

Dummy Financial Report

For load and performance testing of the Sapphire system.

This PDF is expected to be between 1MB and 2MB in size, as a PDF.

It will contain some graphics as well as some text

National Health and Medical Research Council Annual Report 2018–19

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Chief Executive Officer's review

Chief Executive Officer's review



This has been a landmark year for NHMRC with the implementation of our new grant program. After three years of consultation and careful planning, with advice from an Expert Advisory Committee, Research Committee and many others, the new grant schemes were opened for applications in late 2018 and early 2019.

The new grant program will strengthen NHMRC's capacity to achieve its mission of *Building a Healthy Australia*. It is grounded in NHMRC's continuing philosophy that the greatest long-term impact on the health of our community will be obtained from investment in the best researchers and the highest quality research across the health and medical research spectrum.

The reform of NHMRC's grant program has several overarching goals – to provide opportunities for talented researchers at all career stages, to foster innovation and creativity, and to reduce the burden of application and peer review on the research sector. Achievement of these goals will naturally take some years as researchers move from the old to new funding schemes. The outcomes and impact of the changes will be monitored using an evaluation framework developed for us by RAND Corporation Australia, informed by a review of international practice and taking advantage of NHMRC's data capabilities.

Response to the new grant schemes has been strong, such that NHMRC received a significantly higher number of grant applications overall than in previous years. While this was

expected, it does mean that the first rounds of the new schemes will be extremely competitive and a number of high quality applications will not be funded.

Major change is challenging for everyone involved, particularly those researchers for whom NHMRC support is critical to the pursuit of their research goals. We at NHMRC appreciate the resilience of the research sector in the face of change, the strong support that many have expressed for the reforms, and the contribution of a large number of people to the peer review of grant applications in this demanding first year.



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The Australian community makes a significant investment in health and medical research, particularly through Government spending delivered by NHMRC and other pathways. NHMRC has increased its focus on demonstrating the value of this investment by reporting some of the extraordinary outcomes of NHMRC-funded research through our website and social media and by developing impact case studies to illustrate the journey from idea to new medical product or public health policy. A related new initiative this year was the introduction of a requirement for applicants to two major grant schemes to describe the impact of their past research on knowledge, health, the economy or society. This addition to the usual assessment of research publications and other academic outputs will encourage a broader view of research productivity and enable NHMRC to recognise research of broad societal value.

Important progress was made across a number of activities that underpin NHMRC's engagement with the research sector and the community. These included:

- continuing development of a new research grants management system, Sapphire, to make it easier for researchers to apply for and peer review grant applications
- streamlining of peer review processes for several schemes, reducing the number of steps and increasing the number of independent assessments for each application, and
- the launch of our new website which conforms to Digital Service Standards, simplifies access to information needed by the research sector and tells our “story”.

NHMRC recognises our national responsibility to “close the gap” in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In this, the first year of our action plan for *Road Map 3: a strategic framework for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health through research*, we have again exceeded our target of awarding at least 5 per cent of research funding to Indigenous health and have focussed on building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research workforce.

International funding alliances are a small but strategically important component of NHMRC’s grant program, fostering collaboration between Australian and other researchers through various co-funding arrangements. Grants were awarded through bilateral and multilateral alliances during the year, with the European Union, United Kingdom’s National Institute for Health Research, Vietnam’s National Foundation for Science and Technology Development and the Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases (GACD). As CEO of NHMRC, I am honoured to be serving as a member of GACD’s Board of Trustees and chair of its Strategy Board for 2019 and 2020.

The Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) is fundamentally changing the Australian health and medical research landscape, presenting significant new funding opportunities across a range of missions and priority areas. This approach complements NHMRC’s support for investigator-initiated research which forms the broad foundation of Australian capability in biomedical, clinical, public health and health services research. We have continued to work closely with the Department of Health to administer six MRFF programs this year, enabling the MRFF to draw on NHMRC’s experience and systems for peer review and grants management.

Even before the advent of the MRFF, the Boosting Dementia Research Initiative was a magnificent commitment in the 2014-15 Australian Government Budget of \$200 million over five years to support research and build research capacity in this critical field. This was the final year of the initiative and it is clear that its impact will be felt far into the future – through the work of its researchers and the NHMRC National Institute for Dementia Research, which has effectively brought the sector together to take a strategic approach to the challenge of dementia. While NHMRC will continue to support dementia research through its standard grant schemes, the need for additional funding for dementia research has been recognised with the welcome announcement of the MRFF's Dementia, Ageing and Aged Care Mission.

To complement NHMRC's continuing role in ensuring the integrity of the research it funds, we commenced a new project on research quality – specifically to enhance research rigour, reproducibility and reporting through our funding policies and other mechanisms. With the advice of the Research Quality Steering Committee, NHMRC released its first Research Quality Strategy and developed an action plan to guide its implementation. The national conversation on research quality was stimulated by NHMRC's 7th Annual Symposium on Research Translation in November 2018 on the theme 'Ensuring Value in Research', co-hosted with The REWARD Alliance and attended by 320 delegates.

The development and endorsement of high quality evidence-based health guidelines is a core legislated function of NHMRC. In 2018-19, NHMRC released updated *Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare* and developed guidance on per- and poly-fluoroalkylated substances (PFAS) in water, as well as approving four externally developed clinical practice guidelines that met NHMRC's standards.

This reporting period saw the beginning of the 2018–2021 triennium and the appointment of a new Council and Principal Committees. We welcome all new members and thank returning members. I would especially like to thank Professor Bruce Robinson AM for continuing in the role of Chair of the NHMRC Council, and the chairs of the Principal Committees: Professor Steve Wesselingh (Research Committee), Professor Ingrid Winship (Australian Health Ethics Committee), Professor Dianne Nicol (Embryo Research Licensing Committee), Professor Sharon Lewin

AO (Health Translation Advisory Committee) and Dr Katherine Woodthorpe AO (Health Innovation Advisory Committee). Two other committees also warrant mention: the Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus and the Community and Consumer Advisory Group, chaired by Council members Professor Sandra Eades and The Hon. Judith Moylan, respectively. We are immensely grateful for the strong support and wise counsel we receive from the Council and all our advisory committees.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge Australia's outstanding health and medical research community which contributes so much to our understanding of health and disease and to the quality of our health care and public health policy. We are all inspired by their passion and commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and the improvement of the human condition.

Part Six: Financial performance

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Financial performance summary

This section highlights NHMRC's financial performance during 2018-19 for both Departmental and Administered activities.

Financial performance – Departmental

NHMRC's Departmental financial performance for 2018-19 is summarised in Table 2.1 below.

NHMRC departmental financial performance, 2018-19

Operating expenses
Own-source income
Gains
Net cost of services
Revenue from government
Total Operating (deficit) / surplus

NHMRC's operating result for 2018-19 was a deficit of \$0.995 million. This was below the approved Department of Finance loss of \$2.6 million for non-appropriated expenses for depreciation and amortisation.

Financial Performance - Administered

NHMRC administered \$894.7 million in expenses on behalf of Government during 2018-19. Funding through NHMRC's MREA amounted to \$887.1 million. The remaining \$7.6 million funded a range of activities related to dementia research, anti-venom research, streamlining health and medical research initiatives, and research evidence for clinical practice and policy through the Cochrane Collaboration.

The increase in Administered expenses from last year (\$46.0 million) largely reflects increasing commitments from additional Partnership Projects rounds, Targeted Calls for Research schemes, and the completion of the Boosting Dementia Research Initiative.

The balance of the MREA was \$240.2 million at 30 June 2019.

