



Appendix B: Proposed Investigator Grants 2026 score descriptor appendix

NHMRC public consultation

Investigator Grants 2026 score descriptors (proposed)

Applications for Investigator Grants 2026 are assessed by peer reviewers on the extent to which they address the assessment criteria:

- Track record, relative to opportunity (70%), including selected Level
 - Publications (35%)
 - Research Impact (20%)
 - Leadership (15%)
- Knowledge gain (30%).

NHMRC defines '**track record**' for the Investigator Grant scheme as the value of an individual's past research achievements, relative to opportunity, not prospective achievements, using evidence. Track records are assessed relative to opportunity, taking into consideration selected Level and any career disruptions, where applicable (see [Appendix C](#)).

NHMRC defines '**knowledge gain**' for the Investigator Grant scheme as the quality of the proposed research and significance of the knowledge gained. It incorporates theoretical concepts, hypothesis, research design, robustness and the extent to which the research findings will contribute to the research area and health outcomes (by advancing knowledge, practice or policy).

Score descriptors

Score descriptors are used as a guide to scoring an application against each of the assessment criteria. Peer reviewers will consistently refer to these score descriptors to ensure thorough, equitable and transparent assessment of applications.

While the score descriptors provide peer reviewers with some benchmarks for appropriately scoring each application, they are a guide to a 'best fit' outcome only, and **it is not essential that all descriptors relating to a given score are met.**

To assist reviewers in using each score descriptor, overarching performance indicators (Table 1) are provided to assist reviewers to better understand the expectations of applicants at each score, for each assessment criterion. Peer reviewers may wish to refer to these performance indicators where they encounter difficulty determining the most appropriate score. For example, reviewers may wish to refer back to the overarching performance indicators where the applicant's response does not definitively align to a single description, or the applicant's response aligns to the descriptions for multiple scores, to assess the 'best fit' outcome.

Table 1. Performance indicators

Performance descriptor	Performance indicator					
The applicant has demonstrated:	7 Exceptional	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations / satisfactory	2-1 Poor (2) OR not addresses or evidenced (1)
that relative to opportunity, career stage and area of expertise, their track record:	is comparable with the best similar researchers anywhere in the world	is comparable with the best similar researchers anywhere in Australia	is above the expectations of the typical Investigator Grant applicant	meets the expectations of the typical Investigator Grant applicant	is below the expectations of an Investigator Grant applicant	is developing to the standard of an Investigator Grant applicant OR fails to adequately address the assessment criteria or is not evidenced
that the quality of their 5-year vision/plan:	is comparable with the best research anywhere in the world	is comparable with the best research anywhere in Australia	are above the expectations of the typical Investigator Grant application	meet the expectations of the typical Investigator Grant application	are below the expectations of an Investigator Grant application	is developing to the standard of an Investigator Grant application OR fails to adequately address the assessment criterion

Assessing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions

It is recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants make additional valuable contributions to policy development, clinical/public health leadership and/or service delivery, community activities and linkages, and are often representatives on key committees. If nominated by the applicant, these contributions should be considered when assessing research output and track record.

Track record, relative to opportunity (70%), including selected Level

Publications (35%)

Applicants have been asked to nominate up to 10 of their best publications from within their 10-year assessment timeframe (see section 6.8 of [Appendix G](#)). Each nominated publication has an accompanying explanation field which the applicant uses to provide their reasons for nominating the publication. Peer reviewers are to assess nominated publications, including accompanying explanations, to form a judgement on their overall **quality and contribution to science, including the applicant's contribution to each**.

The focus on up to 10 nominated publications, rather than the applicant's total list of publications from their 10-year assessment timeframe, is to ensure emphasis of the publications track record assessment is on the quality and contribution to science, rather than quantity of publications.

Eligible publication types

NHMRC accepts 10 types of publication:

- Accepted for Publication
- Books/Chapters
- Editorials
- Journal Articles (Original Research)
- Journal Articles (Review)
- Letters to the Editor
- Preprints
- Research Report – commissioned by:
 - Government
 - Industry
 - or other
- Technical Report
- Textbook.

