



Australian Government

National Health and Medical Research Council



NHMRC Research Translation Strategy 2022–2025

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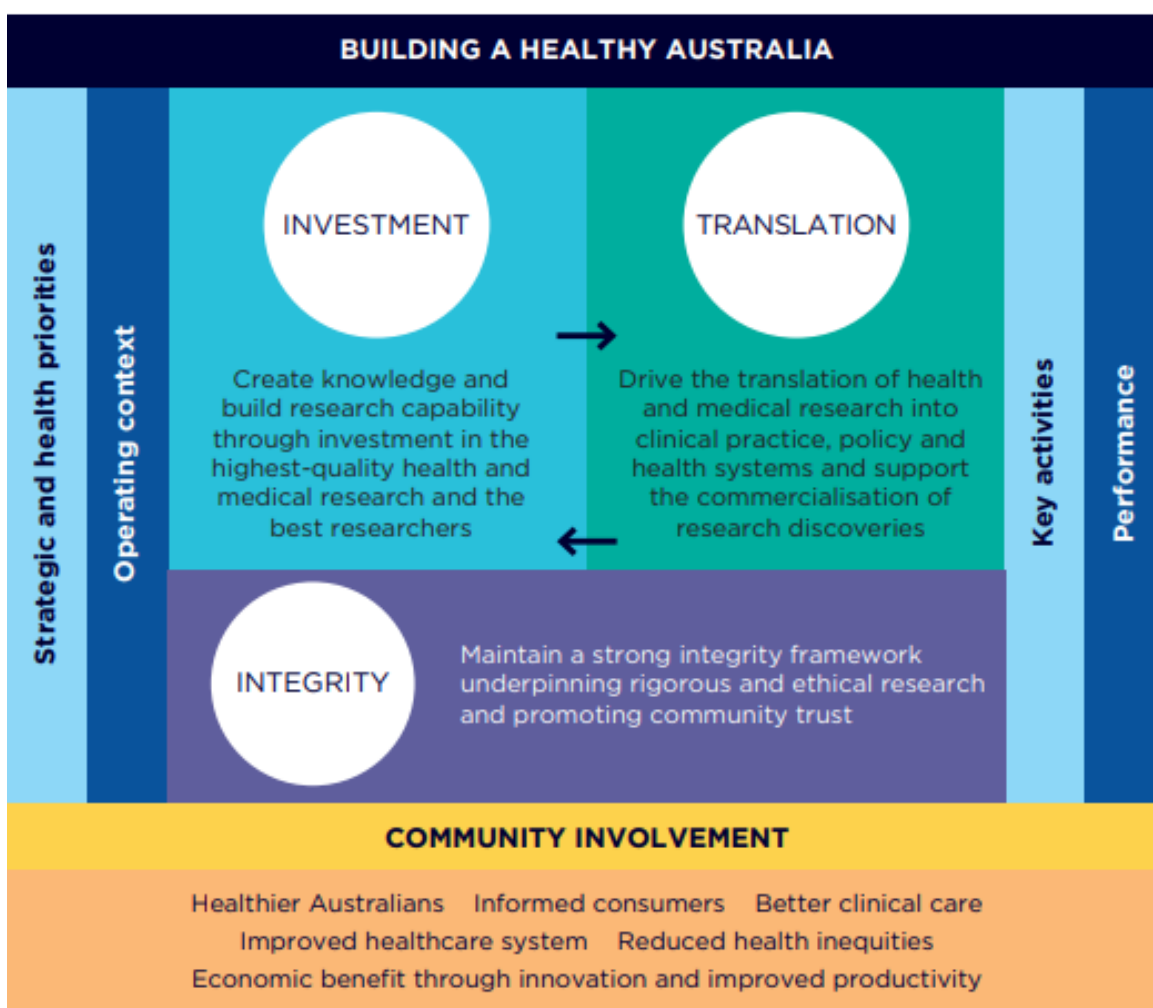
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Introduction

NHMRC’s mission is *building a healthy Australia*. Ultimately, this is the outcome that NHMRC seeks from its activities.

