Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

NHMRC

Public consultation: Proposed updates to Synergy Grant Scheme 2027

Overview

The Synergy Grant scheme was introduced in 2019 as part of NHMRC's then 'New Grant Program' (Ideas, Investigator, Clinical Trials and Cohort Studies, and Synergy Grant schemes).

The scheme awards up to $55m in funding annually to 11 outstanding multidisciplinary teams, to pursue questions not possible for homogenous research groups to address, and seeks to build diverse capability in the health and medical research sector.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is committed to continuing to innovate, evaluate and optimise its grant program, in consultation with stakeholders from the health and medical research sector (via participants in NHMRC grant programs, peer reviewer surveys, RAO consultation and from NHMRC's principal committees).

Rationale

To support the scheme to achieve its objective to support 'highly collaborative, diverse and exceptional research teams, to address major multidisciplinary health and medical research questions', applications are currently assessed in a 2-stage peer review process. Stage 1 assesses the 'knowledge gain' and 'synergy' criteria. Only applications that meet benchmark scores for those criteria are eligible to progress to Stage 2, where individual track records are assessed and scored separately, against the same track record criteria used in the Investigator Grant scheme (Publications, Research impact and pathway to impact, and Leadership).

Consistent feedback from the sector indicates this assessment and peer review framework is overly burdensome. Feedback from applicants and grantees also indicates that the Investigator Grant-style, individual track record assessment may be discouraging teams from nominating the full breadth of potential CIs to their teams (e.g. with diverse, non-'traditional' work and lived experience). And that this ran counter to the mix of personal and professional diversity called for in applicant teams, by the scheme's aims and objective.

NHMRC believes these proposed changes will allow the scheme to continue to achieve its aims and objectives, while significantly reducing burden on scheme participants, and broadening the scope of potential applicants.

What are the changes?

NHMRC is proposing the following 3 key changes for the Synergy scheme from 2027:

1. Introducing '**Team Capability'** to replace individual CI track record assessment

Instead of each CI being assessed individually against the 'Publications', 'Research impact and pathway to impact' and 'Leadership' assessment criteria, each CI will provide up to 10 'Outputs', supported by a written justification of their scientific quality and the CI's contribution to each. Each CI will also provide a 2-page Capability statement, that will outline their suitability for their nominated role(s) in the proposed research project.

2. Introducing '**Potential for Impact**' assessment criterion

It is important to NHMRC's mission to build a healthy Australia that NHMRC-funded research positively impacts knowledge, health and/or research areas. To help achieve this, NHMRC is proposing to assess

Synergy Grant applicants on the potential impact of their proposed research, informed by the applicant team's research proposal and team capability statements (see page 18 for more information).

3. Introducing **single-stage peer review** to replace the '2-stage' peer review process

All assessment criteria (Research quality, Synergy and team capability, and Potential for impact) will be assessed by peer reviewers in one stage, with funding recommendations based on the combined scores for all criteria.

Figure 1 – Current '2-stage' peer review process

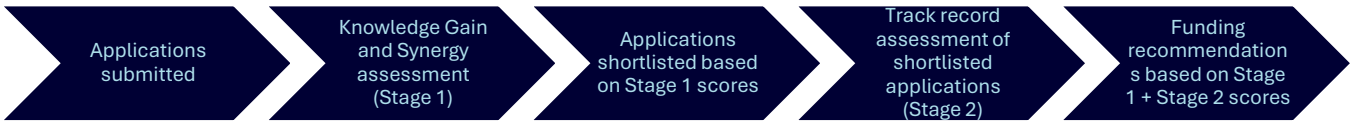
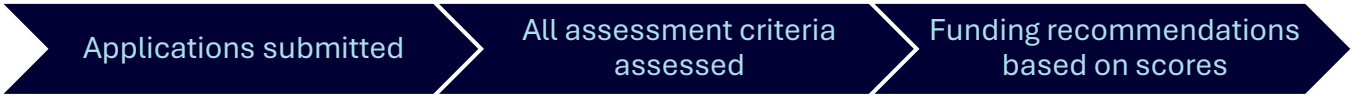


Figure 2 – Proposed single stage peer review process



Why your views matter

Your feedback will help ensure that these updates reflect the views and perspectives from the sector. It will help NHMRC to design the scheme to best meet the needs of applicants and peer reviewers, while ensuring the scheme continues to achieve its aims and objectives.

