Medical Research Future Fund – Research Data Infrastructure Initiative

2025 Research Data Infrastructure Grant Opportunity

Grant Assessment Committee Terms of Reference

Contents

1. Purpose

The Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF), established under the *Medical Research Future Fund Act 2015* (MRFF Act), provides grants of financial assistance to support health and medical research and innovation to improving the health and wellbeing of Australians. It operates as an endowment fund with the capital preserved in perpetuity. The MRFF reached $24.83 billion on 30 September 2025. The MRFF provides a long-term sustainable source of funding for endeavours that aim to improve health outcomes, quality of life and health system sustainability.

This MRFF investment is guided by the *Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy 2021-2026* (the Strategy) and related set of *Australian Medical Research and Innovation Priorities 2024-2026* (the Priorities), developed by the independent and expert Australian Medical Research Advisory Board following extensive national public consultation.

The 2025 Research Data Infrastructure grant opportunity is part of the Research Data Infrastructure Initiative, funded through the MRFF. The Australian Government has announced a total of $100 million over 10 years from 2024-25 for the Initiative.

This initiative provides funding to supports the creation or extension of national research data infrastructure with a focus on data registries, biobanks and data linkage platforms to enable and enhance Australian medical research. This will include supporting infrastructure that makes evidence-based care easier for health professionals, drives efficient use of resources and advances healthcare.

1.1 About the 2025 Research Data Infrastructure Grant Opportunity

Consistent with the *Medical Research Future Fund* Act, the objective of this grant opportunity is to provide grants of financial assistance to support Australian medical research and medical innovation projects that use novel methods to harness multiple existing data infrastructure types in developing and implementing new approaches for addressing an unmet medical need.

For this grant opportunity, up to $20 million is available over two years from 2025-26:

- $10 million 2025-26
- $10 million in 2026-27

The grant amount will be up to 100 per cent of eligible project costs for (grant percentage).

There is no minimum grant amount and the maximum amount available for a single grant is **$2.5 million**.

2. Grant Assessment Committee

2.1 Authority

The 2025 Research Data Infrastructure Grant Assessment Committee (GAC) has been established to assess all eligible applications under the 2025 Research Data Infrastructure Grant Opportunity and provide a report of the outcomes to the Program Delegate, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

2.2 Membership

Members of the GAC have been invited by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing to ensure relevant skills, knowledge and expertise is represented. Membership, however, may change due to unavailability of members or if a skill gap is subsequently identified. For this grant opportunity, there will be one GAC committee, and the GAC members will assess all applications.

Noting that, a GAC member must not be a named investigator on any applications submitted for the grant opportunity.

2.3 Agenda and Work Program

The meeting Agenda will be approved by the Chair of the GAC. The agenda will be developed by the Business Grants Hub (BGH) Secretariat, in consultation with the Chair.

The Chair will ensure the meeting is conducted in accordance with the Terms of Reference and Agenda. Questions, issues or matters for clarification will be directed through the Chair.

All members of the GAC must be fully prepared for the assessment process and be available for the introductory and probity briefings before assessment discussions commence at the meeting.

GAC members are expected to assess and score applications (excluding those with which they have a material conflict of interest) against published criteria prior to, and during the meeting (if applicable). GAC members are also expected to comment on applications with reference to the assessment criteria. Minutes of the meeting will be approved by the Chair.

The meeting will be attended by GAC members, Secretariat and observers from the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, Business Grants Hub and other relevant Australian Government departments or agencies, where appropriate.

All members of the GAC must comply with the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines (CGRGs) with respect to ethics and fair dealing with parties submitting or invited to submit applications.

All members of the GAC must behave in a way which is consistent with the Australian Public Service (APS) Values and Code of Conduct as defined in the *Public Service Act 1999.*

2.4 Administrative Arrangements

2.4.1 Secretariat Support

Business Grants Hub will provide secretariat support for the GAC and undertake all the co-ordination and administrative arrangements.

Non-government GAC members will be remunerated as outlined in their contract for service.

2.5 Role and Function of the GAC

After the 2025 Research Data Infrastructure Grant Opportunity has closed, Business Grants Hub will undertake an eligibility assessment of all submitted applications. Eligible applications will then be compiled, with relevant documents, and provided electronically to GAC members.

Individual GAC members will then:

- declare to Business Grants Hub any Conflicts of Interest concerning any of the applicants (for the Program Delegate at the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing to consider)
- declare to Business Grants Hub if they are unsuitable* to review an application(s), as assessors will by default, be considered suitable against assigned applications
- in accordance with the Assessment Criteria (Appendix A) assess and score all applications with which they are initially assigned and do not have a material conflict of interest, using a scoresheet made available via email (refer to further assessment instructions below). Once all scores are collated, the Secretariat will create a shortlist of applications for discussion at the meeting.

  Prior to the meeting, members may be asked to read any additional shortlisted applications that were not included in their initial allocation.

  At the meeting, after discussion of each application, members will be provided an opportunity to re-score their initial allocation of applications and to score the shortlisted applications if they are yet to do so.

* Unsuitable is defined as having no expertise in any aspect of the application, such as methodology, research area, consumer engagement, commercialisation, project management or research translation/implementation components. Assessors are not expected to have knowledge across all aspects of an application as their subject matter expertise will be complemented by assessors with expertise in other areas of the application.

