



# Appendix A: Pathway to impact update

## NHMRC public consultation

# Excerpt from the proposed updates to Investigator Grants 2026 score descriptors

## Research impact and pathway to impact (20%)

It is important to NHMRC's mission to build a healthy Australia that NHMRC-funded research positively affects the health and wellbeing of Australians. To help achieve this, Investigator Grant applicants are required to demonstrate a verifiable example of where their research has had a significant impact, as the best/strongest indicator of their potential for future success.

NHMRC defines 'impact' as the **verifiable outcomes that research makes to knowledge, health, the economy and/or society** (*not* the prospective or anticipated effects of the research). The reach and significance of the impact is the effect of the research discovery or finding *after* it has been adopted, adapted for use, or used to inform further research.

The 'discovery' or 'finding' alone is not assessed. Rather, the assessment of 'Research impact and pathway to impact' focuses on:

- the '**reach and significance**' of the impact (10%)
- the '**applicant's contribution**' to realising the impact (10%).

Applicants are expected to demonstrate their contribution to the claimed impact along a 'pathway to impact'. NHMRC defines 'pathway to impact' as the sum of the contributions the applicant has made at any stage in the research lifecycle (see **Figure 1**) to maximise the potential reach and significance of the research. The 'research lifecycle' is all the stages of a research project or program (see **Figure 1**). NHMRC defines a 'contribution' as any activity, relating to research and/or research planning, that the applicant can demonstrate improved the potential reach and significance of the research impact.

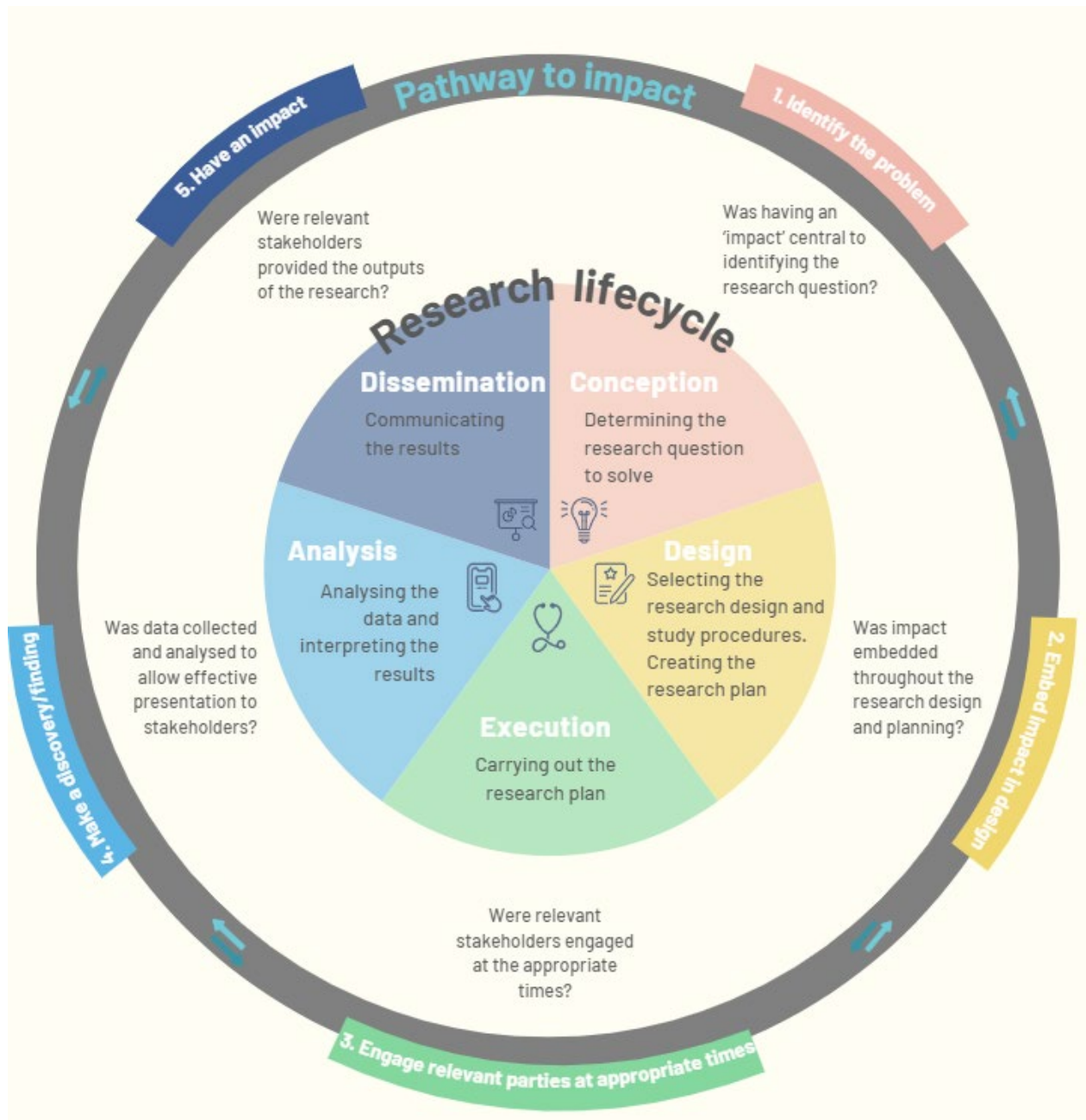
NHMRC acknowledges the dynamic nature of 'impact'. It may be difficult to identify when precisely an 'impact' was realised, and the reach and significance may continue to evolve over time, as the applicant continues to contribute to sustaining and/or maximising the benefit of their discovery or finding. Additionally, there may be factors outside of the applicant's control which contribute to the reach and significance of the impact. As such, the assessment of research impact emphasises the applicant's 'recent' or ongoing contributions to realising, sustaining and/or maximising the impact. To be considered 'recent', the applicant's contributions will continue into their 10-year assessment timeframe (see section 6.8 of [Appendix G](#)). The emphasis on recent applicant contributions ensures that NHMRC peer review continues to focus on the applicant's recent track record achievements as the best/strongest indicator of their potential for future success. Focussing on recent research achievements also helps to ensure equitable assessment for applicants of all career stages. Peer reviewers are required to consider the recency of the applicant's contribution to the impact at the score descriptors (**Table 3**).

