



Australian Government

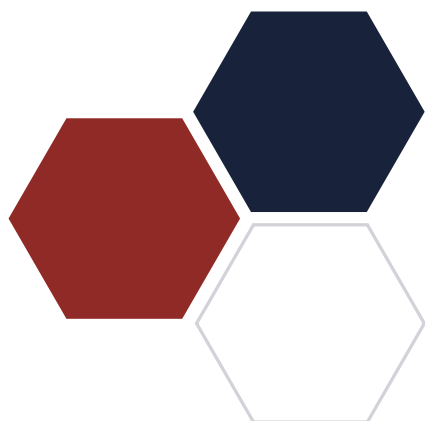
Department of Health

Medical Research Future Fund

Monitoring, evaluation and
learning strategy

2020–21 to 2023–24

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Introduction to the Medical Research Future Fund

The Department of Health (the Department) has developed this Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) *Monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy* (the Strategy) as an overarching framework for assessing the performance of the MRFF. The Strategy aligns with the [Australian medical research and innovation strategy 2016–21](#) and is planned to be in place from 2020–21 to 2023–24. The Strategy will be reviewed each year, and will help to develop a work program for MRFF evaluation and monitoring activities.

The MRFF is a \$20 billion priority-driven endowment fund, established by the Australian Government to support medical research and innovation to improve health outcomes and increase economic growth.

The [Medical Research Future Fund Act 2015](#) (MRFF Act) sets out the operations of the MRFF, including:

- how the endowment fund will be managed
- the purposes for which MRFF funding can be used
- the organisations that will be able to receive MRFF funding

In addition, the MRFF Act specifies that an Australian Medical Research Advisory Board (AMRAB) be established. The AMRAB's duties include determining the [Australian medical research and innovation strategy 2016–21](#) and [Australian medical research and innovation priorities 2020–2022](#), both of which are required under the MRFF Act.

As part of the 2019–20 Federal Budget, the Australian Government announced a [\\$5 billion, 10-year investment plan from the MRFF](#).

The MRFF is a key contributor to the Australian Government's [National health and medical industry growth plan](#), and is complemented by a range of government investments in health and medical research. This includes funding from the [National Health and Medical Research Council \(NHMRC\)](#) and the [Biomedical Translation Fund](#).

In addition, 3 legislative and policy documents provide the framework for MRFF's operation:

- [Medical Research Future Fund Investment Mandate Direction 2015](#)
- [Medical Research Future Fund – funding principles](#)
- [Commonwealth grant rules and guidelines 2017](#)



MRFF's program structure

The Australian Government's MRFF 10-year Investment Plan (the Investment Plan) is structured around 4 themes (patients, researchers, translation and missions) as part of the [Health Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20](#) (pp 22–24). Under these themes are 20 initiatives (Appendix A). Grant opportunities are made available under the initiatives and are the mechanisms for offering grant agreements through the MRFF.

Grant opportunities can result in a:

- single project being funded (ie results in a single grant agreement)
- program of activities (2 or more projects) being funded within a topic area (ie results in multiple grant agreements)

The MRFF's program structure aligns with these financial and grant arrangements (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 MRFF program structure

The MRFF is complex, because it:

- spans 20 inter-related initiatives across the Investment Plan, and across a range of health and medical research areas
- funds activities across the research spectrum, from discovery research to commercialisation and translation of innovative ideas and products, and improved health services
- provides funding across a decade, using funding agreements that range in
 - length (up to 5 years)
 - quantum (from hundreds of thousands to tens of millions of dollars)



Monitoring and evaluation

Principles for monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating funded projects, programs and initiatives within the MRFF will be:

- independent from the policy areas responsible for administering the grant opportunities and from grant recipients
- impartial in its treatment of information for all grant programs and recipients
- transparent in process and outcomes
- inclusive of consumers and stakeholders
- future focused to incorporate learnings that provide ongoing improvements to future evaluation and grant opportunities
- regular and systematic

Monitoring and evaluating the MRFF must:

- consider the key objectives of the MRFF, which are
 - better patient outcomes
 - beneficial change to health practices
 - evidence of increased efficiency in the health system
 - the commercialisation of health research outcomes
 - community support for the use of, and outcomes from, funding¹
- account for the complexity within the MRFF program structure
- support continuous refinement and improvement of MRFF initiatives and evaluation processes during the 10-year investment
- ascertain whether unmet needs have been met
- consider whether other complementary investments are required to address identified areas of need

¹ Department of Health (2015). *Australian medical research and innovation strategy 2016–2021*, DoH, Canberra.