A preprint is a complete and public draft of a scientific document, yet to be certified by a journal through peer review. To be considered in this category, a preprint:

- must be available in a recognised scientific public archive or repository such as arXiv, bioRxiv, Peer J Preprints, medRxiv, etc
- should be uniquely identifiable via a digital object identifier (DOI). For preprints that are incrementally updated as work progresses, each version should have a unique DOI and only the latest version of the work should be included in the grant application.

Publication assessment will focus on up to 10 of the applicant's top publications nominated from within the applicant's 10-year assessment timeframe (see section 6.8 of [Appendix G](#)), supported by applicant explanations for each. Assessment of publication track record will focus on the quality of the research and contribution to science, rather than the quantity of publications.

Table 2. Publications score descriptors (35%)

Score descriptor	Score					
Relative to opportunity, the applicant's career stage and area of research, there was sufficient evidence that, overall:	7 Exceptional	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations / satisfactory	2-1 Poor (2) OR not addressed or evidenced (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the quality of the nominated publications was: 	exceptional	outstanding	above expectations	at expectations	below expectations	marginal/poor, OR not (well) evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the contribution to science of the nominated publications was: 	ground-breaking or paradigm shifting	highly influential or significant	very important	important	somewhat important	limited OR not (well) evidenced/justified
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the author's contribution to most/all publications was: 	central or crucial	highly influential or significant	very important	important	somewhat important	limited OR not (well) evidenced/justified

Reviewers should remember:

- 1) To assess eligible nominated publications (i.e. all allowable publication types and from within the 10-year assessment timeframe), including accompanying explanations, to form a judgement on their overall quality and contribution to science, including the applicant's contribution to each.
- 2) That publication quality refers to characteristics such as the rigour of experimental design, appropriate use of statistical methods, reproducibility of results, analytical strength of interpretations and significance of outcomes, rather than the number of publications or the standing of the journals in which they are published.
- 3) To use score descriptors to appropriately score each application, noting score descriptors are only a guide to a 'best fit' outcome, and it is not essential that all descriptors relating to a given score are met.
- 4) If appropriate, adjust scoring for relative to opportunity considerations or for applicants applying at an inappropriate Level ([Appendix D](#)).
- 5) To ignore additional track record information supplied in the publication explanation field (e.g. conference participation, awards, patents and publications not already nominated in the applicant's 'Top 10') that has not been shown to be as a direct result of the nominated publication (see section 6.9.1 of [Appendix G](#)).

According to feedback from Investigator Grant peer reviewers, applicants who scored well for the publications criteria:

- were first/last author on at least some of their nominated publications
- showed a clear upwards career trajectory
- clearly described and substantiated their role in the described work/nominated publications
- justified the quality, significance and impact of their nominated publications.

Research impact and pathway to impact (20%)

It is important to NHMRC's mission to build a healthy Australia that NHMRC-funded research positively effects 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**).

