

NHMRC Partnership Projects

Funding Policy

Contact for further information: Maryanne Haslam
Assistant Director, Research Activities
(02) 6217 9289
maryanne.haslam@nhmrc.gov.au

NHMRC Partnership Projects

1 Background

Partnership Projects is the first funding scheme to be called under the NHMRC Partnerships initiative.

The NHMRC Partnerships initiative was designed by NHMRC to meet the need for a more effective integration of evidence into health policy and service delivery, a key objective of its Strategic Plan (2007-09). NHMRC's aim is to improve health care through stronger evidence based approaches.

NHMRC Partnerships will help create partnerships among policy makers, managers, service providers and researchers. It will provide funding for researchers and partner agencies to work together, define research questions, undertake research, and interpret the findings. By building Australia's capacity to produce applied research of high quality science, it will help provide answers to the often complex and difficult questions that policy makers, managers and service providers face when making decisions that affect Australians' health and health care. NHMRC Partnerships will focus on informing the decisions that influence health and wellbeing through changes in the delivery, organisation, funding and access to health services and programs. More details about NHMRC Partnerships can be found at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/partnerships.htm>.

NHMRC Partnerships will fund projects that require medium to long term support. The projects will be proposed by alliances between researchers and partner organisations with the goal of supporting research that is likely to impact on health policies and/or service delivery. It aims to increase the opportunities for knowledge transfer and exchange, which could result in a greater uptake of research evidence and, consequently, an improvement in Australian health and health care.

NHMRC Partnership Projects offer the first opportunity, under the NHMRC Partnerships initiative, to support this type of work. Other investments are planned for the future.

2 Objective of NHMRC Partnership Projects

NHMRC Partnership Projects are designed to support research that addresses the delivery, organisation and funding of programs and services that affect health.

NHMRC Partnership Projects are designed to encourage researchers and partner organisations to form alliances to identify research projects, conduct research, interpret its findings and promote the use of those findings to influence the design and evaluation of health and health care policy and practice. This initiative will fund new and existing partnerships to conduct research of high scientific quality that can offer new insights to address complex and difficult questions that affect Australians' health and health care.

3 Scope

Applications must be joint submissions from a research group and one or more partner organisations.

Who can be a partner organisation?

The NHMRC takes a broad perspective on this question. We encourage applications involving partner organisations whose decisions and actions affect Australians' health, health policy and health care delivery in ways that improve the health of Australians. They include organisations such as those:

- working in federal, state, territory or local government - in the health portfolio or in other areas affecting health, such as treasury, urban planning, education or transport
- working in the private sector, such as employers, private health insurance providers or private hospitals
- major non-government organisations and charities
- community organisations, such as consumer groups
- provider and professional groups.

The NHMRC wishes to support substantial research in this area and therefore partners are likely to be larger organisations or consortia.

The research will address the delivery, organisation, funding and access to services and programs that affect health. This will include but not be limited to:

- the evaluation of current performance and opportunities to improve programs or services
- the evaluation of new approaches, their dissemination and uptake
- the effectiveness and use of innovative mechanisms for knowledge transfer and exchange
- all aspects of health care including (but not restricted to) preventative programs, primary and community health care, hospitals, access to services, workforce, infrastructure and funding
- related areas that affect health (such as aged care, urban planning, education, environmental change and economic policy) and
- Indigenous health, an NHMRC priority area for investment.

NHMRC Partnership Projects will not include the evaluation of clinical interventions on individual patients (e.g. new treatments, diagnostic techniques, pharmaceuticals or surgical procedures). Such research is supported through NHMRC Project Grants and Program Grants schemes.

4 Characteristics of strong applications

Strong applications will:

- propose original research likely to generate knowledge that will have an impact on relevant management and/or policy decision-making
- be of a high scientific quality
- demonstrate that strong relations between researchers and partner organisations exist or will be developed
- address issues which are of national or regional significance (rather than local-only significance)
- demonstrate that researchers and partner organisations will come together to identify research projects, conduct research, interpret its findings and promote the use of those findings to influence policy and practice for health
- be led by researchers with strong established records of achievement and
- be of sufficient scope to achieve significant outcomes.

5 Funding

Collaborating partner organisations will make a significant contribution in cash and in-kind to the project. A combined total contribution of at least the same value (in cash and in-kind) as NHMRC funds would be expected. Detailed justification of in-kind contributions will be required.

NHMRC will invest a total of up to \$37 million under this call.

Projects may be of any duration up to five years and the maximum amount of NHMRC funding that may be requested for a single application is \$1.5 million. If applicants wish to submit proposals in excess of \$1.5 million they should contact NHMRC in the first instance to seek advice on whether or not such an application will be considered. Those that anticipate an ongoing synergy for future funding opportunities are particularly encouraged.

It is a requirement of the NHMRC Act that NHMRC funds are used only for research and research training and therefore cannot be used for other purposes such as the delivery of interventions.

6 Eligibility for other NHMRC Funding Schemes

A Chief Investigator holding a Partnership Projects award is eligible to apply for all other NHMRC funding schemes, depending on the specific criteria of the funding schemes.

7. The Partnership

It is anticipated that successful applications will demonstrate that an effective partnership has been or will be established or maintained. This might include: previous evidence of working together successfully; appropriate governance arrangements and extent of partner contributions.

There is scope for investigators from the partner organisations to be included in the applications as members of the applicant team. The assessment of 'partner investigators' will be primarily on the basis of their relevant experience that could support the partnership.