- assess
 - research impact (over appropriate timelines)
 - research outputs (including, where relevant, negative results of research and unintended outcomes)
- account for the challenges in assessing the impact of health and medical research effectively – notably, the difficulties with attributing outcomes to specific grants and the time taken for research to translate to clinical practice

The monitoring and evaluation process also offers an opportunity to:

- determine what impact (direct or indirect) has been made on the health status of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- determine what impact (direct or indirect) has been made on the health status of vulnerable people, including older Australians
- implement innovative grant management, performance management and evaluation processes based on results, and action learning and action-based research (plan, act, observe, reflect)
- learn from and align with
 - other Australian medical research and innovation funding activities
 - existing reviews, evaluations and assessments, such as the [McKeon Review 2013](#)
 - international best practice, where relevant and available
 - earlier work, including a MRFF evaluation framework developed by Research Australia²

Learning from monitoring and evaluation activities

The Strategy aims to establish a learning system, whereby the:

- MRFF's ongoing design and implementation accounts for the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation activities
- selection, design and implementation of monitoring and evaluation activities focus on providing information to support continued improvements within the MRFF

² Research Australia (2019). *An evaluation framework for the Medical Research Future Fund*, commissioned by the Department of Health, Research Australia, Sydney.



Conceptual framework for monitoring and evaluating the MRFF

The MRFF Act (section 3) specifies that its objective is to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians by establishing the MRFF to provide grants of financial assistance to support medical research and medical innovation.

In setting out the *Australian medical research and innovation strategy 2016–21*, the AMRAB articulates the MRFF’s vision, aim and objectives, and 5 impact measures:

- better patient outcomes
- beneficial change to health practices
- evidence of increased efficiency in the health system
- the commercialisation of health research outcomes
- community support for the use of, and outcomes from, funding

Impact is an important component of research evaluation. The United Kingdom’s National Institute for Health Research defines impact as the ‘demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy ...’.³ Impact can be made by:

- treating disease and improving health
- creating and sharing new knowledge
- developing and commercialising new diagnostics or treatments
- implementing new health services or policies

The AMRAB also sets the Australian Medical Research and Innovation Priorities every 2 years, which must align with the Strategy in force (see the *MRFF Act*).

Through the *National health and medical industry growth plan*, the Australian Government also committed to improving health outcomes, and increasing jobs and economic growth.

Figure 2 presents the MRFF monitoring, evaluation and learning conceptual framework, which integrates the aims, visions, objectives and impact measures from these documents. It also sets out the MRFF’s measures of success that are required to support achieving MRFF outcomes. Table 1 defines the measures of success, with their relative contribution towards the 5 MRFF impact measures on each of the measures of success.

³ National Institute for Health Research (2020). *Plan for impact*, NIHR, London. (Accessed 5 November 2020)



