2022

HEALTH+MEDICAL RESEARCH

RNA Future Leaders Program

Early-mid Career Researcher Grants

Guidelines

NSW GOVERNMENT

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Further copies of this document can be downloaded from the NSW Health website at:
https://www.medicalresearch.nsw.gov.au

SHPN (OHMR) 211166

Call for applications

NSW Health invites eligible individuals to apply for the RNA Future Leaders Program **Early-mid Career (EMC) Researcher Grants**. This Program has been designed to support the next generation of innovators in RNA-based diagnostics, therapies, production, vaccines and delivery systems.

Funding for these grants will be provided for three years from 2022 to 2025. Clinician researchers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, researchers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and primary carers who have experienced career disruptions are encouraged to apply.

For the purpose of this Grant, an EMC researcher is defined as a researcher who is within 15 years of the conferral of their PhD (or equivalent) on 18 February 2022 and has not reached professorial level. PhD students who expect to have their PhD awarded by June 2022 are eligible to apply.

Objectives

EMC Researcher Grants aim to:

- fund research excellence among EMC researchers in NSW
- fund research that improves wellbeing and health outcomes for patients
- embed high-quality, innovative research in the NSW health system
- encourage collaboration, leadership and capacity building in the NSW research environment
- support EMC researchers to gain research grants and fellowships from bodies such as the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), Australian Research Council (ARC) and Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF)
- bridge the gap between research, policy and practice to increase and document research impact and translation.

Indicative Grant timeline

Stage	Date
Call for Applications opens	December 2021
Applications close	12PM (AEDT) 18 February 2022
Announcement of successful applicants and commencement of funding	June 2022

Eligible areas of research

This funding will support the recruitment of EMC researchers to undertake research in RNA-based diagnostics, therapies, production, vaccines and associated delivery systems including nanotechnology. Only research projects that improve wellbeing and health outcomes for patients will be considered eligible.

Clinician researchers

Clinicians, including medical, nursing, and allied health professionals, are encouraged to apply.

Clinicians may use up to 50% of the grant to backfill their clinical role, with appropriate justification. If the grant is to be used for this purpose the application must be signed by the appropriate department head in the local health district or specialty health network. The salary limits are as follows:

- Clinician – medical: Salary limit – up to 0.6 FTE Staff Specialist or Visiting Medical Officers.
- Clinician – non-medical: Salary limit – up to 0.6 FTE as per Allied Health (including Pharmacist and radiographers) and Nursing awards.

Funding amounts

EMC grants have a 3-year duration. **A maximum total grant amount of $500,000 will be awarded.**

Grants are for research projects or programs and can cover a combination of salaries of the EMC researcher, the research team (clinical and/or non-clinical), backfill for clinicians to quarantine research time, consumables, equipment and other research infrastructure.

PhD candidates

Applicants who are currently enrolled in a PhD may apply if the date of award is expected to be before June 2022. Evidence of award of the PhD must be provided to NSW Health prior to the announcement of funding. Announcement dates will be advertised on the NSW health and medical research website (www.medicalresearch.nsw.gov.au). Note that evidence of submission of a PhD is not sufficient.

Funding conditions and exclusions

1. Research funded through an EMC Researcher Grant must be conducted in the NSW health system or affiliated organisation (university, medical research institute, industry partners).
2. EMC Researcher Grants must not be spent on capital works, general maintenance costs, organisational infrastructure or overheads, telephone/communication systems, basic office equipment, such as desks and chairs, rent and the cost of utilities.
3. Applicants are required to declare the source, duration and level of funding already held for research in the subject area of the application. Applications must clearly describe the purpose of the additional funding and justify that the additional research will be complementary but not duplicative.
4. Funding is conditional on the EMC researcher and the Chief Executive of the host organisation signing the declaration on the application form, which outlines the host organisation's obligations to the EMC researcher.
5. One application will be accepted per applicant.
6. Up to six applications will be accepted per host organisation.
7. Grants provided under this funding round are one-line grants, not fellowships.
8. Successful applicants must apply for federal funding (NHMRC, MRFF, ARC) at least once during the funded period and provide evidence of the application, scores, feedback and outcome to NSW Health.
9. Recipients of the NSW EMC Researcher Grants in Gene and Cell Therapies or NSW EMC Researcher Grants in Phage Therapy are not eligible to apply for funding under the RNA Future Leaders Program EMC Researcher Grants.

Program Logic and research impact

Applicants are required to submit a Program Logic diagram with their application, including project aim, inputs, activities, outputs, and expected outcomes and impacts.