Applicants are not restricted to referencing a single program of research when addressing the 2 components of the research impact assessment criteria. The impact can result from multiple collaborations, projects or research programs that together make an impact. Whether the impact is derived from one or more research programs, applicants should create a single narrative for their pathway to impact to allow a robust assessment.

**Table 3. Types of research impact and examples of evidence of research impact**

Type of impact	Examples of evidence (not exhaustive)
<p><b>Knowledge impact</b> – research that has contributed to new knowledge and/or demonstrable benefits emerging from adoption, adaption or use of the discovery to inform further research, and/or understanding of what is effective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ recognition of research publications (for example, citation metrics, particularly field weighted)</li> <li>▪ sharing of research data, software or code</li> <li>▪ contribution to registries or biobanks</li> <li>▪ awards/prizes and conference presentations</li> <li>▪ uptake of research tools and techniques</li> <li>▪ a paradigm shift in a research field or evidence of uptake of the research by other disciplines</li> <li>▪ creation of a new area of research</li> </ul>
<p><b>Health impact</b> – research that has contributed to improvements in health through new therapeutics, diagnostics, disease prevention or changes in behaviour; or improvements in disease prevention, diagnosis and treatment, management of health problems, health policy, health systems, and quality of life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ policy or program adopted</li> <li>▪ a clinical guideline adopted</li> <li>▪ international or national practice standards adopted</li> <li>▪ improved service effectiveness</li> <li>▪ Phase I, Phase II and Phase III clinical trials underway</li> <li>▪ improved productivity due to research innovations (for example, reduced illness, injury)</li> <li>▪ quality-adjusted life years (QALYs), disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), potential years of life lost, patient reported outcome measure and other relevant indicators</li> <li>▪ relative stay index for multi-day stay patients, hospital standardised mortality ratio, cost per weighted separation and total case weighted separation (also relevant for economic impact (health care system savings))</li> <li>▪ research report – commissioned by Government, Industry or Other; Technical Report; and Textbook</li> </ul>
<p><b>Economic impact</b> – research that has contributed to improvements in the economic performance of the nation in which the research program was conducted, and/or for which the impact was intended, through creation of new industries, jobs or valuable products, or reducing health care costs, improving efficiency in resource use, or improving the welfare/well-being of the population within current health system resources. An economic impact may also contribute to social or health impacts, including human capital gains and the value of life and health.</p>	<p><b>Healthcare system savings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ reduction in Medicare Benefits Schedule/ Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme costs</li> <li>▪ improved productivity due to research innovations (for example, reduced illness, injury)</li> <li>▪ improved service effectiveness</li> </ul> <p><b>Product development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a research contract with an industry partner and an active collaboration</li> <li>▪ granting of a patent</li> <li>▪ execution of a licensing agreement with a company</li> <li>▪ income from intellectual property</li> <li>▪ raising funding from venture capital or other commercial sources or from government schemes that required industry co-participation</li> <li>▪ successful transition from start-up company (public market flotation, merger or acquisition)</li> <li>▪ development of pre-good manufacturing practice prototype</li> <li>▪ successful generation or submission of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– a regulatory standard data set</li> <li>– applications for pre-market approval of a medical device</li> <li>– a new drug or device for registration (for example, by Food and Drug Administration, European Medicines Agency, Therapeutic Goods Administration)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ product sales</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social impact</b> – research that has contributed to improvements in the health of the society, including the well-being of the end user and the community. This may include improved ability to access health care services and to participate socially (including empowerment and participation in decision making) and to quantify improvements in the health of society.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ uptake or demonstrated use of evidence by decision makers/policy makers</li> <li>▪ qualitative measures demonstrating changes in behaviours, attitudes, improved social equity, inclusion or cohesion</li> <li>▪ improved environmental determinants of health</li> <li>▪ improved social determinants of health</li> <li>▪ changes to health risk factor</li> <li>▪ dissemination of research to consumers and the community via mainstream and/or specialist media</li> <li>▪ capacity building of community members or health service partners</li> </ul>

