



Indigenous Health Research Fund

Roadmap



Theme
Research
missions

Through the Indigenous Health Research Fund (IHRF), the Australian Government has committed \$160 million to improve the health of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people over 10 years from 2019–20 to 2028–29, funded under the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF).

Improving health and social equity for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is one of Australia's most pressing challenges. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have a 10-year lower life expectancy and 2.3 times higher burden of disease than non-Indigenous Australians, despite considerable investment into existing programs. There is a vital need for transformative health and medical research to deliver the knowledge needed to drive impactful policy and service delivery, and achieve equity in outcomes. This requires a shift from short-term fragmented research efforts to longer-term collaborative research – driven by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people – that prioritises the most pressing health issues and knowledge gaps.

The IHRF includes a commitment of \$35 million over 3 years from 2018–19 to 2020–21 to support the development of a vaccine to help to eliminate rheumatic heart disease from Australia. The remaining \$125 million of the IHRF will be distributed through competitive processes.

An Expert Advisory Panel comprising prominent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander research experts and leaders is guiding the approach to implementation and investment of the \$125 million under the IHRF. It is the first national research fund led by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, and conducted through close engagement with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and communities.



Scope

The IHRF will mobilise health and medical research for the prevention of disease and promotion of health and social equity. Through cohesive research led by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people that is designed to deliver community benefit, it seeks to inform and transform the way the health system responds to the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people across the life course.



Our goal

To improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through:

- Indigenous-led research practice and governance
- knowledge translation
- evidence-based change in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practice



Funding principles

The following principles apply to activities funded under the IHRF:

- The IHRF will be underpinned by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander leadership at all stages
- Research must be of the highest quality, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to research excellence, conducted by the most capable organisations and individuals
- Investment must lead directly to the benefit of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities and improved health outcomes
- Impacts on health, social and cultural outcomes will best be enabled by focusing efforts through collaboration
- Investment must increase the number, develop the capability and unlock the potential of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in health and medical research and implementation sciences

Overarching challenges

The IHRF will establish and resource a scientific research agenda that will address several critical challenges impacting on the social, emotional, physical and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, including:

- ensuring a strong sense of identity and culture to develop and sustain healthy communities
- promoting and providing physically and psychologically healthful environments
- improving the social and emotional wellbeing of individuals, families and communities
- ensuring culturally safe health systems that are free of racism
- ensuring the best start to life for our children
- preventing and reducing the impact of chronic and infectious conditions
- understanding the biological determinants of disease susceptibility across the life course

Priority areas for investment

Priority areas for investment will be encouraged across 4 aims. New, emerging priorities may also arise through the course of the IHRF.

Aim 1

Ensure a healthy start to life

- Improving health outcomes during the first 2000 days of life
- Promoting the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander mothers before, during and after their pregnancies
- Improving health and social and emotional wellbeing in young people
- Preventing youth suicide

Aim 2

Ensure lifelong health

- Supporting whole-of-community and whole-of-system infectious disease prevention, management and control
- Supporting community-based chronic disease prevention
- Developing health system and population intervention and prevention trials
- Improving cancer survival
- Understanding the relationships between infection, inflammation and chronic diseases to guide prevention efforts

Aim 3

Implementation science – deliver what works

- Improving the quality, research capabilities and impact of interventions within primary health care
- Preventing blindness and deafness
- Reducing the burden and impact of rheumatic heart disease among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

Aim 4

Address the root causes of inequity

- Developing a health care system that is free of racism
- Intervening in the social and environmental determinants of health
- Enhancing the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities
- Strengthening culture as a determinant of health

Enabling priorities

- **Capacity development** will be essential to unlock the potential of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander research workforce for evidence-based research and ensure the sustainability of an agenda led by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. This must include developing capacity in new and emerging fields, including genomics
- **Data systems** will be required that support reliable and valid data, Indigenous data sovereignty and governance, useful analytics and culturally appropriate data usage (i.e strengths based) that can inform evaluation and improved health outcomes
- **Research-enabled primary care** will provide a platform within which to undertake research and implement new knowledge and knowledge transfer
- **Leverage and support** from key partners, including other MRFF missions, will offer infrastructure and resources to achieve agendas at the scale required to achieve system change and transform health outcomes
- **New and emerging priorities** will be identified by review and consultation processes

Approach to implementation

IHRF's initial phase, which started in 2019–20, targets research that seeks ways of implementing what we already know works, lays the groundwork for future research funding and encourages partnerships to progress innovative research. This includes focusing on:

- ending rheumatic heart disease
- ending avoidable deafness
- ending avoidable blindness
- preventing chronic kidney disease
- improving adolescent mental health

Future phases of the IHRF will encourage Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander-led research teams to identify gaps in knowledge needed to address the scientific agenda of the initial phase, and to collaborate in research to address these priority areas. Sustaining and communicating the outcomes of research will underpin these phases, to establish an enduring legacy from the IHRF.

An **impact framework** and opportunity for review of priorities and evaluation of progress will be embedded in the IHRF implementation plan, to ensure the research impact is measured and promoted.

Partnerships and co-investment

To deliver a research agenda at the scale needed to transform knowledge, practice and health outcomes, the IHRF will seek to establish and encourage research partnerships. At a national level, the Expert Advisory Panel will work closely with other MRFF missions – including the Million Minds Mental Health Research Mission, the Cardiovascular Health Mission and the Genomics Health Futures Mission – on shared agendas to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. The IHRF will seek co-investment from philanthropic sources, state and territory governments, industry and the non-government sector, to provide opportunities for shared investment in some of the significant challenges that are likely to require long-term, collaborative and sustained research efforts led and developed by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.