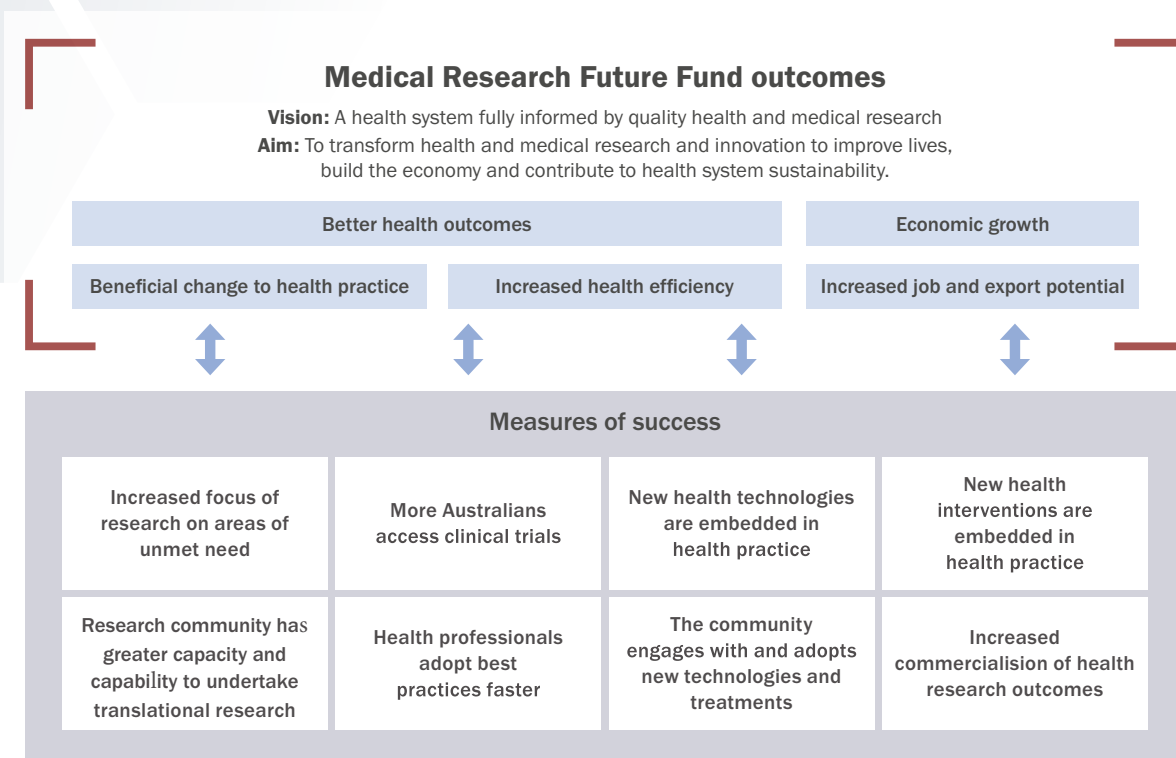


Figure 2 MRFF monitoring, evaluation and learning conceptual framework

Table 2 articulates how each MRFF initiative will contribute to the measures of success identified in the MRFF monitoring, evaluation and learning conceptual framework. The table shows how investment and efforts will be prioritised (ie in the short or longer term) in contributing towards the MRFF’s measures of success.

The measures of success and the MRFF impact measures do not preclude longer-term priority measures of success and MRFF outcomes being relevant to individual grants at any stage of the initiative, nor is it expected that every grant will deliver on every measure of success. The performance of the initiative over time is expected to deliver on the identified measures of success shown in Table 2.

Note that Table 1 uses the following definitions:

- MRFF defines unmet need as ‘serious health conditions whose diagnosis or treatment is not adequately addressed by existing options’ ([MRFF Rare Cancers, Rare Diseases and Unmet Need Grant Opportunity](#))
- Health technologies are ‘the applications of organized knowledge and skills in the form of devices, medicines, vaccines, procedures and systems developed to solve a health problem and improve quality of lives’ ([What is a health technology?](#))



- Health practice is a clinician's use of skills and knowledge in any way that affects the safe, effective delivery of health services
- Precision medicine is an approach to patient care that uses an understanding of a patient's disease to tailor interventions or treatments, and includes technologies such as genomics, computing, connectivity and artificial intelligence
- A health intervention is 'any action that intervenes to improve health, such as medical treatment and preventive campaigns' ([Australia's health 2016 – glossary](#))
- The research community is individual researchers and academics, universities, medical research institutes, hospitals and other medical research organisations undertaking and supporting medical research in Australia, including the medical technology and pharmaceutical sector
- Translational research is the process of applying ideas, insights and discoveries generated through scientific inquiry to the treatment or prevention of human disease. Transfer of knowledge can include changes to practice, policy or further research
- Health professionals are people who operate within any branch of health care, including the medicine, surgery, dentistry, midwifery, pharmacy, psychology, nursing or allied health profession
- Community refers to the general public, including patients, consumers and carers
- Commercialisation is the process of bringing new products or services to market. For MRFF, this is anticipated to include the development of drugs, devices and other products or services that may ultimately benefit patients