Figure 1. The research lifecycle and the pathway to impact



### Reach and significance of the research impact (10%)

The applicant must demonstrate (with evidence) the **reach** and **significance** of the claimed research impact, framed against one or more of the 4 research impact types (see **Table 3**).

The **reach** of the impact is the extent, spread, breadth, and/or diversity of the beneficiaries of the impact, relative to the type of research impact. The **significance** is the degree to which the impact has enabled, enriched, influenced, informed or changed the performance of policies, practices, products, services, culture, understanding, awareness or well-being of the beneficiaries (not the prevalence or magnitude of the issue).

It is the reach and significance of the impact that determines the score (as outlined in the score descriptors at **Table 4**), not whether the applicant has framed their impact around one or more impact types.

There is no requirement for the applicant's research impact to align with their 5-year research proposal/vision.

**Table 4. Reach and significance of the research impact (Emerging Leadership and Leadership) (10%)<sup>1</sup>**

Score descriptors	Leadership (and Emerging Leadership) score indicators					
	7 Exceptional	6 (7) Outstanding	5 (6) Above expectations	4 (5) At expectations	3 (4) Below expectations/ satisfactory	Poor 2 (3) <b>OR</b> not addressed or evidenced 1 (2)
Relative to opportunity, the applicant's career stage and area of research, there is <b>robust verifiable evidence</b> of:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a <b>Knowledge</b> impact that has led to new knowledge within the field that is:</li> </ul>	paradigm-shifting and recognised internationally	major or significant and recognised nationally	very important and recognised across multiple fields	important within the field	somewhat important within the field	Recognised sporadically <b>OR</b> not well evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>influence on the FoR/research that is:</li> </ul>	profound and beyond the specific FoR	significant and beyond the specific FoR	very important and somewhat beyond the specific FoR	important within the specific FoR	somewhat important within the specific FoR	limited importance within the specific FoR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an influence on the development of a new field that is:</li> </ul>	central or crucial and recognised internationally	major and recognised nationally	very important	important	somewhat important	marginal <b>OR</b> not (well) evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a <b>Health</b> impact that has led to a development that has improved health or health systems, services, policy, programs or clinical practice that is:</li> </ul>	paradigm shifting	major or significant	very important	important	somewhat important	marginal <b>OR</b> not (well) evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>had an impact on health that was:</li> </ul>	profound with moderate reach or major with extensive reach	major with moderate reach or significant with extensive reach	significant with moderate reach or very important with extensive reach	very important with moderate reach or important with extensive reach	somewhat important with limited reach	limited <b>OR</b> not (well) evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improved the health of Australia's Indigenous people (where relevant):</li> </ul>	profoundly	significantly	measurably	somewhat	adequately	marginally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>led to a change in health systems, services that was:</li> </ul>	major, scalable/sustainable in a large number of communities	significant, scalable/sustainable in multiple communities	very important, scalable/sustainable in some communities	important, possibly scalable and sustainable in a small number of communities	good and possibly sustainable in a small number of communities	marginal and with limited evidence of scalability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an <b>Economic</b> impact that has led to the development of a service delivery or system change, device, therapeutic or change in clinical practice that is:</li> </ul>	profound	major	very important	important	somewhat important	limited importance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the generation of commercial income that is:</li> </ul>	very significant	significant	good	somewhat good	adequate	limited and/or not (well) evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a reduction in healthcare costs that is:</li> </ul>	profound	major	significant	good	adequate	limited
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a <b>Social</b> impact that has led to changes in social well-being, equality or social inclusion that are:</li> </ul>	major, for many people internationally <b>OR</b> profound, for a smaller number of people nationally/ internationally	significant, for many people nationally <b>OR</b> major, for a smaller number of people nationally	very important, for people nationally <b>OR</b> significant, for people at the state/territory or national level	important, for people nationally <b>OR</b> significant, for a smaller number of people at the local, state/territory level	important, for a number of people at the local, state/territory level	somewhat important, for people at the local, state/ territory level

