

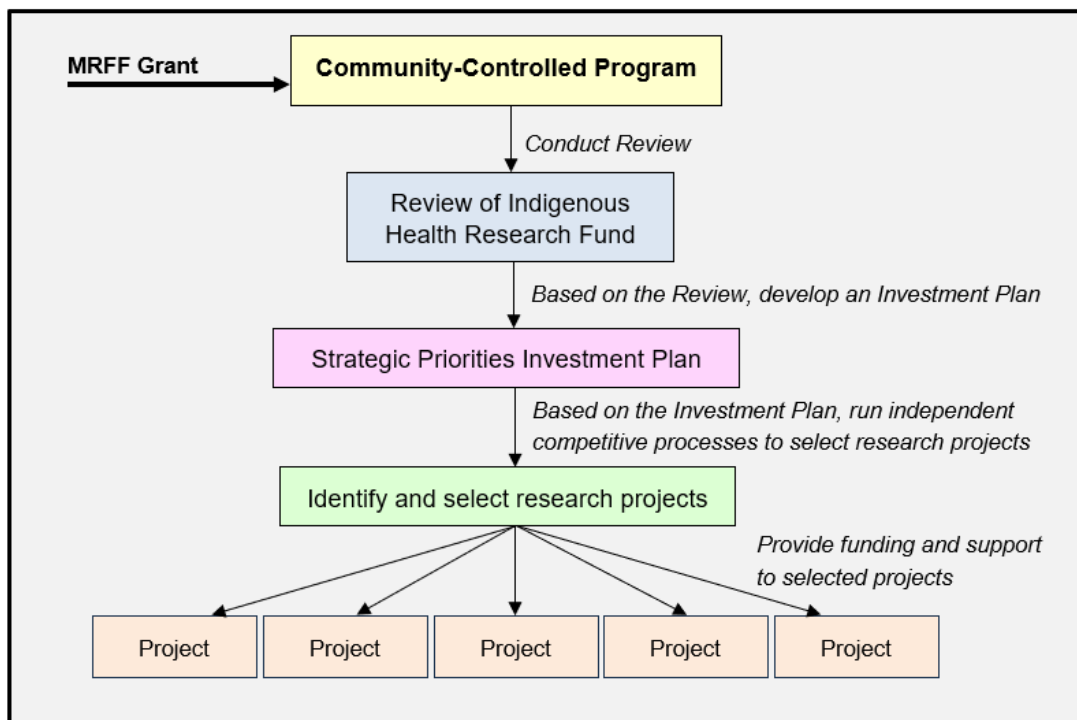
## Medical Research Future Fund’s Indigenous Health Research Fund (IHRF) 2026 Grant Opportunity Consultation

This document is a consultation draft and includes the sections of the draft grant opportunity guidelines tailored for this grant opportunity. To keep the document short the standard sections that are used across all MRFF grant opportunity guidelines are not included in this consultation draft.

The purpose of this grant opportunity is to award \$28.5 million through a competitive process to an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled program to:

- Conduct a review to assess progress of the IHRF towards its vision and priorities
- Informed by this review, develop strategic priorities for the research investment
- Run one, or more, open and competitive processes, to identify and select Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health and medical research projects
- Partner with the successful projects to provide funding and support to ensure their success in tackling health issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Figure: Purpose of the grant opportunity





# Medical Research Future Fund – Indigenous Health Research Fund

## 2026 Empowering Community-Controlled Research Grant Opportunity Guidelines

Opening date:	<b>Quarter 1 2026 (Exact date to be determined)</b>
Closing date for minimum data:	5pm ACT local time on <b>To be determined</b>
Application closing date and time:	5pm ACT local time on <b>To be determined</b>
Commonwealth policy entity:	<b>Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care</b>
Administering entity	<b>National Health and Medical Research Council</b>
Enquiries:	Applicants requiring further assistance should direct enquiries to their MRFF Eligible Organisation’s Research Administration Officer. Research Administration Officers can contact NHMRC’s Research Help Centre for further advice:  Email: <a href="mailto:help@nhmrc.gov.au">help@nhmrc.gov.au</a>  Questions should be submitted no later than 1:00pm ACT Local Time on <b>To be determined</b> .
Date guidelines released:	<b>To be determined</b>
Type of grant opportunity:	<b>Targeted Competitive</b>

## About the grant program

### About the 2026 Empowering Community-Controlled Research Grant Opportunity

Consistent with the MRFF Act, the objective of this grant opportunity is to provide a grant of financial assistance to an organisation or consortium to run an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled program to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander led health and medical research projects.

The lead organisation applying to this grant opportunity can be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisation (see glossary). Alternatively, if the lead organisation is not a Community-Controlled Organisation as per the definition, the application must detail how the lead organisation has had a long relationship with, and will partner with, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisation or Organisations to deliver this program, and how the program will incorporate the principles of Community-Control and genuine leadership by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The lead of the program (Chief Investigator A) is to be an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person, the majority (50%+) of the team is to comprise of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals, and there is to be a mix of career stages within the team.