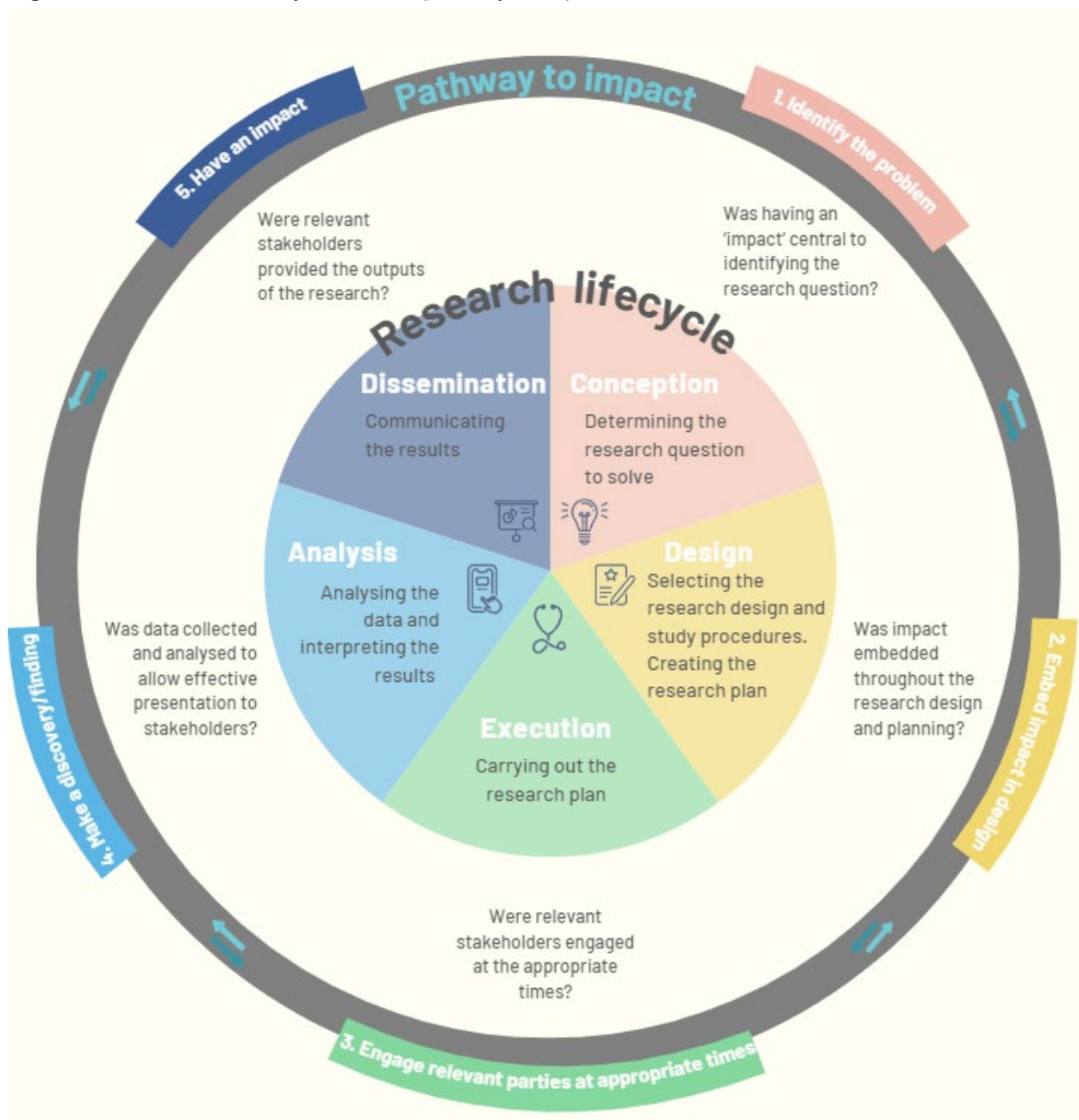
Applicants are not restricted to referencing a single program of research when addressing the 2 components of the research impact assessment criteria. The impact can result from multiple collaborations, projects or research programs that together make an impact. Whether the impact is derived from one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