NHMRC welcomes your submissions, which will help inform these updates, proposed for implementation from the 2027 Synergy Grant round. Please review the relevant consultation documents before completing your submission and feel free to bring this consultation to the attention of interested colleagues. Below are the key excerpts from the proposed Synergy Grants 2027 Guidelines. For comparison, you can find the current Synergy Grants 2026 Guidelines on GrantConnect.

The closing date for this consultation is Tuesday, 19 May 2026. If you need assistance, please email synergy.grants@nhmrc.gov.au.We look forward to receiving your comments.

Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

NHMRC

(Proposed) Synergy Grants 2027 Guidelines – relevant excerpts of updated material

Section 1.2 – About the grant program

Funding for the program will be provided from the NHMRC Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA), which is underpinned by section 51 of the NHMRC Act.

The objective of the Synergy Grant scheme is to:

- achieve collaborative gain through the support of highly collaborative, diverse and exceptional research teams, to address major multidisciplinary health and medical research questions.

The intended outcomes of the Synergy Grant scheme are to:

- support ongoing highly collaborative and diverse teams (in terms of research discipline, career stage, gender and/or cultural background), to address questions not suitable for homogenous research teams
- generate transformative impacts only possible with the specific mix of skills and experience of research teams
- build capability in the health and medical research sector by supporting diverse teams that will demonstrate their leadership in mentoring and career development of team members, leading to the diversification of the research workforce.

1.1. Key changes

Applicants need to note the following changes for the Synergy Grants 2027 Guidelines:

- Following extensive consultation with the sector and an expert working group, and consistent feedback from Synergy Grant applicants and peer reviewers, the assessment and peer review frameworks have been revised.
- To support CIAs to nominate their best/most appropriate teams, including CIs from diverse backgrounds, the individual track record elements 'Publications', 'Research impact' and 'Leadership' have been replaced by a teams-based 'Team capability' criterion, which replaces 'Top 10 publications' with 'Top 10 outputs' and introduces a 'Team capability statement' (see Appendix B).
- The 'Potential for impact' criterion has been added (see Appendix B).
- The '2-stage' peer review, that separates Track record assessment from the assessment of 'Synergy' and 'Knowledge gain' has been replaced by a single-stage assessment.
- 'Knowledge gain' has been renamed as 'Research quality', to align with other MREA team-based schemes, and to acknowledge that the potential 'knowledge gained' is now assessed via the 'Potential for impact' criteria.
- In line with the (draft) Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research (2026), applicants are asked at 'Research quality' to outline their research impact vision, and how they will embed working towards achieving that impact within their research plans, designs and evaluation strategy (see Appendix B).

Appendix B. Synergy Grants 2027 score descriptors

The Synergy Grant scheme's objective is to achieve collaborative gain through the support of highly collaborative, diverse and exceptional research teams, to address major multidisciplinary health and medical research questions.

Applications for Synergy Grants 2027 are assessed by peer reviewers on the extent to which they address the following assessment criteria:

- **Research quality (30%)**
- **Synergy and team capability (50%)**
  - synergy (30%)
  - team capability (20%)
- **Potential for impact (20%)**

These assessment criteria are intended to be used together, to assist peer reviewers to determine which teams are most likely to achieve the scheme's objective.

Teams are required to pose multidisciplinary research questions that align to their 'research impact vision', in their response to '**research quality**'. Teams must outline how their diverse professional and personal skills and experience are purposefully aligned to address these questions in their response to '**synergy**' and '**team capability**'. How well the team can address these criteria will inform the team's '**potential for impact**', particularly the elements that demonstrate the **significance** and the **reach** of the proposed research (including scientific framework, design, methods and analyses, plans to maximise and measure impact of the research, and access to necessary resources, etc).

Key definitions

'**synergy**' is the appropriateness of a diverse and highly collaborative team, to address a major health and medical research question in a way that would not be possible for a homogenous group of researchers or researchers working independently.

'**team capability**' is the quality and appropriateness of the nominated team members to fulfil their role on the grant, justified by their demonstrated track record.

'**collaborative gain**' is the discernible benefit of purposefully diverse teams working synergistically to build sector capability and address multidisciplinary research questions.

'**research quality**' is the quality of the research question(s), project aims and the proposed research plan, along with their alignment with the team's 'research impact vision', scheme objectives and expected outcomes.

'**research impact vision**' is the aspirational goal of the research project or program. Not what the team plans to achieve in 5 years with the grant, but rather what the team is ultimately working towards, the ideal outcome of the team's research efforts.

'**potential for impact**' is the extent to which the outcomes and outputs of the proposed research will result in advancements to and/or impact on the research or health area.

'**reach**' is the **breadth and scale** of impact in the target population of the research.