NHMRC’s three strategic themes – investment, translation and integrity – reflect NHMRC’s legislated functions to fund health and medical research and training, to issue guidelines and to advise on improving health outcomes, through prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease and the provision of health care. They also reflect NHMRC’s role in promoting the highest standards of ethics and integrity in health and medical research (Figure 1).

Figure 1. NHMRC’s Strategy for Health and Medical Research (NHMRC Corporate Plan 2022-2023)



NHMRC has developed this Research Translation Strategy to describe how we will drive the translation of health and medical research into health-related policy and practice within and outside the health system for the improvement of individual and population health.

1. Research translation

1.1 What is research translation?

Research translation may also be referred to as ‘knowledge translation’, ‘knowledge transfer’, ‘knowledge exchange’, ‘knowledge mobilisation’ and ‘research implementation’.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined ‘knowledge translation’ as ‘the synthesis, exchange, and application of knowledge by relevant stakeholders to accelerate the benefits of global and local innovation in strengthening health systems and improving people’s health.’¹ The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) define it as ‘a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically-sound application of knowledge to improve the health of Canadians, provide more effective health services and products and strengthen the health care system.’² CIHR’s most recent Strategic Plan (2021–2031) uses the term ‘knowledge mobilisation’ as ‘an umbrella term that includes a wide range of activities related to both the production and use of research results.’³

Similarly, various frameworks have been developed to assist researchers and end-users in the translation of research.⁴ This includes the Knowledge to Action⁵ process that has been used by CIHR. NHMRC has considered concepts in these frameworks in developing this strategy.

The creation of knowledge does not, of itself, lead to widespread implementation of that research and improvements to health. The knowledge must be translated for the benefits to flow and have impact.

At NHMRC, research translation is fundamentally about activities that use the results of research to inform, for example, the next stage of research, new research or research re-design, public policy, health-related systems and practice, or support the commercialisation of research discoveries, for the improvement of individual and population health. All types of research knowledge are valuable and can be translated (e.g. biomedical, clinical, public health and health services research).

Translation is complex and is sometimes referred to as a ‘translation pathway’ from research through to implementation into policy and practice. Translation can occur at any stage and can be complex; strategies and activities may need to be modified repeatedly along this pathway.

A range of activities contribute to research translation, for example, the synthesis of evidence, development of evidence-based guidelines, and the identification, testing and introduction of systems, practices, policies and devices (as well as elimination or disinvestment in those that are not effective).

¹ Cited in, Rapid response: knowledge translation mechanisms to translate evidence into public health policy in emergencies. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2021 <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/341972>, accessed 6/12/2022

² CIHR, <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29529.html>, accessed 1/3/2021

³ CIHR, Strategic Plan 2021-2031, <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/documents/cihr-strategic-plan-2021-2031-en.pdf>, accessed 2/3/2021

⁴ A review of a number of different research translation frameworks is at: Milat AJ, Li B. Narrative review of frameworks for translating research evidence into policy and practice. *Public Health Res Pract.* 2017; 27(1): e2711704, <https://www.phrp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PHRP2711704.pdf>, accessed 8/7/2022

⁵ Graham ID, Logan J, Harrison MB, Straus SE, Tetroe J, Caswell W, Robinsons N. Lost in knowledge translation: time for a map? *J Contin Educ Health Prof.* 2006; 26(1): 13–24, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/chp.47>, accessed 8/7/2022

1.2 Context

While much of the translation of health and medical research will occur within the health system, it is not restricted to that setting. There are many non-medical factors – social and environmental determinants – that influence our health. WHO describes the social determinants of health as ‘the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.’⁶ Translation of health and medical research may occur, for example, in the education, justice, planning and environmental sectors. Accordingly, in this strategy, we refer to the translation of research into health-related systems, practice and policies, to encompass these other sectors.

1.3 What is NHMRC’s role in research translation?

Achieving impact through the translation of high-quality research evidence is rarely possible for one individual or one organisation working in isolation. NHMRC works with a range of other people and entities – for example, researchers, consumers, communities (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities), governments, adopters, regulators, advisors, investors, funders and knowledge brokers. Further information about research impact is available in NHMRC’s [Research impact position statement](#).