Note that outcomes and impacts may not be realised during the funded period, they may be projected to occur in the future. Particularly for basic science, the 'next users' who are responsible for taking the research findings to the next step for translation should be involved from the start of the project so they understand the research and can move the findings towards translation.

Research Impact Assessment

The Program Logic will be used to optimise the probability of research impact at application stage. If the research is funded, the Program Logic will guide the measurement of impact throughout the project and at its conclusion.

Research impact will be considered across five domains:

Domain 1: Knowledge Generation

- New interventions, treatments, diagnostics, or drug targets.
- New clinical or medical prototypes.
- Peer-reviewed publications and presentations at conferences.
- Media coverage and other non-peer-reviewed publications.

Domain 2: Capability Building

- New partnerships leveraged.
- Training and professional development.
- Research students supported.

Domain 3: Policy and Practice

- Instances where research findings are considered in policy development.
- Instances of change in clinical practice.
- Instances of new health technology or new treatments used in clinical care.

Domain 4: Patient health and population outcomes

- Improved health outcomes, including change in:
    - time to develop an outcome

      likelihood of an outcome occurring.

Domain 5: Economic outcomes

- Research jobs created and sustained.
- Patents and commercialisation.
- Value of leveraged research funding (external grants awarded due to NSW Health funding).
- Reduction in cost of delivering care.
- Potential for return on investment.

Research Translation

All research projects should have potential to lead to changes in clinical practice or policy in the short and/or long term, even if not during the funded period. Applications must clearly describe:

- The long-term goal and clinical significance of the research
- The expected pathway for this to occur (note this may not be linear)
- How the researchers will engage with 'next users', i.e. research partners and other stakeholders who will take the research to the next step on the translation pathway.

An example translation pathway is at Appendix A. Applicants may use their preferred framework.

Priority populations

It is important that all research projects consider and respond to the distribution of the burden of disease within the population and the needs of higher risk and priority populations where appropriate. These may include women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, individuals from a non-English speaking background, socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and people living in regional and remote areas.

Relevant partners should be engaged early to ensure that the research design and conduct will be effective and appropriate for these population groups.

Research projects with a primary focus on Aboriginal health or involving Aboriginal people as participants should attach a completed Aboriginal Health Impact Statement to their application, available at https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/PD2017_034.pdf

Intellectual Property

Intellectual property (IP) arrangements should be agreed between all research partners and organisations, according to local policy. IP arrangements must cover both background IP and IP that is developed during the project. IP arrangements should consider the contributions of all parties. The arrangements should be detailed in the application.

Commercialisation Training

NSW Health has developed a training program in commercialisation, which grant recipients are required to complete during their candidature. The training will provide students with a high-level understanding of the biotech industry, its structure, corporate roles and the process of taking a product from a concept through to market. Specifically, students will understand the essential steps required to create successful therapeutics from a formulation, manufacturing, regulatory and reimbursement strategy point of view. At the completion of the course students will understand how to construct a target product profile and associated business case for a new therapeutic product.

Declaration of career disruption

Applicants may present a declaration and/or evidence of career disruption for consideration by the review panel. Please refer to the NHMRC policy on career disruption: https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/attachments/relative_to_opportunity_policy0720.pdf

Career Disruption is defined as a continuous absence from work of 90 days or more and/or continuous long term, part time employment. This may be due to:

- pregnancy
- major illness/injury
- carer responsibilities.

Career disruptions may be declared in the application form, if relevant.

Research collaborations and partnerships

Applicants are encouraged to identify and engage relevant partners who will provide a meaningful contribution to delivery of the research project and implementation of outcomes.

Partners may include:

- NSW Health System partners including NSW Ministry of Health, Pillars, and statewide health services
- local health districts and specialty health networks
- Advanced Health Research Translation Centres and Centres for Innovation in Regional Health

- universities and medical research institutes
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services
- Primary Healthcare Networks
- clinical networks
- non-government organisations
- consumers and patients.

The research must be conducted in NSW but may be part of a wider collaboration.

RNA Production and Research Network

Applicants are encouraged to consider collaborating and working with the **NSW RNA Production and Research Network (RPRN).** The RPRN can be contacted via rprn@unsw.edu.au. Please include 'NSW RNA Future Leaders Program' in the subject line.

Industry Partnerships

Outcome-focused collaborative research partnerships between industry organisations and host organisations are encouraged.