'**significance**' is the **extent** to which the research will address the issue, not the prevalence/incidence of the health issue.

'professional and personal diversity' refers to the mix of team members with regards to their various professional backgrounds (i.e. research discipline, professional background, career stage), as well as demographic information (e.g. gender, cultural/linguistic background, age, under-represented groups).

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.

NHMRC strives to use a consistent range of adjectives in the descriptions of each score, across category descriptors. This is to help provide clarity and consistency for peer reviewers on what is expected at each score. However, due to the varying difficulty of addressing some elements of the assessment criteria, this is not always appropriate. In some instances, multiple adjectives are used within the description of a single score. This is to allow peer reviewers to consider the applicant's performance along a range of excellence against the assessment criteria, as opposed to relying upon single adjectives.

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.

Performance indicators

The performance indicators (**Table 1**) can be used together with the score descriptors to further understand what is expected of applicants at each score. Performance indicators are designed to allow peer reviewers to anchor their expectations of applicants around the objectives of the scheme. Synergy Grants, for example, fund exceptional, purposefully diverse teams to build capability in the sector, and address research question(s) that couldn't be addressed by homogenous teams or by researchers working independently. Therefore, these indicators are primarily framed around these expectations, and that awardees will generate transformative impacts only possible with their specific mix of skills and experience.

The performance indicators provide peer reviewers with descriptions that address 3 broad 'elements' of independent assessment (quality of the proposed research, the potential for impact, and the demonstrated capability of the applicant(s)). As such, not all descriptions in the performance indicators will be relevant for each assessment criteria.

As with score descriptors, performance indicators provide peer reviewers with some benchmarks for descriptions relating to a given score.

Table 1. Performance indicators

Performance indicator					
With reference to what the assessment criteria is asking (and where relevant, having consideration for the applicant team's opportunities for research) the applicant team has demonstrated in their response, that they are:					
7 Highest performing	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations	2–1 Poor (2) **OR** not addressed or evidenced (1)
as strong a team as could reasonably be expected. You are entirely convinced by their response (there is no real need to change or alter in any way). In your view, the team has demonstrated they are fully capable of conducting research with significant positive impact and that they, and their proposed research, would be comparable with the best similar research or researchers anywhere in the world.	an incredibly strong team. You are extremely convinced by their response (with only a small number of minor weaknesses). In your view, the team has demonstrated they are exceedingly capable of conducting research with significant positive impact and that they, and their proposed research, would be comparable with the best similar research or researchers anywhere in Australia.^	a very strong team. You are very satisfied by their response (with only a small number of weaknesses). In your view, the team has demonstrated they are very capable of conducting research with significant positive impact and that they, and their proposed research, exceed your expectations of what you would consider to be 'good' researchers or research.	a good team. You are mostly satisfied by their response (with some moderate weaknesses throughout). In your view, the team has demonstrated they are quite capable of conducting research with significant positive impact and that they, and their proposed research, meet your expectations of what you would consider to be 'good' researchers or research.	a developing team. You are somewhat satisfied by their response (with some moderate to significant weaknesses throughout). In your view, the team has demonstrated they are developing towards being capable of conducting research with positive impact but that they, and their proposed research, do not yet meet your expectations of what you would consider to be 'good' researchers or research.	a poor team **OR** an applicant team who hasn't addressed the assessment criteria or corroborated their statements/claims
Key adjectives used in score descriptors					
Paradigm-shifting Transformative Central or Crucial Highest Fully Entirely	Extremely Outstanding Major(ly) Significant(ly)	Very	Important Well Good	Adequate Moderate(ly) Somewhat	Limited Marginal Poor Not (well) evidenced Not addressed

^NHMRC acknowledges that in some research areas, the best Australian research and researchers are the benchmark internationally. In these instances, peer reviewers are encouraged to align the applicant's response to a score of 7 for this element. When applicants simultaneously meet the descriptions for multiple scores (e.g. an applicant who satisfies the description of 'very strong' simultaneously satisfies the description of 'good'), peer reviewers are encouraged to consider aligning the applicant's response with the higher score.

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 applicable, these contributions should be considered when assessing outputs and team capability.

Research quality (30%)

The Synergy Grant scheme supports **exceptional** and **highly collaborative** teams to address **major multidisciplinary** health and medical research questions.

'Research quality' for the Synergy Grant scheme refers to the quality and rigour of the proposed research plan/framework to address complex multidisciplinary research question(s), not suitable for homogenous research groups, or researchers working independently, to address.