<sup>1</sup> For the assessment of research impact, different 7-point scales are used for Emerging Leadership and Leadership applicants. This is to recognise that early and mid-career researchers will have had less time to accumulate research impact than more senior researchers.

**Remember** to consider in your assessment (based on the corroborating evidence provided):

- 1) The reach and significance of the research impact in:
  - a. informing knowledge to advance research
  - b. improving products, processes, behaviours/prevention, policies, practices
  - c. improving the nation's economic performance and/or
  - d. improving the health and well-being of the community.
- 2) The verifiable impact of the research (including research that leads to a decision *not* to use a particular diagnostic, treatment or health policy), rather than the prospective or anticipated effects/outcomes of the research (e.g. a prospective publication linked to the applicant's research program is *not* demonstrated or corroborated impact).
- 3) That an applicant's research impact may not necessarily align with the applicant's 5-year research proposal/vision.

According to feedback from Investigator Grant peer reviewers, applicants who scored well for the research impact criterion:

- clearly described and evidenced/corroborated their research impact claims
- used tangible examples to illustrate the change (impact) that occurred as a direct result of the research
- clearly identified an impact beyond the initial research finding
- included evidence that the impact had significant benefits.

## Applicant's contribution to the research impact (10%)

The applicant must outline their contribution to achieving their claimed impact.

Applicants will be assessed on the extent to which they can demonstrate their contribution to achieving the impact was:

- deliberate and proactive – integrated into the research activities and/or research plan
- targeted – with relevant stakeholders and at appropriate times
- effective – necessary to realise the claimed impact.

Reviewers will consider whether the applicant's contributions were deliberate and proactive, including the degree to which maximising impact was integrated into the research activities/plan. Reviewers will also consider whether the timing and targeting of these activities (e.g. stakeholders engaged) maximised the likelihood of achieving impact, and the degree to which the applicant's contributions were necessary to realise, sustain and/or maximise the impact. Peer reviewers will use their experience and expertise to determine the extent to which the applicant's contributions along the pathway to impact were appropriately targeted and timed for maximum benefit.

To provide flexibility for applicants who join research projects and/or programs at different stages, applicants are not required to provide examples of their contributions from each stage of the research lifecycle

(**Figure 1**). Applicants are also not required to outline *each* of their contributions along the pathway to impact. Applicants should outline their key example(s), that best highlight their initiative and judgement in maximising the potential reach and significance of the research impact. Applicants should include sufficient examples of their contributions to allow reviewers to assess them against the score descriptors at **Table 5**.

The progression of the pathway to impact is determined by the manner in which the research project or program moves between and along the stages of the research lifecycle. This relationship is represented in **Figure 1**. This image is illustrative only. NHMRC recognises that each 'pathway to impact' is unique, often non-linear or multidirectional, and the underpinning research projects/programs will not always move through the research lifecycle in a linear way (i.e. from conception through to dissemination). NHMRC also acknowledges that achieving impact is not solely the responsibility of a single researcher, and that multiple individuals will be involved (research collaborators, intermediaries, stakeholders, regulators, consumers/end users etc). The applicant's task is to create a clear narrative of *their* most significant contributions along a pathway to impact that best highlight their initiative and judgement in realising, sustaining and/or maximising the potential reach and significance of the research impact.