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

Type of impact	Examples of evidence (not exhaustive)
<p>Knowledge impact – 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"> ▪ recognition of research publications (for example, citation metrics, particularly field weighted) ▪ sharing of research data, software or code ▪ contribution to registries or biobanks ▪ awards/prizes and conference presentations ▪ uptake of research tools and techniques ▪ a paradigm shift in a research field or evidence of uptake of the research by other disciplines ▪ creation of a new area of research
<p>Health impact – 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"> ▪ policy or program adopted ▪ a clinical guideline adopted ▪ international or national practice standards adopted ▪ improved service effectiveness ▪ Phase I, Phase II and Phase III clinical trials underway ▪ improved productivity due to research innovations (for example, reduced illness, injury) ▪ quality-adjusted life years (QALYs), disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), potential years of life lost, patient reported outcome measure and other relevant indicators ▪ 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)) ▪ research report – commissioned by Government, Industry or Other; Technical Report; and Text Book
<p>Economic impact – 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>Healthcare system savings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reduction in Medicare Benefits Schedule/ Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme costs ▪ improved productivity due to research innovations (for example, reduced illness, injury) ▪ improved service effectiveness <p>Product development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a research contract with an industry partner and an active collaboration ▪ granting of a patent ▪ execution of a licensing agreement with a company ▪ income from intellectual property ▪ raising funding from venture capital or other commercial sources or from government schemes that required industry co-participation ▪ successful transition from start-up company (public market flotation, merger or acquisition) ▪ development of pre-good manufacturing practice prototype ▪ successful generation or submission of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a regulatory standard data set – applications for pre-market approval of a medical device – a new drug or device for registration (for example, by Food and Drug Administration, European Medicines Agency, Therapeutic Goods Administration) ▪ product sales
<p>Social impact – 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"> ▪ uptake or demonstrated use of evidence by decision makers/policy makers ▪ qualitative measures demonstrating changes in behaviours, attitudes, improved social equity, inclusion or cohesion ▪ improved environmental determinants of health ▪ improved social determinants of health ▪ changes to health risk factor ▪ dissemination of research to consumers and the community via mainstream and/or specialist media ▪ capacity building of community members or health service partners

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%)¹

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) OR not addressed or evidenced 1 (2)
Relative to opportunity, the applicant's career stage and area of research, there is robust verifiable evidence of:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Knowledge impact that has led to new knowledge within the field that is: 	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 OR not well evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> influence on the FoR/research that is: 	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"> an influence on the development of a new field that is: 	central or crucial and recognised internationally	major and recognised nationally	very important	important	somewhat important	marginal OR not (well) evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Health impact that has led to a development that has improved health or health systems, services, policy, programs or clinical practice that is: 	paradigm shifting	major or significant	very important	important	somewhat important	marginal OR not (well) evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> had an impact on health that was: 	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 OR not (well) evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improved the health of Australia's Indigenous people (where relevant): 	profoundly	significantly	measurably	somewhat	adequately	marginally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> led to a change in health systems, services that was: 	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"> an Economic impact that has led to the development of a service delivery or system change, device, therapeutic or change in clinical practice that is: 	profound	major	very important	important	somewhat important	limited importance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the generation of commercial income that is: 	very significant	significant	good	somewhat good	adequate	limited and/or not (well) evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a reduction in healthcare costs that is: 	profound	major	significant	good	adequate	limited
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Social impact that has led to changes in social well-being, equality or social inclusion that are: 	major, for many people internationally OR profound, for a smaller number of people nationally/ internationally	significant, for many people nationally OR major, for a smaller number of people nationally	very important, for people nationally OR significant, for people at the state/territory or national level	important, for people nationally OR 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

¹ 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.

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) OR not addressed or evidenced 1 (2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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, OR not (well) evidenced/not integrated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 OR not (well) evidenced /considered/conducted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> effective: 	recent* or ongoing contributions that were essential to realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were highly influential for realising the impact OR less recent^ contributions that were essential for realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were very important for realising a recent* impact OR less recent^ contributions that were highly influential for realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were important for realising a recent* impact OR less recent^ contributions that were very important for realising the impact	recent* or ongoing contributions that were somewhat important for realising a recent* impact OR less recent^ contributions that were important for realising impact	poorly evidence/justified in realising the impact OR 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.