The **'Research quality'** criterion focuses on the theoretical concepts, research design, analytical approach and methods or techniques the applicant team employs to address major multidisciplinary research questions that contribute to achieving their 'research impact vision', by advancing knowledge, practice or policy in the research and/or health area.

Multidisciplinary research

Solving major research questions and achieving transformative health outcomes increasingly requires new technical and intellectual approaches (new ways to think about and/or address a question) through a convergence of perspectives from different disciplines. Each discipline provides specific intellectual knowledge, experimental approaches, methodological considerations, analytical approaches, and theoretical context. Together, these elements provide new insights to address major and challenging research questions.

In addition to integration between the broad research areas of basic science, clinical medicine and science, public health and health services research, a multidisciplinary approach may involve single or multiple methods (i.e., qualitative, quantitative, multimethod and mixed methods) across a range of research disciplines including, for example, social sciences, policy analysis, economics, engineering, mathematics and physical sciences. Such approaches may be critical to address major questions in health care delivery, health systems strengthening or population health.

The concept of research involving multiple disciplines is often denoted by terms such as multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. However, the definition of these terms, and even the concept of a 'discipline', is constantly evolving and lacks consensus across different areas of health and medical research.

For the purposes of Synergy Grants, '**multiple disciplinary research**' covers 'research by teams that integrate information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, methodologies and/or theories from 2 or more disciplines or bodies of specialised knowledge to **advance fundamental understanding** or to solve questions whose solutions are **beyond the scope of a single discipline** or area of research practice'.

Engaging with stakeholders to maximise impact

NHMRC strongly encourages and values collaborations with stakeholders who have direct experience and knowledge, or who are direct beneficiaries, of the proposed research. This could include consumers, community groups, industry, clinicians and policy makers. The active involvement of these stakeholders will enhance research priority setting, increase the relevance of the research, provide critical knowledge that increases the quality and direction of the research, and increase the '**significance**'[1] and '**reach**'[2] of the potential impact of the research.

[1] 'significance' refers to the extent to which the research will address the issue, not the prevalence/incidence of the health issue.

[2] 'reach' refers to the breadth **and scale** of impact in the target population of the research.

In their response to the '**research quality**' criterion, applicants are asked to provide a '**research proposal**' that will:

Vision

- outline the team's 'research impact vision'[3]

Plan and design

- propose a multidisciplinary research question(s) that works towards achieving this 'vision', by: identifying, considering and incorporating relevant stakeholder needs
- outlining why the integration of knowledge and methods (e.g. data, tools, perspectives, techniques) from multiple research disciplines or bodies of specialised knowledge is required
- outlining the type(s) of diversity fostered and how it will enhance the outcomes of the project, its scientific quality and whether the approach will provide novel solutions and insights, not possible for homogenous research teams
- describing the appropriate integration of sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation into the research plan and design, and/or justified why any variables are not integrated
- addressing an issue of critical significance to advance knowledge in the research or health area
- provide a hypothesis/rationale that justifies the appropriateness of the proposed research question(s), design and methods
- describe how the proposed scientific framework/research design integrates complementary knowledge and approaches from multiple disciplines
- explain how realising an impact will be embedded throughout the research plan and design

Execution

- describe how the team plan to engage relevant parties at appropriate times throughout the execution of the research plan, to maximise the potential impacts of the proposed research
- demonstrate access to resources, infrastructure, and facilities that will be required to undertake the proposed research
- identify and mitigate potential risks (e.g. scientific, technical, financial, compliance/regulatory, operational) to the success of the research
- outline the plans and methods that will keep the team integrated and cohesive, and will drive positive outcomes, e.g.:

  how performance will be monitored

  how milestones will be evaluated

  how the grant funds and other resources will be shared, deployed, and redeployed if required.

Evaluation

- outline plans to effectively communicate key findings and analysis to appropriate stakeholders
- describe how you plan to measure the impact of the proposed research

[3] The aspirational goal of the research project or program. Not what the team plans to achieve in 5 years with the grant, but rather what the team is ultimately working towards, the ideal outcome of the team's research efforts.

For the assessment of '**research quality**', peer reviewers are to consider:

- the standard and extent to which the hypothesis/rationale is justified and aligned with the proposed research
- the extent to which the research question(s) require a multidisciplinary team to solve
- the quality and appropriateness of the scientific framework/research design
- the extent to which the diversity fostered will enhance the outcomes of the project, including the scientific quality and whether the approach will provide novel solutions and insights, not possible for a homogenous research team
- the appropriateness of the integration of sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and/or sexual orientation into the research and/or justification of why any variables are not integrated
- the extent to which plans to engage with relevant stakeholders, to maximise the potential impact, are integrated/embedded and targeted throughout the research lifecycle
- the comprehensiveness of risk mitigation plans
- the quality and appropriateness of resources, infrastructure, and facilities that will support the proposed research
- the appropriateness of plans to ensure the team meets their research milestones.