Table 1 Defining measures of success

Measure	This measure considers the extent to which outcomes of MRFF-funded research:	Level of emphasis				
		Better health outcomes	Beneficial change to health practice	Increased health efficiency	Economic growth	Increased job and export potential
Increased focus of research on areas of unmet need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifies areas of unmet need and facilitates more research into these areas leads to new health treatments, drugs, interventions, devices and diagnostics embeds such approaches into clinical practice 	High	High	High	Low	Low
More Australians access clinical trials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> creates better opportunities for Australians to access clinical trials by funding activities that support research to progress to the clinical trial stage, and directly supporting additional clinical trial activity builds Australia's clinical trial capability and leadership at the national and international level 	High	High	High	High	High
New health technologies are embedded in health practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifies or validates new health technologies, including precision medicine measures the awareness of new health technologies among clinicians and patients embeds new health technologies into clinical practice 	High	High	High	High	High
New health interventions are embedded in health practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifies or validates new health interventions measures the awareness of new health interventions among clinicians and patients embeds new health interventions into clinical practice 	High	High	High	Low	Low
Research community has greater capacity and capability to undertake translational research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increases researcher capacity improves awareness of translational research within the research community supports capability development to undertake translational research 	Low	High	Low	High	High
Health professionals adopt best practices faster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifies or establishes best practices assesses the speed at which best practices are communicated to clinicians and health service administrators identifies how best practices are understood and adopted 	High	High	High	Low	Low
The community engages with and adopts new technologies and treatments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> involves the community in prioritising, designing and conducting research promotes community awareness of new technologies and treatments, and their benefits promotes community support for new technologies and treatments 	High	High	High	Low	Low
Increased commercialisation of health research outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifies research or products that are viable for commercialisation and lead to creating new Australian companies or expanding existing companies leads to new commercially available treatments or products for the benefit of Australian patients 	High	High	High	High	High

MRFF = Medical Research Future Fund

Table 2 How initiatives contribute to the measures of success

Theme	Initiative	Measure of success							
		Increased focus of research on areas of unmet need	More Australians access clinical trials	New health technologies are embedded in health practice	New health interventions are embedded in health practice	Research community has greater capacity and capability to undertake translational research	Health professionals adopt best practices faster	Community engages with and adopts new technologies and treatments	Increased commercialisation of health research outcomes
Patients	Emerging Priorities and Consumer-Driven Research	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term
	Clinical Trials Activity	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term	Long term	Long term	Long term
	Global Health	Short term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term	Long term
Researchers	Frontier Health and Medical Research	Short term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term	Short term	Short term
	Researcher Exchange and Development within Industry	Long term	Long term	Long term	Long term	Short term	Long term	Long term	Long term
	Clinical Researchers	Long term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term	Long term	Long term

continued

Table 2 *continued*

Theme	Initiative	Measure of success							
		Increased focus of research on areas of unmet need	More Australians access clinical trials	New health technologies are embedded in health practice	New health interventions are embedded in health practice	Research community has greater capacity and capability to undertake translational research	Health professionals adopt best practices faster	Community engages with and adopts new technologies and treatments	Increased commercialisation of health research outcomes
Research Missions	Australian Brain Cancer Mission	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Long term
	Million Minds Mental Health Research Mission	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term
	Genomics Health Futures Mission	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term
	Dementia, Ageing, and Aged Care Mission	Short term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term
	Indigenous Health Research Fund	Short term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term
	Stem Cell Therapies Mission	Long term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term
	Cardiovascular Health Mission	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term
	Traumatic Brain Injury Mission	Short term	Short term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term

continued

Table 2 *continued*

Theme	Initiative	Measure of success							
		Increased focus of research on areas of unmet need	More Australians access clinical trials	New health technologies are embedded in health practice	New health interventions are embedded in health practice	Research community has greater capacity and capability to undertake translational research	Health professionals adopt best practices faster	Community engages with and adopts new technologies and treatments	Increased commercialisation of health research outcomes
Research translation	Preventive and Public Health Research	Long term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term
	Primary Health Care Research	Long term	Long term	Long term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term
	Rapid Applied Research Translation	Long term	Long term	Long term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term
	Medical Research Commercialisation	Long term	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term	Long term	Short term
	National Critical Research Infrastructure	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term
	Research Data Infrastructure	Long term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Short term	Long term	Long term	Long term

Note: This table shows the how short- and long-term investment and efforts will be prioritised towards the Medical Research Future Fund’s key measures of success for each initiative. Individual grants may not be able to deliver on every measure of success.