Leadership (15%)

For the assessment of leadership, peer reviewers are required to review the applicant's leadership narrative. Applicants have been asked to provide a single narrative that outlines their leadership achievements and their ability to identify and contribute to positive change (for example, organisational or behavioural/cultural change). Applicants have been asked to frame their response around one or more of the leadership elements:

- Research Mentoring – activities that support fellow researchers (from within or beyond the applicant's research group), to develop their research careers. Examples may be drawn from:
 - formal and informal stewardship of the next generation of researchers
 - supervising, mentoring and/or training
 - career development of staff and/or students
 - identifying, training and nurturing talent
 - fostering collaboration among junior researchers
- Research Programs and Team Leadership – activities that contribute to creating better working environments within research programs and/or teams. Examples may be drawn from:
 - creating diverse, inclusive, and collaborative learning environments
 - engagement with the broader community and public advocacy
 - providing opportunities for appropriate research and non-research training
- Institutional Leadership – activities that demonstrate the applicant's commitment to improving their research workplace. Examples may be drawn from:
 - driving behavioural and cultural change
 - identifying and mitigating risks
 - contribution(s) to department, centre, institute or organisation
 - improving equity and diversity
- Research Policy and Professional Leadership – activities that demonstrate initiative in helping to improve the conduct of research. Examples may be drawn from:
 - improving research quality standards
 - driving innovation and multi-dimensionality in research
 - improving academic reporting standards
 - contribution to the peer review of publications and grant applications, nationally and/or internationally.

NHMRC recognises that a broad range of leadership contributions are necessary to create an environment that enables research excellence and stewardship, and that based on a researcher's working environment, work history and level of seniority, examples of leadership will vary. The inclusion of 4 leadership elements is intended to support applicants of all backgrounds, research environments or career stage, to articulate a strong leadership narrative.

It is the clarity of the applicant's narrative and the strength of their demonstrated leadership examples that determines the applicant's score, not how many of the leadership elements their narrative addresses.

There is no 'correct' number of leadership elements to address, nor is there a formula to help calculate the most appropriate leadership score depending on the balance of how strongly (or not) an applicant might address one leadership element versus multiple (e.g. there is no rule to help peer reviewers determine whether it is better for an applicant to address 4 leadership elements 'well', 2 elements 'very well', or one element 'exceptionally'). The 4 leadership elements are not weighted, therefore reviewers should avoid 'averaging' the score descriptions (**Table 6**) for each of the addressed elements, particularly where the applicant has used a varying number of words to address each. Instead, peer reviewers should use their judgement, expertise and experience, when reviewing the applicant's leadership narrative, to assess the applicant's overall leadership performance, including consideration of the applicant's career stage, field of research, institution and the applicant's responses to the career overview and career context sections of the application.

The examples listed under each leadership element above are illustrative only, applicants have been encouraged to demonstrate their strongest examples of leadership throughout their narrative.

Peer reviewers should ignore Leadership track record information that falls outside of the allowable '10-year assessable timeframe' (see section 6.8 of [Appendix G](#)). Applicants have been advised not to provide Leadership track record information that carries over the allowable 10-year assessment timeframe. However, where applicants do list Leadership track record information that carries across the 10-year timeframe (for example, 'I have mentored 20 students since 2004'), peer reviewers should use their judgement in determining what subset of that leadership track record information to consider in their assessment. In the above example, reviewers might decide to reduce the number of claimed students mentored in proportion to how much additional time was being claimed (that is, halve the number of students mentored to 10, as the time period claimed was double the allowable 10-year timeframe).

Table 6. Leadership score descriptors (15%)

Score descriptor	Score					
Relative to opportunity, the applicant's career stage and area of research, the applicant demonstrates proactive leadership in:	7 Exceptional	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations/ satisfactory	2-1 Poor (2) OR not addressed or evidenced (1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> research mentoring that is: 	exceptional, entirely beneficial and transformational	outstanding, highly beneficial, appropriate and effective	excellent, very beneficial, appropriate and effective	beneficial, appropriate and effective	somewhat influential, appropriate and effective	poorly articulated OR not addressed or evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> research programs and team leadership that is: 	world-leading, decisive, strategic, inclusive, collaborative and transformative	outstanding, creating a highly conducive team and/or program environment	excellent, driving change and improving team and/or program cohesion	good, improves the team and/or program environment	somewhat effective in transforming the team and/or program environment	poorly articulated OR not addressed or evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> institutional leadership (at any level – e.g. local, school/faculty/department or organisation/institute-wide), that: 	creates a paradigm-shift that improves the research workplace	has a substantial influence in improving the research workplace	is very effective at improving the research workplace	effective in improving the research workplace	somewhat effective in improving the research workplace	poorly articulated OR not addressed or evidenced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> research policy and professional leadership that is: 	wholly innovative, creating paradigm-shifts in the conduct of research	extremely effective, creating highly impactful changes in the conduct of research	very effective, creating very impactful changes in the conduct of research	effective, creating impactful changes in the conduct of research	somewhat effective, creating some changes in the conduct of research	poorly articulated OR not addressed or evidenced