Research quality (30%)

Table 2. Research quality

Score descriptor	Score indicators					
The application's research proposal reflects the ambitions of the team's research vision, and demonstrates that it:	7 Highest performing	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations	2–1 Poor (2) OR not addressed or evidenced (1)
▪ is supported by a reasoned hypothesis/rationale that is:	of the highest standard and fully justified	outstanding and extremely well justified	very strong and very well justified, with few minor weaknesses	strong and well justified, with a few minor concerns	somewhat justified, with some moderate concerns	poor OR not (well) justified
▪ addresses an issue that is:	of critical significance to advance knowledge in the research or health area*	of considerable significance to advance knowledge in the research or health area*	very significant to advance knowledge in the research or health area*	of significance to advance knowledge in the research or health area*	somewhat significant to advance knowledge in the research or health area*	of marginal OR of no significance to advance knowledge in the research or health area*
▪ addresses a research question beyond the scope of a single discipline that is:	only possible for a multidisciplinary team to explore	entirely appropriate for a multidisciplinary team to explore	highly appropriate for a multidisciplinary team to explore	appropriate for a multidisciplinary team to explore	somewhat appropriate for a multidisciplinary team to explore	of no benefit for a multidisciplinary team to explore OR not articulated
▪ has a scientific framework, design, methods and analyses (that integrate complementary knowledge and approaches from multiple disciplines) that is:	of the highest standard, fully developed and appropriate	outstanding, extremely well developed and appropriate with only a small number of minor weaknesses	very strong, very well developed and appropriate with a small number of weaknesses	strong, sound and appropriate with some moderate weaknesses	somewhat sound and appropriate with some moderate to significant weaknesses	lacks clarity in some aspects OR not articulated
▪ will foster diversity to enhance the outcomes of the project that are:	of the highest scientific quality, and entirely likely to provide novel solutions and insights	of exceptional scientific quality, and extremely likely to provide novel solutions and insights	of very high scientific quality, and very likely to provide novel solutions and/or insights	of high scientific quality, and likely to provide novel solutions and/or insights	of moderate scientific quality, and only somewhat likely to provide novel solutions and/or insights	of poor scientific quality, and unlikely to provide novel solutions or insights OR not appropriately addressed / justified
▪ has or has access to technical resources, infrastructure, equipment and facilities that are:	of the highest quality, fully aligned with the proposed research and access was fully evidenced / justified	outstanding, extremely well aligned with the proposed research and access was extremely well evidenced / justified	very good, well aligned with the proposed research and access was very well evidenced / justified	good, mostly aligned with the proposed research and access was mostly evidenced / justified	only somewhat aligned with the proposed research and access was somewhat evidenced / justified	poorly aligned with the proposed research OR not explained / justified
▪ has a risk management strategy that identifies and mitigates potential risks to the success of the research that is:	entirely appropriate, identifies all risks and has a comprehensive mitigation plan	extremely appropriate, identifies most risks and has a thorough mitigation plan	very appropriate, identifies several risks and has a very good mitigation plan	appropriate, identifies some risks and has a good mitigation plan	somewhat appropriate, identifies a small number of risks and has a mitigation plan	poor OR not appropriate or addressed
▪ has plans to ensure the team meets their research/performance milestones that are:	entirely appropriate and comprehensive	extremely appropriate and comprehensive	very appropriate and comprehensive	appropriate and comprehensive	somewhat appropriate and comprehensive	Poor OR not appropriate or addressed

* significance refers to the extent to which the research will address the issue, not the prevalence/incidence of the health issue.

^ further details on the research lifecycle and pathway to impact are at Appendix X.

Synergy and team capability (50%)

The '**synergy**' and '**team capability**' criteria focus on the potential **collaborative gain** of diverse teams working synergistically to address multidisciplinary research questions of major importance.

The '**synergy**' criterion provides an opportunity for the applicant team to *outline* the appropriateness of their **professional and personal diversity** to address their nominated research question(s) via a 'synergy statement'.

The '**team capability**' criterion provides an opportunity for individual team members to *demonstrate* the quality and appropriateness of their skills and experiences, to perform the role outlined for them in the 'synergy statement'.