Financial and administrative data

Existing MRFF financial and administrative reporting includes:

- Department Portfolio Budget statements (annual)
- Department annual reports
- GrantConnect
- Financial Assistance to Support the Australian Medical Research and Innovation Priorities (biennial report to Parliament)
- Future Fund Board of Governors
- grant agreements
 - annual reports with financial administrative information
 - end-of-project reports with financial and administrative information
- Department's administered reporting information by program, which provides visibility of the administered funds and brings together financial information from a number of other systems, including the
 - Government Estimates Update System
 - Australian Department of Social Services Community Grants Hub
 - Australian Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources Business Grants Hub
 - NHMRC Research Grants Management System



Proposed approach for monitoring and evaluating the MRFF

A multicomponent, mixed-methods approach is proposed for monitoring and evaluating the MRFF, based on the program structure. Table 3 outlines the proposed activities.

As part of assessing the MRFF initiatives, the Department will also consider the contribution of key drivers, or enablers, that support achieving the measures of success outlined in Table 2, including:

- collaboration
- communications
- data and infrastructure
- governance
- partnerships and engagement
- public and private funding

Assessment of the contribution of the above enablers to success will be embedded within the monitoring, evaluation and learning activities outlined in Table 3.



Table 3 Proposed MRFF monitoring, evaluation and learning activities

Program level	Activity	Goal	Output	Frequency
Grant agreement ^a	Monitor progress against deliverables: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> annually at each milestone at the end of project beyond the end of project^b 	Support MRFF monitoring, evaluation and learning activities and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> assure that projects meet their intended objectives during MRFF funding and after it ends oversee issues and risks as they arise, including opportunities for early intervention provide information to support improvements in grant design (eg understanding key features of successful projects) 	Grant assessment	Annually
Grant opportunity ^c	Evaluation of grant opportunities – for example, the impact of projects and programs	Provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> clear guidance on the intended objectives of the grant being offered and how grant recipients will demonstrate progress against those objectives assurance that grant opportunities meet their intended objectives and outcomes as specified in the guidelines a way to enable continuous improvement to support the design of future opportunities 	Evaluation report	When required to support ongoing program delivery
Initiative	Mission reviews	Assess progress towards the mission’s 10-year vision and priorities, and re-align approaches as required	Progress report	Every 3 years, on a rolling basis (2 missions each year from 2020–21)
	Evaluate non-mission initiatives	Assess progress, outputs and outcomes against long-term objectives, international best practice and/or emerging trends or priorities	Progress report	Annually from 2019–20
Theme	Thematic reports	Assess the MRFF’s impact on patients, researchers, missions and translation	Report	Annually, on a rolling basis from 2021–22
MRFF	Internally review the MRFF administrative and grants management	Process review of financial management and grant administration to ensure efficiency and effectiveness	Report	Annually from 2020–21, then every 2 years over time
	Impact evaluation against the 8 measures of success	Assess broader program performance against the MRFF’s measures of success	Report	Every 5 years from 2024

MRFF = Medical Research Future Fund

a A grant agreement sets out the relationship (eg financial, milestones) between the Australian Government Department of Health (the Department) and a funded organisation, and specifies the details of the grant.

b See Table 4. The Department will engage with grant recipients to undertake these retrospective evaluations.

c A grant opportunity is the specific round or process through which grant agreements are offered. Single or multiple agreements can arise from 1 grant opportunity.