Remember: Do not take into consideration Leadership track record information from outside of the allowable 10-year assessment timeframe (see [Appendix G](#)).

According to feedback from Investigator Grant reviewers, applicants who scored well for the Leadership criteria were able to provide evidence for their leadership role(s) in their field and/or institution.

Knowledge gain (30%)

NHMRC defines 'knowledge gain' for the Investigator Grant scheme as the **quality of the proposed research and significance of the knowledge gained**. It incorporates theoretical concepts, hypothesis, research design, robustness and the extent to which the research findings will contribute to the research area and health outcomes (by advancing knowledge, practice or policy).

In their response to the knowledge gain criterion, applicants are asked to:

- describe **the research vision/plan** for the next 5 years of their research career
 - outline the proposed research objectives, basic methodologies and expected outcomes
 - describe the importance of the vision/plan in addressing an issue to advance the research or health area (not prevalence or magnitude of issue)
- outline the **proposed new research** to be undertaken with the Investigator Grant
 - describe the planned outcomes of the proposed new research and its potential significance
 - where relevant, provide details of ongoing and/or completed research that informs, and/or provides context for, the proposed new research
 - describe the support for the proposed new research (e.g. access to technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities, and if required, access to additional expertise and funding necessary to achieve proposed outcomes)
 - justify that the proposed new research can be achieved with the available time and funding from the Investigator Grant (i.e. that it is feasible)
 - outline how engagement along a research impact pathway will be embedded into the design and planning of the proposed new research.

For the assessment of 'knowledge gain' peer reviewers are to consider:

- the clarity and justification of the research hypotheses/rationale
- the strengths and weaknesses of the scientific framework, study design, methods and analyses
- the feasibility of the proposed new research, taking into account the applicant's justification of how the research can be achieved with the time and money available from the grant
- whether the proposal tackles a major question addressing an issue of critical importance to advance the research or health area (not prevalence or magnitude of issue)
- the access to the technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities, and if required, access to additional expertise and funding necessary to achieve the proposed outcomes
- the degree to which research impact was integrated into the research design and plan
- the potential for significant and transformative changes/outcomes in the scientific knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues
- the potential research outputs including intellectual property, publications, policy advice, products, services, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing etc.

The assessment of knowledge gain is of the **proposed new research** outlined in the research proposal. Where details of previous and/or concurrent research (not funded by the Investigator Grant) are outlined in the research proposal, this may help the peer reviewer to contextualise the proposed new research. This may assist the reviewer to better understand the rationale for the proposed research and to determine its feasibility.

Peer reviewers are to make no distinction in their assessment of the 5-year research vision/plan, between applicants who have held, or currently hold an Investigator Grant, and applicants who have not.

The significance of the study is not a measure of the prevalence/incidence of the health issue (for example, cancer versus sudden infant death syndrome) but the extent to which the study will address the health issue.

The knowledge gain must be relevant to Australia and Australian health, but it is not a requirement for all research outlined in the research vision/plan to occur in Australia (see [NHMRC Direct research costs guidelines](#)). NHMRC encourages international collaboration in health and medical research to contribute to global health, achieve better outcomes for the Australian community and build Australia's research capability (see [NHMRC International Engagement Strategy 2020–2023](#)).

