integrity

NHMRC promotes the highest standards of HMR ethics and integrity through a range of activities, including: development of ethics and integrity codes and guidelines; promoting research quality; Administering Institution applications assessment; institutional and post-award compliance monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

Outputs

Outputs are the immediate and direct products resulting from NHMRC activities. These are products generated by NHMRC staff, often involving staff in other organisations, and include:

Investment – NHMRC grants awarded; MRFF or partner grants awarded; funding partnerships formed

Translation – Guidelines released; media and promotional activities held; Translation Centres accredited

Integrity – Research ethics and integrity guidance documents released; precautionary and consequential actions implemented in research integrity and post-award.

Outcomes

Outcomes concern what is done with NHMRC's outputs by parties external to NHMRC, and the effects that NHMRC's activities produce on the HMR sector. These include:

Investment – Increased innovation, reduced administrative burden, increased opportunities for researchers at all career stages; increased research capacity; new knowledge and skills; new processes, materials and technologies; publications; and trained and educated researchers

Translation – Changes to clinical practice, policies and health systems; patents and licensing; contracts and consultancies; startup and spinout companies; company acquisition; new products and services

Integrity – Improved ethical behaviour in the HMR sector; policy development and discussion in the HMR sector.

Impacts

NHMRC's activities are ultimately intended to lead to improved well-being through increases in the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia. This latter objective may be understood to be realised directly through reduced mortality and morbidity and improvements in health and wellbeing. It may also occur indirectly as a result of improvements to economic, social and environmental wellbeing.

A key issue when considering impacts is to what extent these impacts can be claimed by NHMRC. This is because NHMRC is almost always in a position of contributing to impacts that occur at some distance in time and space from its own activities and that may be attributed to the work of several parties.

In order to resolve such issues, when evaluating its own impacts NHMRC considers:

- *The counterfactual*: the situation that would have occurred in the absence of NHMRC's activities, recognising that other (non-NHMRC-funded) parties might have undertaken the research
- *Attribution*: which other parties were actually involved in enabling or delivering the impact, and what their proportional contribution was
- *Sensitivity*: how sensitive the outcomes of impact analyses are to the underlying assumptions of those analyses, and how credible these assumptions and outcomes are likely to be to NHMRC's stakeholders.

Grant program

Historically, most of NHMRC's evaluation activities have related to the agency's grant program. As set out within NHMRC's [grant program overview](#), the agency's objectives when funding HMR are to:

- ensure that Australia undertakes the research needed to meet current and future health challenges, improving population health, patient outcomes and the effectiveness and efficiency of the health system
- ensure that Australia has the research capability and capacity needed to underpin a world-class national health care system
- support research of unique importance to Australia that is unlikely to be undertaken elsewhere.

Within the area of investment, evaluations related to the grant program can each be directed at a different level of activity such as grant management, grant schemes, the entire grant program and NHMRC's overarching objective. These evaluation areas are depicted in [Figure 3](#) and are each described further below.

Figure 3. Grant program evaluation types

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
1. Grant management		3. Whole-of-program		
	2. Grant schemes		4. NHMRC's objective	

Grant management

NHMRC's monitoring and evaluation activities focused on grant management may relate to any aspect of grant program administration, including:

- development, maintenance and ongoing support for the grant management system
- provision of grant management services to other agencies
- managing and responding to inquiries from grant applicants, grantees and peer reviewers
- receipt of applications
- managing active grants
- policies related to administering institution status
- monitoring compliance with NHMRC's policies and requirements.

NHMRC's Institutional Annual Compliance Report (IACR) is an example of a grant management focused evaluation.

Grant schemes

Each individual grant scheme has its own objectives and intended outcomes. Grant scheme evaluations may focus on the structure or outcomes of the grant scheme itself, on specific grant scheme policies, on the process of running grant scheme rounds – including application processes and peer review – or even on particular grants.

Post Implementation Reviews (PIRs) are a standard feature of NHMRC grant scheme administration and are usually based upon the results of surveys of applicants and peer reviewers.

For select grant schemes, evaluations may also focus on the identification of topics for targeted and priority funding. Periodically, evaluations are undertaken related to cross-cutting components of grant schemes such as [peer review](#) and [assessment criteria](#).

Whole-of-program

A key purpose of evaluations undertaken at the level of the whole grant program is to determine how effectively the program is supporting capability and capacity building, and health-system priorities/requirements. Such evaluations may also be undertaken to provide an evidence base for future revisions to the structure of the program itself.

NHMRC periodically undertakes or commissions evaluations of the program's longer-term outputs and outcomes. Examples include [Measuring Up](#) (2018) and the [Evaluation of NHMRC funded dementia and diabetes research](#) (2024).

NHMRC's objectives

[Impact Case Studies](#) are NHMRC's primary mechanism for demonstrating NHMRC's success in accomplishing its objectives. The case studies are narratives describing the work of a group of NHMRC-funded researchers and their collaborators within a particular area of HMR, and the successful outcomes of this work. The case studies also describe NHMRC's own agency-level contribution to addressing particular health issues.