Table 4 Indicative MRFF monitoring, evaluation and learning schedule

Program level	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26
Grant agreement	Grant assessment	Grant assessment	Grant assessment	Grant assessment	Grant assessment	Grant assessment	Grant assessment
Grant opportunity	-	-	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Initiative	Rapid Applied Research Translation Evaluation, and Medical Research Commercialisation landscape review	Clinical Trials Activity and Mission review(s)	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Theme	-	-	Impact of researchers	Impact of patients	Impact of translation	Impact of missions	Impact of researchers
MRFF	-	Internally review administrative and granting arrangements	-	Internally review administrative and granting arrangements	-	Impact evaluation against the 8 measures of success	Internally review administrative and granting arrangements

- = not applicable; MRFF = Medical Research Future Fund; TBD = to be determined

Appendix A Initiatives and their goals

Table 5 MRFF initiatives and their goals

Theme	Initiative	Goal
Patients	Emerging Priorities and Consumer-Driven Research	To support research that improves patient care and translation of new discoveries, and encourage collaboration between consumers and researchers
	Clinical Trials Activity	To increase clinical trial activity in Australia, help patients' access clinical trials, and enable researchers to bring international trials to Australian patients
	Global Health	To develop understanding and tools to fight threats to Australia's national health security from the regional and global challenges of antimicrobial resistance and drug-resistant tuberculosis
Researchers	Frontier Health and Medical Research	To create opportunities for researcher collaborations to explore bold and innovative ideas, and make discoveries of great potential and global impact
	Researcher Exchange and Development within Industry	To foster partnerships between industry, universities, registered training organisations and governments, and strengthen Australia's success in research translation and commercialisation
	Clinician Researchers	To help the next generation of talented Australian health professionals drive research questions, develop new discoveries and ensure implementation of best practice care for their patients
Research missions	Australian Brain Cancer Mission	To double the survival rates and improve the quality of life of patients with brain cancer over the 10 years to 2027, with the longer term aim of defeating brain cancer
	Million Minds Mental Health Research Mission	To help an extra one million people be part of new approaches to mental health prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment and recovery
	Genomics Health Futures Mission	To save or transform the lives of more than 200,000 Australians through genomic research to deliver better testing, diagnosis and treatment
	Dementia, Ageing, and Aged Care Mission	To improve quality of life for Australians as they age