It is an NHMRC requirement that partners agree that the findings of NHMRC-funded research will be published and that researchers will adhere to NHMRC policy on the dissemination of research outputs. (See the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/files/r39.pdf>)

Partners may not enter agreements that would prevent researchers submitting their research findings for publication in the public domain. NHMRC will maintain a publicly available database of these grants and require successful applicants to report annually on the status of publications of results.

8 Assessment Criteria for NHMRC Partnership Projects

Applicants for NHMRC Partnership Projects will be assessed against the following criteria (with the percentage values of the maximum score provided in brackets):

- 1. Track Records of the Chief Investigators Relative to Opportunity (25%)**
- 2. Scientific Quality of the Proposal and Methodology (25%)**
- 3. Relevance and Likelihood to Influence Health and Research Policy (25%)**
- 4. Strength of Partnership (25%)**

Criterion 1

Track Records of the Chief Investigators Relative to Opportunity (25%)

1. It is expected that Chief Investigators (researchers) will have an excellent record of achievement.
2. Records will encompass a broad spectrum of achievements, including but not limited to:
 - publications in peer-reviewed journals
 - books and other relevant forms such as government reports
 - invitations to present work nationally or internationally
 - previous funding relative to opportunity (e.g. from NHMRC, other Australian peer-reviewed sources, other Australian funding, international peer-reviewed funding and private sector funding)
 - support for other projects
 - demonstrable effects of previous research on health care practices or policy

- other research-related service achievements (such as in research development, health or clinical policy or practice and influential advice to health care authorities) and
- a record of having worked successfully with policy and practice organisations.

Criterion 2

Scientific Quality of the proposal and Methodology (25%)

Assessment of scientific quality will include the following considerations:

- the clarity of hypotheses and objectives
- strengths and weaknesses of the experimental design and/or the appropriateness and robustness of the proposed methodology and
- feasibility.

Criterion 3

Relevance and Likelihood to Influence Health and Research Policy (25%)

Assessment will focus on the extent to which the findings from the research are likely to make a significant contribution to influencing health and well being through changes in the delivery, organisation and funding of services that affect health. This will include consideration of factors such as the extent to which:

- the application addresses issues which are of national or regional significance in improving health or health care
- the project has the potential to contribute significantly to health policy and decision making
- the aims and concepts of the project are innovative
- the project is likely to yield new methods and techniques for addressing issues and
- the capacity of the partner organisation(s) to use the findings to influence policy decision making and health system performance. This will be assessed by reference to, for example, the roles and/or areas of responsibility of the organisation or the partner organisation's demonstrated record of achievement in effecting such changes.

Criterion 4

Strength of Partnership (25%)

Assessment will focus on the extent to which the application demonstrates the capacity to develop or sustain a strong partnership. Factors such as the following will be considered:

- the financial and in-kind commitment of the partner/s
- previous evidence of effective working relationships with partner organisations
- evidence of co-development of the proposal
- the proposed governance or partnership arrangements. Applications should show how the team will foster and maintain a collaborative approach between the researchers and decision makers, over the course of the initiative and
- the roles of staff in the partner agency or agencies in the research process.

In evaluating the strength of the partnership, applications will be assessed on the extent to which the proposal is achievable through the provision of skills, linkages, infrastructure and milestones. NHMRC will also take into account value for money in terms of justification for equipment and facilities and other items of expenditure to sustain the partnership.

9 Assessment Processes

Grant Review Panels established by the NHMRC will include researchers from relevant disciplines and people with experience in policy and service delivery.

NHMRC reserves the right not to seek external reviews on those grants that are deemed not competitive by Grant Review Panels.

Where written reviews are sought, they will be from external assessors with appropriate research backgrounds.

Applicants will be offered the opportunity to comment on the external assessment reports. NHMRC will provide further information to applicants about the timeframe for responding to the external assessment reports.

NHMRC encourages applications that address Indigenous health. Advice will be sought on applications that are relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research from an Indigenous Health Research Panel against the *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* which is available on the NHMRC website at:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health_ethics/human/conduct/guidelines/ files/e52.pdf

The Grant Review Panel will make its recommendations based on its judgement about the overall merits of each application against all the assessment criteria for funding, taking into consideration the comments by the external assessors and the applicants' responses.

10 Indicative Timeline

The following timeframe for NHMRC Partnership Projects is proposed:

Activity	Date
Application process opens	25 July 2008
Applications close	19 December 2008
Short-listing of applications by Grant Review Panel	Early 2009
External Assessment of short-listed applications	February/March 2009
Assessments to Applicants for comment	April 2009
Grant Review Panel Recommendations	April/May 2009
Announcements	TBA

10 Reporting

Annual progress and financial reports will be required by 31 March of each year on the form prescribed by the NHMRC, including the status of any publication of results. At the completion of the grant, a final report and financial acquittal will be required by 30 June of the following year.

In accordance with policy requirements, NHMRC may suspend payment of further instalments of any current grant until the appropriate reports have been received and

assessed as satisfactory. Where an institution fails to submit satisfactory reports, as required, the NHMRC may terminate funding and determine that all or part of the funding must be repaid.

NHMRC reporting proforma and requirements can be found at:

<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/admin/progreport.htm>

For Partnership Projects, reports will also need to demonstrate regular substantial engagement with partners and the evolution of roles within the partnership.