Each case study describes the pathways through which a grantee's research was translated and implemented and the outcomes and impacts arising from it. Case study narratives usually encompass a time period of several decades.

The Strategy

NHMRC engages in a broad range of routine evaluation-related activities. These include:

- *Legislative monitoring*: mandatory reports (e.g. Portfolio Budget Statements, Corporate Plan, Annual Report) that cover inputs, outputs, and outcomes
- *Promotional communication and evaluation*: activities aimed at communicating impact and accountability to stakeholders (such as grant scheme outcome factsheets and announcements, Impact Case Studies, [10 of the Best](#), bibliometric studies), Research Excellence Awards, and newsletters like [Tracker and other media](#)

- *Activity-level evaluation*: routinely undertaken activities such as Business Activity Reports, grant scheme PIRs, post-award grant reporting/evaluation, IACRs, and evaluations reported to Council and Principal Committees
- *External evaluations*: occasionally commissioned external reviews or independent evaluations of NHMRC programs to assess long-term outcomes and ensure objectivity.

A primary aim of this Strategy is to improve the quality of these and other monitoring, learning and evaluation-related activities by progressively increasing the agency's level of evaluation maturity.

Vision

As set out within the ACE Maturity Model, the highest level of evaluation maturity occurs when:

... evaluation is embedded into all processes, evaluation resources are prioritised, evaluation evidence is consistently used for program design and decision making, and leadership actively acknowledges the value of evaluation in the work of the agency.

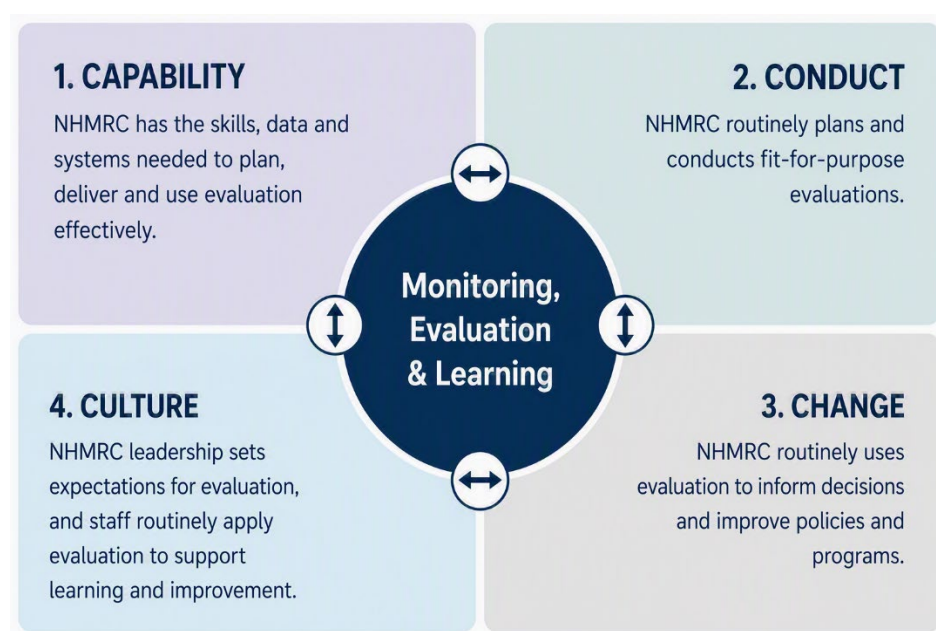
Objectives

The ACE Maturity Model indicates four areas within which maturity should be prioritised. These areas are:

- Evaluation capability (CAPABILITY)
- Evaluation design, planning and delivery (CONDUCT)
- Evaluation use (CHANGE)
- Evaluation culture and leadership (CULTURE).

With the aim of increasing its evaluation maturity, NHMRC will work towards the objectives shown within the Evaluation Cycle in [Figure 4](#):

Figure 4. NHMRC Evaluation Cycle



Actions

To accomplish these objectives and realise NHMRC's vision for monitoring, evaluation and learning, NHMRC will undertake the following priority actions:

1. CAPABILITY

NHMRC has the skills, data and systems needed to plan, deliver and use evaluation effectively

Action 1.1 – Build evaluation literacy and technical skills

Ensure baseline evaluation training for business area staff, provide targeted technical training for staff leading or supporting evaluations, including ethics and culturally safe evaluation.

Action 1.2 – Strengthen access to evaluable data

Formalise partnerships with internal and external data custodians to improve access to high-quality, linked administrative and research data for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

Action 1.3 – Establish enabling systems and tools

Ensure staff have access to fit-for-purpose evaluation tools, data infrastructure and analytical support that enables consistent, ethical and efficient evaluation practice across the agency.

2. CONDUCT

NHMRC routinely plans and conducts fit-for-purpose evaluations

Action 2.1 – Embed evaluation in design and governance

Ensure evaluation planning, including program logics and theories of change, are embedded in the design and governance of new and revised grant schemes, policies and major business activities.