NHMRC’s legislated functions mean that, in addition to supporting all areas of health and medical research, including translational research⁷, it plays a key role by issuing and approving evidence-based health advice and guidelines, advising on improving health outcomes, and building capacity and capability – providing long-term and stable support for research translation.

NHMRC is not the implementer of health-related policy and practice, nor does it commercialise research discoveries. Rather, it supports and influences those responsible for implementation and commercialisation (e.g. government departments, health-related services, health and other professionals, businesses and industries). Its role complements that of other government and non-government research funding organisations that support research translation.

⁶ WHO, https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1, accessed 22/7/2022

⁷ Translational research has been described as follows: ‘Translational research could be regarded as any type of research that leads to knowledge translation; this is not a particularly helpful definition as it would be hoped that all medical research could lead to knowledge translation, albeit some more than others. Research that has a high capacity for translation and research that addresses particular gaps in translation is translational research that is particularly valued.’ Davidson, A. Translational research: what does it mean? *Anesthesiology*. 2011; 115(5): 909-11, <https://pubs.asahq.org/anesthesiology/article/115/5/909/12882/Translational-Research-What-Does-It-Mean>, accessed 8/9/2022

2. NHMRC's current research translation activities

NHMRC undertakes a range of activities to support its role in research translation. An overview of these activities is set out below.

2.1 Partnerships between researchers and end-users

Research is embedded in the system when the research organisation/researcher is part of the decision-making and implementation process with end-users.

Another important role for NHMRC is to encourage and support strengthening of the relationship between the research and health-related sectors. NHMRC undertakes a range of activities to foster partnerships and embedded research. In addition to funding translational research, NHMRC's grant program supports collaborations of health care, research and industry through Partnership Project, Development, and Clinical Trials and Cohort Studies Grant Schemes. It also supports international research collaborations, e.g. in implementation science through participation in the Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases (GACD) and partnerships with other funders, such as CIHR.

NHMRC recognises excellent collaborations between health and research organisations through its Research Translation Centre accreditation program. Accreditation recognises the value of leadership and excellence in research, translation, collaboration and the training of health professionals in an evidence-based environment. By recognising these centres, NHMRC is also encouraging other high-performing collaborations across the country.

Consumers and the community have a critical role to play in embedding research in health-related systems. NHMRC provides leadership and guidance on the involvement of consumers and the community in research, from identifying research needs through to implementation of outcomes.

NHMRC acknowledges that there are different ways of referring to the end-users of research, e.g., some distinguish between end- and next-users. As discussed above, translation is complex and is not a linear process. In this strategy, the term 'end-user' is used in a broad-sense to include consumers, communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as providers of healthcare and health-related systems, professionals and policy-makers.

2.2 Building capacity and capability

To translate research into improved health outcomes for Australians, we need those responsible for translation to have the requisite knowledge and skills.

NHMRC supports the translation of research by encouraging and building capacity and capability in research translation, including in the science of implementation.

The NHMRC grant program provides funding to build the research and research translation capability of researchers, e.g. through Centres of Research Excellence Grants and Investigator Grants. The latter can provide opportunities for clinician researchers to undertake research embedded in health-related systems.

In accrediting Research Translation Centres, a key criterion is the ability to build capability of health professionals in research and research translation. Consumer and community involvement is also an important part of research translation training programs.

NHMRC holds an annual Research Translation Symposium where delegates can learn and share their experience in research translation. NHMRC also encourages researchers to consider translation by assessing their past research impact in applications to the Investigator and Synergy Grant schemes, and their proposed translation and impact in applications to the Centres of Research Excellence and Partnership Project schemes.

2.3 The use of high-quality research

[Access to research outcomes drives stronger public policy, stronger health systems and a stronger knowledge economy. An important role for NHMRC is to encourage the use of high-quality research evidence in all areas of health and health-related policy and practice.](#)

NHMRC funds translational research, including implementation science, that focuses on the methods and strategies to facilitate the translation of research evidence into practice, policy and products. However, NHMRC does more than fund high-quality research to produce the best available evidence. It develops and approves high-quality evidence-based guidelines and advice for clinical practice and public and environmental health, which can be adopted by state and territory regulatory bodies. It supports access to systematic reviews of evidence (e.g. by funding access to the Cochrane Library for all Australian residents) and promotes best practice in evidence development, synthesis and analysis.