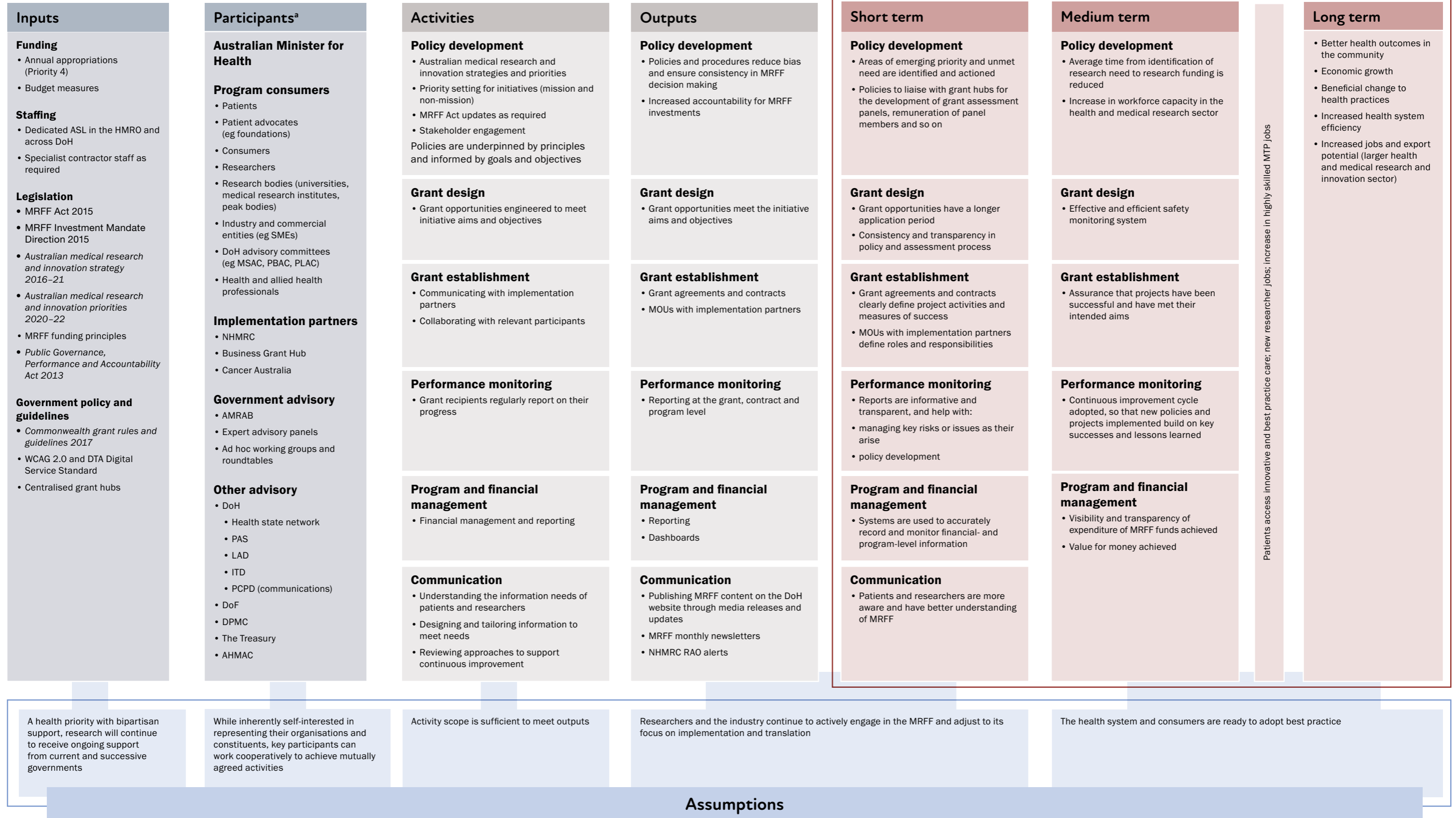
Table 5 *continued*

Theme	Initiative	Goal
Research missions (continued)	Indigenous Health Research Fund	To improve the health of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander-led research practice and governance • knowledge translation • evidence-based structural change in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health practice
	Stem Cell Therapies Mission	To support world-leading translational stem cell research that develops and delivers innovative, safe and effective stem cell medicines to improve health outcomes, in partnership with patients and carers
	Cardiovascular Health Mission	To make transformative improvements in heart health, vascular health and stroke for all Australians
	Traumatic Brain Injury Mission	To make transformative improvements to the lives for people affected by traumatic brain injury through personalising care, developing and implementing tailored treatments and identifying how to reduce barriers to support people to live their best possible life after traumatic brain injury
Research translation	Preventative and Public Health Research	To support targeted research on new ways to address risk factors for chronic and complex diseases in Australia
	Primary Health Care Research	To increase Australia's evidence base in primary health care through research to improve service delivery and patient outcomes, and translate this knowledge into action
	Rapid Applied Research Translation	To support research centres that conduct transformative translational research, so patients can benefit from better quality of care. These centres have been accredited for excellence by the NHMRC
	Medical Research Commercialisation	To support early-stage health and medical research and innovation in Australia through to proof-of-concept and beyond, providing opportunities for commercialisation
	National Critical Research Infrastructure	To establish and extend infrastructure of critical importance that will be used to conduct world-class health and medical research
	Research Data Infrastructure	To establish and extend research data infrastructure to support world-class health and medical research

MRFF = Medical Research Future Fund; NHMRC = National Health and Medical Research Council

Appendix B MRFF program logic overview

Situation | Health and medical research and innovation improves health outcomes, creates jobs and drives economic growth. The Australian Government has made available \$5 billion over 10 years through the MRFF, which complements funding made available through the NHMRC, Australian Research Council, university block grants, and industry support such as the Research and Development Tax Incentive.



AHMAC = Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council; AMRAB = Australian Medical Research Advisory Board; ASL = average staffing level; DOF = Australian Government Department of Finance; DOH = Australian Government Department of Health; DTA = Digital Transformation Agency; DPMC = Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; HMRO = Health and Medical Research Office; ITD = Information Technology Division; LAD = Legal and Assurance Division; MOU = memorandum of understanding; MRFF = Medical Research Future Fund; MSAC = Medical Services Advisory Committee; MTP = medical technologies and pharmaceuticals; NHMRC = National Health and Medical Research Council; PAS = Procurement Advisory Service; PBAC = Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee; PCPD = People, Communication and Parliamentary Division; PLAC = Prostheses List Advisory Committee; RAO = research administration officer; SME = small to medium enterprise

^a Groupings of key participants are not mutually exclusive