The program is to build on the evidence base to accelerate positive impact on health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and implement the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The successful applicant is required to undertake a review, develop a Strategic Priorities Investment Plan and partner with and a support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and medical research projects and researchers. Further details of each of these activities is provided below.

The grant opportunity guidelines do not specify the timing and budget for each of the grant activities. Applicants are to determine and describe in their application the timing of each activity and how much of the grant funding will be allocated to each activity. Applicants should also explain how they intend to sequence activities and describe the dependencies within their approach.

The successful applicant is required to undertake the following activities:

1. Review the Indigenous Health Research Fund
  - a. in alignment with the MRFF Monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy (Evaluation Strategy), conduct a review of the Indigenous Health Research Fund (IHRF), with an aim towards ensuring that future investment builds on the evidence base and accelerates positive impact. The Review is expected to assess:
    - i. alignment and progress of research funded to date towards the vision and goals of the IHRF, and in addressing the priorities for investment listed in its Implementation Plan
    - ii. impact of research funded to date, as determined by the evaluation measures listed in the Implementation Plan and the MRFF Measures of Success outlined in the Evaluation Strategy
    - iii. how the existing investment has implemented, and opportunities for future investment to implement, the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

- iv. remaining areas of unmet need and gaps in evidence to address system change and improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes
- v. opportunities (if any) for improvements to the IHRF initiative itself
- b. the Review is to be provided the Department for publication to promote transparency

2. Develop a Strategic Priorities Investment Plan

- a. informed by the Review, and in consultation with the community and research sector, develop a Strategic Priorities Investment (SPI) Plan
- b. the SPI Plan should detail national priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and medical research investment that will be supported by funding from this grant
- c. the SPI Plan should detail the timing and estimated number of projects to be supported using funding from this grant and the objectives and expected outcomes of these projects
- d. the SPI Plan should align with and complement other relevant research priority setting plans
- e. the SPI Plan should detail how investment will implement, the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- f. the SPI Plan should detail how the investment should complement and build on the existing funding and support being provided through other initiatives for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health research

3. Partner with and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and medical research projects and researchers

- a. run independent, transparent, open and competitive processes to identify and select Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and medical research projects that address the priorities identified in the SPI Plan
- b. partner with the selected projects to provide funding (no minimum amount, and a maximum of \$5 million per project) paid in flexible instalments that are within the agreed funding envelope with agreed performance measures
  - i. it is expected that a comprehensive range of projects of different sizes and budgets will be selected
  - ii. these projects can be new projects or projects that build on existing programs of research
- c. provide and/or procure specialist support and expertise for the selected projects to ensure their best chance at success
- d. assist selected projects with planning and undertaking the agreed activities, with the aim of translating their research into improved health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- e. facilitate meetings, share learnings and establish appropriate networks between the selected projects and other relevant parties in the context of progressing their research outcomes
- f. regularly liaise with all of the selected projects to ensure complementarity and minimise risk of duplication of research effort
- g. in addition to partnering with selected projects, run activities in collaboration with other relevant initiatives (such as the OCHRe Network) to support, nurture and mentor the

current and next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and medical researchers in Australia

- h. ensure there is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and Community-Control in all stages of the program and all activities are culturally appropriate and acceptable to the community

It is expected that the vast majority of funding will be utilised to fund and support the selected research projects. The applicant should detail how much of the grant funding will be utilised to fund and support the selected research projects.

The successful organisation can fund its own health and medical research projects as long as the projects have been appropriately selected through independent, transparent, open and competitive processes.

The intended outcome of this grant opportunity is to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through a Community-Controlled research program that applies the principle of self-determination.

## Grant amount and grant period

### Grants Available

The amount available for a single grant is fixed at \$28.5 million.

### Grant period

The maximum grant period that can be applied for is 7 years.

## The assessment criteria

Applications will be assessed against the assessment criteria described below. You must address all assessment criteria in your application. We will assess your application based on the weighting given to each technical criterion and against the non-weighted (non-technical) assessment criterion.

The application form requests information that directly relates to the assessment criteria below. You should provide evidence to support your responses to each criterion and your requested budget. Size limits apply to all responses.

Funding will only be awarded to applications that score satisfactorily against all criteria.

### Assessment Criterion 1 - Project Impact (40% weighting)

You are required to address this criterion within your Grant Proposal. Project Impact is the potential to achieve the outcomes of the grant opportunity and provide direct benefit of importance to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. You should demonstrate this by providing details of how your proposal will be directly relevant to the objectives and desired outcomes of this grant opportunity.