The following conditions apply:

- Industry partnerships must involve a lead applicant who is based at an eligible host organisation and who is the main driver of the project. Industry organisations are not eligible to be host organisations.
- Only an eligible lead applicant can apply for grant funding and submit an application on behalf of project partners.
- Applications may include and maintain among project partners one or more industry organisations.
- Industry organisation(s) must contribute resources to the project. Industry matched funding is encouraged, but not required.
- Industry organisation(s) must enter into a legally binding agreement with the Host Organisation to ensure their obligations are met under the Program, including education quality, insurance at both sites, intellectual property arrangements relating to contributions of the EMC researcher and policies relating to publications.
- A nominated industry supervisor must be employed by the industry organisation on an ongoing basis or hold an employment contract for at least the projected duration of the project.
- Industry organisation(s) must meet all standard employer responsibilities required by law, and accommodate and support the industry supervisor and EMC researcher for the duration of the project.
- Industry organisation(s) must intend to commit to hosting an EMC researcher at their site for 30% of the EMC researcher's time. If the industry organisation is registered to conduct its business activities outside of NSW, consideration should be given to any travel or living expenses to be granted to the EMC researcher, as well as justification of the benefits of external industry exposure for the EMC researcher and NSW. A COVID risk plan must be submitted by the industry organisation to ensure completion of the project. Clear justification should be provided if the industry organisation is unable to host the EMC researcher at their site for 30% of the EMC researcher's time and offer an alternative pathway for sufficient supervision by the industry supervisor.
- The Industry Supervisor must commit to releasing the EMC researcher for the Commercialisation Training Program.

NSW Health is open to different partnership arrangements providing the eligibility criteria and conditions relating to industry partnerships are met. The partnership should be clearly outlined in the application. For example, start-ups may partner with larger industry organisations in addition to their academic partner.

Submission of applications

Applicants must use the Early-Mid Career Researcher Grants – RNA Future Leaders Program 2022 Application Form and attach any supporting evidence. The form is available at: https://www.medicalresearch.nsw.gov.au

Applications must be approved by a designated senior representative (Research Director, Dean of Research etc.) and submitted by a representative of the host organisation or administering organisation.

Complete applications must be submitted by email to MOH-OHMRGrants@health.nsw.gov.au by 12PM AEDT on Friday 18 February 2022. All applications will receive an email acknowledging receipt within 48 hours. It is the applicant's responsibility to follow up if no acknowledgement is received. Please note that the maximum file size is 20MB. Larger files will be rejected by the NSW Health server.

The confirmation email should be retained as this may be required by NSW Health as evidence of submission. If an email confirming receipt of the application is not available, no further correspondence regarding the application will be entered into.

Please refer to www.medicalresearch.nsw.gov.au for relevant program dates and updates to the program.

Host Organisations are invited to submit a maximum of six (6) applications only.

Any queries regarding this Program may be directed by email to MOH-OHMRGrants@health.nsw.gov.au.

Eligibility criteria

Applications must meet all eligibility criteria.

EMC Researcher Requirements

Based in NSW

The EMC researcher must reside in or plan to move to NSW for the duration of the grant and must be employed by an NSW-based medical research institute, university, or non-government organisation.

Submit a complete application

The EMC researcher must fully complete the application form, attach all relevant and required documentation; sign the declaration on the form and include certification from the host organisation.

Australian citizen, permanent residency status or appropriate visa

The researcher must be an Australian citizen, a permanent resident of Australia or have an appropriate working visa for the full term of the Grant. Researchers who are neither Australian citizens nor permanent residents must provide evidence of residency status and the right to remain in Australia for the duration of the funding period, certified by a Justice of the Peace (JP) or equivalent. Note that for electronic documents, an official VEVO statement is sufficient, JP certification is not required. Australian Citizens and Permanent Residents are not required to provide evidence.

Classified as an EMC researcher

The EMC researcher must have worked less than 15 years postdoctoral and not reached professorial level.

Host Organisation Requirements

The host organisation is where most of the research is conducted. The host organisation must be based in NSW and employ the EMC researcher for the duration of the grant. The host organisation must conduct health and medical research and be one of the following:

- university
- independent medical research institute
- not-for-profit organisation
- NSW Health local health district or specialty health network.

If the host organisation is an NSW Health organisation, grant funds must be paid to an administering organisation that can manage funds across financial years as the full funding amount will be paid upfront. Please refer to Administering Organisation Requirements.

The EMC researcher's host organisation must provide appropriate infrastructure support for the research project, such as wet/dry lab space, computer equipment, and desk space.

An authorised representative of the host organisation is required to sign the application form indicating support from the Research Director and Chief Executive for the application and to certify that the organisation complies with the requirements of the grant.