Action 2.2 – Prioritise evaluations strategically

Develop a monitoring, evaluation and learning workplan based upon annual business plans, coordinate, sequence, resource and govern evaluation activity, and prioritise evaluations based on strategic importance, risk, scale, anticipated impacts and system-level learning.

Action 2.3 – Deliver fit-for-purpose evaluations

Deliver evaluations using fit-for-purpose approaches, supported by robust data and analysis, that routinely use logic models and theories of change, and that align with [Commonwealth Evaluation Principles](#) (CEPs).

3. CHANGE

NHMRC routinely uses evaluation to inform decisions and improve policies and programs

Action 3.1 – Use evaluation evidence in decisions

Use evaluation findings to inform and improve all aspects of agency functioning, including grant scheme design, policy development and refinement, operational decisions and risk management, and ensure that evaluations are undertaken in a timely way such that evidence is available to support key decision points.

Action 3.2 – Apply publish-by-default where appropriate

Evaluation outputs are routinely published, subject to ethical, cultural, legal and commercial considerations, to support transparency, sector-wide learning and to ensure that evaluations are conducted to the highest standards and are readily available to staff.

4. CULTURE

NHMRC leadership sets expectations for evaluation, and staff routinely apply evaluation to support learning and improvement

Action 4.1 – Strengthen leadership oversight of evaluation

Ensure senior leadership oversight and guidance of evaluation, the strategy and workplan through regular reporting on progress and findings and discussions involving NHMRC's Council and Principal Committees.

Action 4.2 – Normalise learning from evaluation

Ensure regular internal discussions take place aimed at sharing evaluation insights across NHMRC and with other agencies, focusing on what worked, what did not, and what will change as a result, to embed learning and continuous improvement.

Action 4.3 – Embed evaluation expectations in corporate processes

Ensure evaluations are appropriately resourced and that evaluation expectations are embedded in corporate planning, performance reporting and governance so that evaluation is always business-as-usual and outcomes are clearly linked to organisational objectives.

STRATEGY-ON-A-PAGE: Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Strategy 2026

VISION				
That NHMRC strives to embed evaluation into all processes, evaluation resources are prioritised, evaluation evidence is consistently used for program design and decision making, and leadership actively acknowledges the value of evaluation in the work of the agency.				
AREA	CAPABILITY	CONDUCT	CHANGE	CULTURE
OBJECTIVES	NHMRC has the skills, data and systems needed to plan, deliver and use evaluation effectively	NHMRC routinely plans and conducts fit-for-purpose evaluations	NHMRC routinely uses evaluation to inform decisions and improve policies and programs	NHMRC leadership sets expectations for evaluation, and staff routinely apply evaluation to support learning and improvement
ACTIVITIES	Action 1.1 – Build evaluation literacy and technical skills Ensure baseline evaluation training for business area staff, and provide targeted technical training for staff leading or supporting evaluations, including ethics and culturally safe evaluation. Action 1.2 – Strengthen access to evaluable data Formalise partnerships with internal and external data custodians to improve access to high-quality, linked administrative and research data for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Action 1.3 – Establish enabling systems and tools Ensure staff have access to fit-for-purpose evaluation tools, data infrastructure and analytical support that enables consistent, ethical and efficient evaluation practice across the agency.	Action 2.1 – Embed evaluation in design and governance Ensure evaluation planning, including program logics and theories of change, are embedded in the design and governance of new and revised grant schemes, policies and major business activities. Action 2.2 – Prioritise evaluations strategically Develop a monitoring, evaluation and learning workplan based upon annual business plans, coordinate, sequence, resource and govern evaluation activity, and prioritise evaluations based on strategic importance, risk, scale, anticipated impacts and system-level learning. Action 2.3 – Deliver fit-for-purpose evaluations Deliver evaluations using fit-for-purpose approaches, supported by robust data and analysis, that routinely use logic models and theories of change, and that align with CEPs.	Action 3.1 – Use evaluation evidence in decisions Use evaluation findings to inform and improve all aspects of agency functioning, including grant scheme design, policy development and refinement, operational decisions and risk management, and ensure that evaluations are undertaken in a timely way such that evidence is available to support key decision points. Action 3.2 – Apply publish-by-default where appropriate Evaluation outputs are routinely published, subject to ethical, cultural, legal and commercial considerations, to support transparency, sector-wide learning and to ensure that evaluations are conducted to the highest standards and are readily available to staff.	Action 4.1 – Strengthen leadership oversight of evaluation Ensure senior leadership oversight and guidance of evaluation, the strategy and workplan through regular reporting on progress and findings and discussions involving NHMRC's Council and Principal Committees. Action 4.2 – Normalise learning from evaluation Ensure regular internal discussions take place aimed at sharing evaluation insights across NHMRC and with other agencies, to embed learning and continuous improvement. Action 4.3 – Embed evaluation expectations in corporate processes Ensure evaluations are appropriately resourced and that evaluation expectations are embedded in corporate planning, performance reporting and governance so evaluation is always business-as-usual.