In your application you should demonstrate how your project will:

- informed by the Review of the Indigenous Health Research Fund, support and ensure the success of a number of new health and medical research projects that are a priority for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ensure complementarity and efficient use of resources between the supported projects and projects previously funded under the IHRF
- accelerate and increase the capacity and capability of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health research sector
- contribute to implementing the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- uplift Community-Control in all stages of the project
- demonstrate leadership of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals, communities and organisations in the conceptualisation, design and implementation of your project
- engage with partners (e.g. healthcare, community, education, commercial, multi-disciplinary, and/or intersectoral) to achieve the objectives of the grant opportunity and accelerate the translation of research outcomes into practice and policy
- demonstrate how a review of the research literature, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health research prioritisation frameworks and support initiatives, have informed the proposed project
- drive Indigenous Knowledge Translation and assert Indigenous Data Sovereignty

You should demonstrate how the outcomes or results you have identified against the MRFF measures of success are relevant and meaningful to the goal and aims of the Indigenous Health Research Fund.

Please commence addressing this criterion by substantiating that the project addresses the objective of the grant opportunity as outlined in section 2.3.

Further instructions are in section 7.4.

## Assessment Criterion 2 - Project Methodology (30% weighting)

In responding to this criterion you should demonstrate your proposed methods, encompassing the strengths and weaknesses of the design and the quality and feasibility of the proposal. You are required to provide information on appropriate milestones, performance indicators and timeframes.

You should demonstrate your proposed approach to delivering the project by providing:

- 1) your project plan, including:
  - a) an outline of the activities you will undertake and how they will be undertaken
  - b) appropriate milestones, performance indicators and timeframes for delivery
    - i. including the anticipated timeframe for each of the required activities of undertaking a review, developing a Strategic Priorities Investment Plan and providing financial and other support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and medical research projects and researchers
  - c) the Community-Controlled structures in place for the project including evidence that the project:
    - i. is controlled and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
    - ii. is connected to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples communities

- iii. builds the strength and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and peoples
- 2) the project's Indigenous Governance structure that will cross the life of the program:
  - a) ensure integrity, transparency and probity
  - b) integrate and respect Indigenous Knowledge Systems
  - c) assert Indigenous Data Sovereignty
  - d) drive Indigenous Knowledge Translation
- 3) a project feasibility analysis
- 4) a strategy outlining how you will conduct a robust evaluation of the program and disseminate its findings

### Assessment Criterion 3 - Capacity, Capability and Resources to Deliver the Project (30% weighting)

This criterion is used to assess whether the project team named in your application has the appropriate mix of skills and experience to undertake the research project. You should articulate the team's cultural authority and/or relevant experience in research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in accordance with the *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders* produced by the NHMRC.

The project team should include community-based researchers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders—individuals with non-traditional pathways into research who may not hold formal academic qualifications and who bring lived experience, cultural knowledge, and trusted relationships within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These contributions are recognised as essential to culturally safe health research and are central to achieving meaningful, community-led positive health outcomes.

In demonstrating Capacity, Capability and Resources you should not provide information about your MRFF Eligible Organisation.

Your application must include clear evidence that the project is Community-Controlled and also clearly demonstrate:

- the project is genuinely Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led, with at least the majority (50%+) of the team comprising Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals
- the team has demonstrated success in delivering projects in partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and/or organisations that have accelerated positive impact on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health outcomes
- the team has an appropriate mix of skills and experience to successfully undertake this research project
- the team has leadership to anticipate and solve potential obstacles in partnership with the community to ensure the successful completion of the proposal
- the team has expertise in all aspects of the Grant Proposal
- how the project will appropriately identify, and engage with expertise for its processes including the process to allocate program funds
- the commitment of partners to the project and how any cash or in-kind contributions will support its successful delivery

- the team builds capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers, including those in Community-Controlled Organisations by enhancing leadership, and identifying pathways and providing support for emerging researchers - particularly community-based researchers with non-traditional pathways into research.

Each CI should provide an example from the assessable period of this grant opportunity (see Glossary) of how they have used their skills, knowledge and/or experience to contribute to meaningful advances in health outcomes, practice, programs and/or policy relevant to the proposed project.

## Glossary

<p>Community-Controlled Organisation</p>	<p>As defined in Clause 44 of the <a href="#">National Agreement on Closing the Gap</a>:</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control is an act of self-determination. Under this Agreement, an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisation delivers services, including land and resource management, that builds the strength and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people and is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>incorporated under relevant legislation and not-for-profit</li> <li>controlled and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people</li> <li>connected to the community, or communities, in which they deliver the services</li> <li>governed by a majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander governing body</li> </ol>
<p>Indigenous Data Governance and Sovereignty</p>	<p>Refer to the Lowitja’s Institute’s Indigenous Data Governance and Sovereignty Research Pathways Information Sheet at <a href="https://www.lowitja.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/328550_data-governance-and-sovereignty.pdf">https://www.lowitja.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/328550_data-governance-and-sovereignty.pdf</a>.</p> <p>And the Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles at <a href="https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org/mnw-principles">https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org/mnw-principles</a>.</p>