Clinical Scientists may undertake clinical work separately from where research is undertaken. If the grant is to be used to quarantine research time and backfill a clinical position, the application must also be endorsed by the Chief Executive/Executive Director of the organisation where clinical duties are undertaken.

Administering Organisation Requirements

An administering organisation is only required where the funds are held by a separate organisation to the host organisation.

In such cases, the administering organisation will enter into the funding agreement with NSW Health, manage the funds, submit financial reports and coordinate other reporting requirements as outlined in the funding agreement.

Grant funds must be paid to an administering organisation that can manage funds across financial years as the full funding amount will be paid upfront.

The administering organisation must be:

- a university
- a medical research institute, or
- a non-government organisation in NSW.

Selection criteria

All applications for funding that meet the eligibility criteria will be assessed against the following selection criteria. In addressing the selection criteria, applicants should specifically highlight the relevance to the eligible areas of RNA research.

Applications should be written in plain English, as applications may be reviewed by a panel member with expertise in a different area to that of the application.

The proposed research project does not have to address every criterion but must demonstrate strengths in relevant criteria.

Applicant (40%)

Applicants will be assessed on:

- academic and relevant clinical qualifications
- research, clinical and industry experience, including demonstrated capacity to work in multidisciplinary teams
- skills and experience directly related to the topic area(s) and methodology of the research project
- track record in research and research impact, relative to opportunity
- responsibilities that could reasonably be considered to have had a negative impact on research track record over the previous ten years.

Research project (40%)

A clear and detailed description and justification for the project is required, including aims, methodology, and expected outputs and outcomes. The research project will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- evidence of a gap in knowledge, provided by prior systematic reviews and/or gap analyses, and a clearly articulated need for the research
- how the proposed project will advance existing knowledge and why this is important
- the extent to which the proposed research is innovative and novel
- strength, rigour and appropriateness of the research methodology
- potential outputs and outcomes of the research and how the research will improve clinical practice and/or patient outcomes in the short or long term
- ability to deliver the research outputs, outcomes and/or objectives within the grant period.
- scalability and generalisability of results
- the skills of the proposed research team that are relevant to the project, and each team member's ability to contribute meaningfully to the research
- relationship to existing research undertaken by the host organisation and the research team
- evidence of engagement with the NSW RNA Production and Research Network and/or international collaborations
- engagement with industry is desirable
- the plan for research translation and impact, including consideration of commercialisation and intellectual property where appropriate
- consideration of priority population groups if relevant.

Budget

Full details of the budget should be clear in the application. The budget will be assessed on:

- appropriateness of the funding amount and purpose
- existing funding for the research, and how this relates to the additional funding requested
- other contributions and support for the project.

Skill development and capacity building (20%)

All EMC applicants will be assessed on skill development activities undertaken to date, and proposed skill development during the period of the grant. Activities undertaken should align with the researcher's vision for their research career.

Examples of skill development activities that may be undertaken include:

- leading or participation in clinical quality assurance activities
- receiving regular formal mentoring
- attending training, for example in research skills or research leadership
- taking on leadership roles
- mentoring or supervising junior researchers
- involvement in collaborations, for example with other research groups or policy agencies
- active roles in relevant networks, advisory committees or governance groups

- collaboration with clinicians and others involved in translation of research findings.

Selection process

Step 1: Eligibility check

Following the closing date for applications, NSW Health will determine if the application has satisfied all eligibility criteria.

Step 2: Review by independent expert panel

An independent selection panel of expert reviewers will assess each application against the selection criteria.

Step 3: Funding recommendation

The independent selection panel will agree on the final ranking of all eligible applications and will make a recommendation for funding to NSW Health.

Step 4: Decision and notification

NSW Health will determine grant recipients and amounts. All applicants will be informed as to whether they have been awarded funding.

Step 5: Grant Agreements

NSW Health will contact administering organisations for successful projects to execute a funding agreement. A standard, non-negotiable funding agreement will be used.

Post Award Requirements

The Administering Organisation will enter into a funding agreement with NSW Health that sets out obligations.

A schedule for reporting will be outlined in the funding agreement and will include a requirement to provide:

- annual progress reports
- annual financial reports
- a final report following the conclusion of the term of the Grant
- Post-grant reports related to research translation and research impact.

Program evaluation

The grants program will periodically be assessed to ensure it is meeting its objectives. This will be done in collaboration with the host organisations and funding recipients.

Recipients and host organisations may be required to supply information and meet with NSW Health staff to support the evaluation of the program.