Synergy (30%)

The **'synergy'** criterion is closely interrelated with the **'research quality'** criterion.

While **'research quality'** asks applicants to justify *why* the proposed research requires the integration of knowledge, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, methodologies and/or theories and analyses from multiple disciplines, **'synergy'** is the applicants' opportunity to outline *the ways in which* their diverse team will work collaboratively to address the proposed research.

Applicants will be assessed on the extent to which they can show that they will build team capability, and produce discernibly beneficial outcomes for complex, multidisciplinary research questions that would not be possible without the collaborative effort of the specific members of the team (i.e. **collaborative gain**).

Diversity is a broad concept with different dimensions and approaches across the health and medical research sector. Each of the different dimensions is important and diversity should be embraced in its broadest sense.

For the purposes of the Synergy Grant scheme 'diversity' refers to the purposeful '**professional and personal diversity'** of the team members. Teams will be assessed on the appropriateness of their diverse professional backgrounds (i.e. research discipline, career stage), as well as demographics (e.g. gender, cultural/linguistic background, age, membership of under-represented groups) to address the proposed research.

The diversity of the team must be purposefully aligned with research objectives; the synergy statement should clearly articulate how each of the CIs contributes to the scientific development and execution of the research in a **substantive and measurable** manner.

Incorporated within '**professional diversity**' is the mix of disciplines within the team (**multidisciplinarity)**. When considering the team's **multidisciplinarity**, it is the extent to which the team's diversity is **necessary** and **appropriate** to address the research that is the focus of the assessment, **not the degree of multidisciplinarity** among the team (i.e. the number of disciplines represented by team members). The team's diversity is purposeful, in pursuit of generating a collaborative gain, not 'diversity for diversity's sake'.

In their response to the '**synergy**' criterion, applicants are asked to provide a '**synergy statement**' that outlines:

- how the team's 'professional and personal diversity' is appropriately and productively aligned with the proposed research question(s), methods, analyses and research plan
- why the research question(s) cannot be addressed without the proposed personnel
- what mentoring, professional and personal development opportunities will be provided and how they will contribute to increasing capability and diversification of the research workforce, including in under-represented groups and researchers
- plans for the team to work synergistically, including outputs, milestones, evaluation measures, strategies for intellectual exchange, governance, grant sharing and resources
- strategies for the sustainability of the research collaboration and intellectual exchange, and scope for long term outcomes extending beyond the life of the project.

For the assessment of 'synergy' peer reviewers are to consider:

- the appropriateness of the applicant team's professional and personal diversity to work collaboratively to undertake the research
- the potential benefit of the team's diverse experience and vital perspectives, without which the research question cannot be addressed, and how these perspectives are integrated into each stage of the proposed research
- incorporating strategies to provide mentoring and development opportunities and build capability of the sector, particularly of under-represented groups/researchers
- the quality and alignment of plans for the team to work synergistically, including outputs, milestones, evaluation measures, strategies for intellectual exchange, governance, grant sharing and resources
- the strength of sustainable collaborations and the likelihood to extend beyond the life of the project.

Synergy (30%)

Table 3. Synergy score descriptors and indicators

Score descriptor	Score indicators					
The 'synergy statement' outlines:	7 Highest performing	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations	2–1 Poor (2) **OR** not addressed or evidenced (1)
▪ the alignment of the team's 'professional and personal diversity' to address the proposed research, that is:	fully appropriate to maximise productivity and collaborative gain	extremely appropriate to maximise productivity and collaborative gain	very appropriate to improve productivity and deliver a significant collaborative gain	appropriate to improve productivity and deliver a collaborative gain	somewhat appropriate to improve productivity and somewhat likely to achieve a collaborative gain	of mixed benefit to productivity or to achieving a collaborative gain **OR** not evident or addressed
▪ the team's diverse experience and vital perspectives, which are:	essential for the research plan, and optimally targeted to maximise the potential benefit	extremely important for the research plan and optimally targeted to maximise the potential benefit	very important for the research plan and very well targeted to maximise the potential benefit	important for the research plan and well targeted to maximise the potential benefit	somewhat important for the research plan and somewhat targeted to maximise the potential benefit	poorly integrated **OR** not appropriate to maximise potential benefit
▪ strategies to provide mentoring and development opportunities and build capability of the sector, particularly of under-represented groups/researchers, that are:	entirely likely to be successful, and of transformative significance in building capability in the sector	extremely likely to be extremely successful, and of major significance in building capability in the sector	very likely to be successful, and very significant in building capability in the sector	Likely to be successful, and significant in building capability in the sector	somewhat likely to be successful, and moderately significant in building capability in the sector	are likely to be of limited success or significance in building capability in the sector **OR** not addressed
▪ plan(s) for the team to work synergistically, including outputs, milestones, evaluation measures, strategies for intellectual exchange, governance, grant sharing and resources that are:	of the highest quality, fully aligned with the proposed research and fully evidenced / justified	outstanding, extremely well aligned with the proposed research and extremely well evidenced / justified	very good, well aligned with the proposed research and very well evidenced / justified	good, mostly aligned with the proposed research and mostly evidenced / justified	only somewhat aligned with the proposed research, somewhat evidenced / justified	poorly aligned with the proposed research **OR** not explained / justified
▪ that sustainable collaborations are likely to extend beyond the life of the project and continue to achieve collaborative gain that are:	entirely transformative or of critical significance	extremely influential or of major significance	very influential, or very significant	influential, or significant	somewhat influential, or moderately significant	of limited or marginal significance **OR** not addressed or well articulated