Table 7. Knowledge gain score descriptors (30%)

Score descriptor	Score indicators						
<p>The applicant's research proposal demonstrates that the proposed research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is supported by a reasoned hypothesis/rationale that is: has a scientific framework, design, methods and analyses that are: demonstrates that it addresses an issue that is: has or has access to technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities that are: if required, has access to additional funding necessary to achieve proposed outcomes that is: if required, has access to additional expertise necessary to achieve proposed outcomes that is: involves contributions along the pathway to impact that are: will result in changes / outcomes in the scientific knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues and outputs (e.g. intellectual property, publications, policy advice, products, services, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing) that are: 	7 Exceptional	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations / satisfactory	2-1 Poor (2) OR not addressed or evidenced (1)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is supported by a reasoned hypothesis/rationale that is: 	exceptional in its justification	extremely well justified	very well justified, with few minor weaknesses	well justified, with a few minor concerns	satisfactorily justified, with some minor concerns	poor OR not (well) justified
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has a scientific framework, design, methods and analyses that are: 	exceptional, perfectly developed and appropriate	extremely well developed and appropriate with only a few minor weaknesses	very well developed and appropriate with minor weaknesses	sound and appropriate with a few minor concerns	somewhat sound and appropriate with some minor concerns	lacks clarity in some aspects OR contains notable weaknesses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrates that it addresses an issue that is: 	of critical importance to advance the research or health area*	of considerable importance to advance the research or health area*	very important to advance the research or health area*	of importance to advance the research or health area*	of somewhat importance to advance the research or health area*	of marginal importance to advance the research OR health area*
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has or has access to technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities that are: 	exceptional, extremely well aligned with the proposed research and access was well evidenced / justified	highly appropriate, very well aligned with the proposed research and access was well evidenced / justified	very good, well aligned with the proposed research and access was evidenced / justified	good, mostly aligned with the proposed research and access was mostly evidenced / justified	adequate, mostly aligned with the proposed research and access was somewhat evidenced / justified	somewhat aligned with the proposed research OR access was not (well) explained / justified
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> if required, has access to additional funding necessary to achieve proposed outcomes that is: 	already secured or extremely well evidenced / justified that it will be obtained	highly justified / evidenced that it will be obtained	very well justified / evidenced that it can be obtained	well justified / evidenced that it can be obtained	Somewhat justified / evidenced that it may be obtained	poorly justified /evidenced or unlikely to materialise OR lacks sufficient funding
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> if required, has access to additional expertise necessary to achieve proposed outcomes that is: 	exceptional and extremely well aligned with the proposed research	highly appropriate and very well aligned with the proposed research	excellent and well aligned with the proposed research	very good and mostly aligned with the proposed research	good and mostly aligned with the proposed research	somewhat aligned with the proposed research OR not well articulated
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> involves contributions along the pathway to impact that are: 	fully integrated into research planning and/or activities	integrated into most of the research planning and/or activities	very important to research planning and/or activities	important to research planning and/or activities	satisfactorily important to research planning and/or activities	marginal or poor, OR not (well) evidenced
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> will result in changes / outcomes in the scientific knowledge, practice or policy underpinning human health issues and outputs (e.g. intellectual property, publications, policy advice, products, services, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing) that are: 	transformative, profound or of critical significance	highly influential or of major significance	very influential, or very significant	influential, or significant	somewhat influential, or moderately significant	unlikely to be significant OR not (well) justified

* (not the prevalence or magnitude of the issue)

Focus more on the scientific quality and potential for impact of the proposed (new) research outlined in the research proposal. **Focus less** on whether existing/ongoing research has funding. Research that is not funded by the Investigator Grant can be included in the Research Proposal to help provide context for the proposed new research. However, your assessment is of the proposed new research.

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

- described a program of research that is achievable/feasible within the 5-year timeframe, and not just a set of disparate projects
- provided a clear research proposal with well-justified rationale/methods/hypothesis with a strong vision for the future
- made clear statements on the expected outcomes of the research and how it would be a significant progression on current activities, with a clear trajectory
- didn't assume knowledge (avoided jargon and obscure acronyms)