The applicant's contribution to the research impact is expected to be recent, continuing into the applicant's 10-year assessment timeframe (see [section 6.8](#) of [Appendix G](#)). Peer reviewers will be asked to consider the recency of the applicant's contribution at the score descriptors (**Table 5**). It may assist applicants and reviewers to better understand the concept of 'impact' by reviewing one or more of NHMRC's impact case studies on its [website](#). These case studies outline the 'translation journey' of a selection of NHMRC-funded research projects and show that the creation of knowledge is vital, but also that there are many other activities necessary to generate impact.

**Table 5. Applicant’s contribution to the research impact (10%)**

Score descriptor	Score indicators					
Relative to opportunity, the applicant’s career stage and area of research, the applicant demonstrated that their contribution along the pathway to impact was:	7 Exceptional	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations/ satisfactory	1–2 Poor 2 (3) <b>OR</b> not addressed or evidenced 1 (2)
• deliberate and proactive:	fully integrated into their research planning and/or activities	integrated into most of their research planning and/or activities	very well integrated into their research planning and/or activities	well integrated into their research planning and/or activities	integration into their research planning and/or activities was satisfactory	poorly integrated, <b>OR</b> not (well) evidenced/not integrated
• targeted:	timed optimally for maximum benefit and with the most appropriate stakeholders	timed strategically and with highly appropriate stakeholders	timed very well and with appropriate stakeholders, with only a few omissions	timed well and with appropriate stakeholders, but with some notable omissions	timed satisfactorily and with somewhat appropriate stakeholders, but with notable omissions	timed poorly, with limited stakeholders <b>OR</b> not (well) evidenced /considered/conducted
• effective:	recent* or ongoing contributions that were essential to realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were highly influential for realising the impact <b>OR</b> less recent^ contributions that were essential for realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were very important for realising a recent* impact <b>OR</b> less recent^ contributions that were highly influential for realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were important for realising a recent* impact <b>OR</b> less recent^ contributions that were very important for realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were somewhat important for realising a recent* impact <b>OR</b> less recent^ contributions that were important for realising impact	poorly evidence/justified in realising the impact <b>OR</b> in relation to an impact where the applicant’s contributions occurred more than 20 years ago

\* continuing into the applicant’s 10-year assessment timeframe (see section 6.8 of Appendix G)

^ wholly outside the applicant’s 10-year assessment timeframe but less than 20 years ago

**Remember:** Only where the applicant cannot demonstrate any contributions to the impact within their 10-year assessment timeframe should the reviewer consider the applicant’s contributions to be ‘less recent’.



### *Evidence for impact claims*

Applicants are required to provide evidence that is sufficient and strong enough to demonstrate their claims. Applicants may use the same evidence across the 2 impact sub-criteria if appropriate. Peer reviewers will need to decide whether the impact claims have been sufficiently demonstrated and corroborated. A poorly corroborated or non-corroborated research impact should receive a score of '1', in alignment with the score descriptors. Research impact examples may include the adoption or adaptation of existing research.

An applicant who does not wish to provide research impact evidence because it is not in the public domain, or because it is commercially sensitive, may describe the evidence within their application, noting that it is commercially sensitive, without making it available. Any such evidence should be provided to RAOs who should ensure that such evidence is retained by their office to be made available to NHMRC, if requested.

In considering whether to provide such evidence, applicants should note that all NHMRC peer reviewers enter into a Deed of Confidentiality prior to the commencement of the peer review process which prohibits the discussion of applications or disclosure of any information contained therein, outside of their appointment as a peer reviewer. In addition, NHMRC staff are required under the APS Code of Conduct to observe rigorous confidentiality in relation to their day-to-day work.

### *Verification of evidence provided against research impact claims*

Peer reviewers can verify evidence provided by applicants. Peer reviewers must not seek evidence to support the research impact claims of an applicant who has not provided evidence.

Peer reviewers should also note that, for corroborating evidence, it is the quality of the evidence provided, not the quantity, that should be considered. Applicants only need to provide evidence sufficient and strong enough to verify the claims, not all evidence that may be on the public record. Examples of evidence are listed in **Table 3** above. Evidence examples may be relevant to more than one research impact type.