Team capability (20%)

The '**team capability**' criterion complements the applicant team's '**synergy statement**'. While the '**synergy statement**' should *outline* the quality and appropriateness of the applicant team members to undertake the proposed multidisciplinary research, the '**team capability**' criterion enables individual team members to *demonstrate* their **capability** to perform their nominated role.

Each CI should **nominate (up to) 10 outputs** within their '10-year assessment timeframe'[4], and provide a single written explanation that outlines their quality and the CI's contribution to each.

Each CI should also submit a **capability statement** (up to 2 pages) that demonstrates their appropriateness for their outlined role, and their previous experience working cohesively and collaboratively (with the same or other collaborators) for a collaborative gain.

Applicants should outline examples of their **most relevant,** high-quality achievements and experience, from within their '10-year assessment timeframe'. This may include (but is not limited to) their:

- career summary (within their '10-year assessment timeframe'), qualifications, employment and appointment history
- contribution to relevant research or health area(s), including outputs and/or outcomes
- generation of new knowledge, and the translation of research into a Knowledge, Health, Economic or Social impact
- ability to build and maintain highly collaborative teams (with the same or other collaborators) to address complex, multidisciplinary questions
- supervision, mentoring and training experience
- leadership of research programs, institutional leadership and/or leadership of teams, including contributions towards improving equity and diversity, behaviour and culture
- lived experience, representation of 'voices' and/or communities, engagement with consumers and/or industry partners, and other professional activities (e.g. committees, conference organisation/participation) and personal experiences.

Note: the above list is illustrative only, it is not expected that each CI will address each dot point.

For the assessment of '**team capability**', peer reviewers are to consider the extent to which each CI teams' nominated **outputs,** including **written explanations**, and **capability statements** demonstrate that, overall, the team:

- has the relevant skills and experience to carry out the proposed research.
- has experience working cohesively and collaboratively (with the same or other collaborators) for a collaborative gain, including the production of knowledge, outputs and/or outcomes of the highest quality and significance.

[4] The '10-year assessment timeframe' counts back from the application close date, and is extended commensurate with the period of any valid career disruption(s), where present. The 10-year assessment timeframe cannot extend beyond when the applicant commenced research. This timeframe is not extended for career circumstances that do not meet the definition of a career disruption. See NHMRC's RTO Policy for more details.

Team capability (20%)

Table 4. Team capability score descriptors and indicators

Score descriptor	Score indicators					
the applicant team's response to 'team capability' demonstrates that overall, the team possess:	7 Highest performing	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations	2–1 Poor (2) **OR** not addressed or evidenced (1)
▪ skills and experience:	of the highest quality, and fully justifies their appropriateness to carry out the proposed research	of extremely high quality, and justifies to an exceptionally high degree, their appropriateness to carry out the proposed research	of very high quality, and justifies very strongly their appropriateness to carry out the proposed research	of high quality, and strongly justifies their appropriateness to carry out the proposed research	of mixed quality, and somewhat justifies their appropriateness to carry out the proposed research	of limited quality, and poorly justifies their appropriateness to carry out the proposed research **OR** not evidenced and/or demonstrated
▪ the experience working collaboratively and cohesively (with the same or other collaborators) for a collaborative gain that:	produces knowledge, outputs and/or outcomes of the highest quality and significance	produces knowledge, outputs and/or outcomes of extremely high quality and significance	produces knowledge, outputs and/or outcomes of very high quality and significance	produces knowledge, outputs and/or outcomes of high quality and significance	produces knowledge, outputs and/or outcomes of mixed quality and significance	produces knowledge, outputs and/or outcomes of limited quality and significance **OR** not evidenced and/or demonstrated

Reviewers should remember:

1) The team capability criterion measures how well each CI can **validate** they have the skills and experience necessary to perform their role (as outlined in the 'synergy statement'). It **is not** a direct comparison, or measure of, the quality of applicant track record outputs, in isolation.