NHMRC also encourages the use of high-quality research by publishing impact case studies illustrating how research evidence has been developed and used. Through various grant schemes, NHMRC requires applicants to identify the research evidence that has informed the design of their research proposal; for example, Clinical Trials and Cohort Studies Grant applicants must demonstrate that the rationale is strongly supported by evidence.

3. NHMRC’s strategic priorities for research translation

NHMRC has identified three strategic priorities to encourage the translation of health and medical research into policy and practice within and outside the health system for the improvement of individual and population health.

Priority 1: Encourage partnerships between researchers and end-users

Priority 2: Encourage and build capacity and capability in research translation

Priority 3: Maximise the use of high-quality research evidence for public benefit

The *Research Translation Strategy 2022-2025* overleaf shows how we plan to work on these priorities to achieve our mission and the principles that underpin the range of actions we will undertake.

Vision: That health and medical research helps to build a healthy, resilient and prosperous population in Australia

Mission: To drive the translation of health and medical research into public policy, health-related systems and clinical practice, and support the commercialisation of research discoveries, for the improvement of individual and population health

Principles:

- Access to research outcomes drives stronger public policy, stronger health-related systems and a stronger knowledge economy.
- Research is embedded in the system when researchers and end-users work together to identify research priorities, design and conduct high-quality research and implement outcomes.
- To translate research into improved health outcomes, those responsible for research translation need the requisite knowledge and skills.

Strategies:

- Foster genuine collaboration between researchers and end-users.
- Build capacity and capability of researchers in research translation.
- Offer funding opportunities that foster translation.
- Promote translation of evidence into high-quality guidelines and advice.
- Build a research culture that focuses on impact.

NHMRC’s priorities support a range of impacts:

- Health-related
- Social
- Economic
- Knowledge

End-users of NHMRC research may include policy-makers, providers of healthcare and health-related systems, professionals, consumers, communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Priority 1: Encourage partnerships between researchers and end-users

Goal: Research embedded in health-related systems fostered

Actions:

- Promote successful examples of co-design and partnerships between researchers and end-users, e.g. Research Translation Centres and Partnership Projects, which may involve partnerships between researchers and health services, policy-makers, managers, clinicians
- Continue to provide leadership on the involvement of consumers and the community in research
- Strengthen the role of consumer and community representatives in peer review of NHMRC’s targeted research calls, including representatives for research that focusses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health
- Consider the role of consumer and community representatives in peer review of NHMRC’s translation-focused grant schemes

KPIs: Communication of examples of researcher/end-user partnerships translating evidence. Research meets the needs of consumers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Priority 2: Encourage and build capacity and capability in research translation

Goal: Increased knowledge and skill of researchers

Actions:

- Continue to review and update advice for guideline developers on evidence synthesis
- Evaluate Research Impact Track Record assessment in Investigator Grants and extend consideration of impact to other relevant NHMRC grant schemes
- Continue hosting Research Translation Symposia
- Continue to support clinician researchers to undertake research
- Consider how to strengthen support for translational research and guidance for peer reviewers

KPIs: Opportunities for clinician researchers to undertake research embedded in the health system. Researcher participation in Research Translation Symposia.

Priority 3: Maximise the use of high-quality research evidence for public benefit

Goal: Increased access to high-quality research evidence for use in developing health-related policy and practice

Actions:

- Continue to develop and approve high-quality evidence-based guidelines and advice for public and environmental health and clinical practice
- Continue adoption of innovative digital platforms that support the development of guidelines and collaboration with guideline developers
- Implement NHMRC’s new Open Access Policy and promote open access beyond NHMRC-funded research
- Amplify communication about the impact of evidence from NHMRC-funded research
- Grow staff capability and capacity in assessing the quality of evidence, evidence synthesis and development of evidence-based advice

KPIs: Evidence of promotion of open access to publications and data from health and medical research. Evidence that the research we fund has impact.