Potential for impact (20%)

It is important to NHMRC's mission to build a healthy Australia that NHMRC-funded research positively impacts knowledge, health and/or research areas. To help achieve this, Synergy Grant applicants are assessed on the potential impact of their proposed research, informed by the applicant team's research proposal and team capability statements.

For Synergy Grants, '**impact**' refers to the '**significance**' and '**reach**' of the benefit of the team's planned research outcomes/outputs. 'Significance' refers to the **extent** to which the research will address the issue, not the prevalence/incidence of the health issue. 'Reach' refers to the **breadth and scale** of impact in the target population of the research (including researchers, clinicians, intermediaries, regulators, consumers/end users etc).

Applicants should ensure that the potential '**significance**' and '**reach**' of their proposed research is clearly articulated in their **research proposal** and/or their team's **capability statement**, as appropriate for their specific plans for impactful research.

Peer reviewers will assess '**potential for impact**' by considering the claimed 'significance' **and** 'reach' of the proposed research, as well as the capability of the applicant team to successfully deliver the planned impact. They will consider the extent to which the applicant team has demonstrated that they:

- have identified, considered and incorporated relevant stakeholder needs within their research question(s)
- have embedded activities throughout their research plan and design to maximise their chances for impact
- will engage relevant parties at appropriate times throughout the execution of the research plan, to maximise the potential impacts of the proposed research (e.g. adapted/adopted for use by the target cohort)
- will effectively communicate key findings and analysis to appropriate stakeholders
- will describe how they plan to measure the impact of the proposed research
- have plans to produce outputs that will advance the research or health area(s).

To assist with this assessment, peer reviewers may take into consideration the scientific framework, study design, methods and planned analyses (research proposal) and the research team's resources, mix of expertise, and experience of working collaboratively (capability statement).

NHMRC recognises that different forms of research will generate different types of impact. Synergy Grant applications may be assessed on one or more of the following impact types:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

It is the reach and significance of the impact that determines the score (as outlined in the score descriptors at Table 5), not whether the proposed impact is framed around one or more of the impact types. Research impact also includes research that leads to a decision not to use a particular diagnostic, treatment or health policy.

Table 5. Potential for impact (20%)

Score descriptor	Score indicators					
Overall, the application articulates:	7 Highest performing	6 Outstanding	5 Above expectations	4 At expectations	3 Below expectations	2–1 Poor (2) **OR** not addressed or evidenced (1)
▪ plans to maximise and measure the impact of the proposed research (e.g. consideration of, and engagement with, relevant stakeholders at the planning, design, execution, analysis and evaluation stages), that are:	fully integrated into each stage of the research lifecycle and optimally targeted to maximise the potential benefit	extremely well integrated into each stage of the research lifecycle and extremely well targeted to maximise the potential benefit	very well integrated into each stage of the research lifecycle and very well targeted to maximise the potential benefit	well integrated into each stage of the research lifecycle and mostly targeted to maximise the potential benefit	somewhat integrated into most stages of the research lifecycle and somewhat targeted to maximise the potential benefit	marginal or poor, **OR** not appropriate or addressed
▪ plans to ensure the impact(s) will be recognised, and/or adapted or adopted for use:	by the broadest possible cohort of affected populations/jurisdictions	by an extremely broad cohort of affected populations/jurisdictions	extensively among affected populations/jurisdictions	substantially among affected populations/jurisdictions	moderately broadly among affected populations/jurisdictions	by limited numbers of affected populations/jurisdiction **OR** by no one, due to major deficiencies in the proposal/application
▪ plans to produce outputs (e.g. intellectual property, publications, policy advice, products, services, teaching aids, consulting, contract research, spin-offs, licensing etc.) that are:	entirely transformative or of critical significance to advance the research or health area(s)	extremely influential or of major significance to advance the research or health area(s)	very influential, or very significant to advancing the research or health area(s)	influential, or significant to advancing the research or health area(s)	somewhat influential, or moderately significant to advancing the research or health area(s)	of limited or marginal significance to advancing the research or health area(s) **OR** entirely unlikely to be of any significance