2.5.1 Role of the Chair

The role of the Chair is to ensure the meeting is conducted in accordance with the Terms of Reference and the Agenda.

The Chair will manage conflicts of interest, ensure that all GAC members are heard, ensure that application strengths and weaknesses are discussed, ensure procedure is followed, and ensure the GAC keeps to time. The Chair will also be asked to summarise strengths and weaknesses of each application following its assessment.

Questions, issues or matters for clarification will be directed through the Chair (but can be directed to the Secretariat if about process/program guidelines).

The Chair is a non-scoring member of the GAC.

2.5.2 Role of the Consumer Advocate

Meaningful consumer and community engagement in the health and medical research sector offers valuable insight into medical research to ensure that the research is appropriate for community needs, increases awareness, understanding and public confidence and promotes effective translation of research into improved health outcomes.

A consumer can be a member of the public who has lived or is living with a certain health condition/s and/or is leading a career as a consumer advocate. Their lived experience and/or career experience can add value to the assessment process by providing constructive feedback and assisting the panel where consumer engagement is appropriate.

A consumer advocate invited to sit on the panel will not be involved in the formal scoring of applications but will perform an advisory role. The consumer advocate will draw attention to the assessment criteria where consumer engagement is appropriate. It is the Chair's responsibility to ensure that consumers have a voice at the table through the consumer advocate.

The consumer advocate is bound by the same confidentiality, probity, and briefing requirements that apply to the GAC, and will be provided a list of all shortlisted applications and declare to Business Grants Hub any Conflicts of Interest concerning any of the applications.

The consumer advocate will then receive the shortlisted application material (excluding those with which they have a material conflict of interest) at the same time as the panel members, ahead of the panel meeting to enable them to advise the panel during discussions as required. A worksheet will be provided where the consumer advocate must record comments for each application. The comments will be presented at the GAC meeting.

2.5.3 Application assessment

GAC members will undertake the assessment of applications in accordance with the CGRGs and Grant Opportunity Guidelines and consider applications on:

- how well it meets the Assessment criteria, using the Assessment Scoring Scale and Rating Scale as a guide (see Appendix B and C)
- whether it provides value with relevant money.

When assessing whether an application represents value with relevant money, the GAC will have regard to:

- the overall objective/s to be achieved
- the value of the grant sought
- the extent to which the application matches identified MRFF priorities
- the extent to which the application demonstrates that funding will assist to meeting the grant opportunity objectives and achieving the grant opportunity outcomes.

2.5.4 Application assessment process

Prior to the meeting, each eligible application is assigned a minimum of three (3) initial assessors, with each assessor assigned a maximum of 15-20 applications.

Suitability declarations will be collected as part of the declaration of interest process. Assessors are then assigned to applications taking into account conflicts of interest and their suitability declarations.

GAC members will then independently assess their assigned applications using the Assessment Scoring Scale (Appendix B). Scores are to be allocated based on assessment against a ten-point scale (10 highest, 1 lowest). Rating of the non-technical (Value and Risk of your project Assessment Criterion) will be done in accordance with the Rating Scale at Appendix C. Each application should be rated as either Excellent, Good or Marginal.

The assessors' scores, which are submitted to Business Grants Hub will be collated and then weighted appropriately so that each score is out of 10, producing a ranked list of applications.

A proportion of eligible applications will then be shortlisted by the delegate to proceed to the GAC meeting for group discussion and scoring/rescoring. The proportion of applications that progress to the committee meeting for full committee discussion and scoring/rescoring will be based on the cumulative budget value of ranked applications at least equating to 150% of the grant opportunity budget.

In addition to the 150% threshold, applications will go straight to committee discussion if the application had:

- less than three initial assessors, or
- three or more initial assessors but had a large standard deviation (fell in the range of the top 10% of applications with the most variation in scores).
- The Chair of the GAC may also exercise his or her judgement and discretion to take applications to the meeting where necessary.

Prior to the committee meeting, all assessors will receive the remaining shortlisted applications (including those they were not assigned to initially assess prior to the meeting), to review ahead of the GAC meeting.

For each application, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing will assign two members of the GAC as a primary (SP1) and secondary (SP2) spokesperson, taking into account their expertise and any potential conflicts of interest. All scores (from panel members and spokespersons) are weighted equally. At the GAC meeting, the role of the primary and secondary spokesperson is to provide the GAC with an overview of the application and lead the discussion about its merits against the assessment criteria. Panel members may support the primary spokesperson by providing additional context and information where appropriate.

During the GAC meeting, the Chair will request the nominated spokespersons speak to the application, then all eligible assessors will discuss the merits of each application and be provided the opportunity to rescore.

To be awarded funding, applications must receive a score of 5 or higher against each of the technical (weighted) assessment criteria and a rating of ‘Good’ or ‘Excellent’ for the non-technical (Value and Risk of your project) assessment criterion.

Note that when calculating the committee’s collective Criterion 4 ranking, Business Grants Hub will assign a numerical value to each Criterion 4 ranking. Individual Marginal ranking is assigned a value of 1, individual Good ranking is assigned a value of 2 and individual Excellent ranking is assigned as a value of 3. A total average score less than or equal to 1.49 is to be classified as Marginal. A total average score between 1.50 and 2.49 is to be classified as Good. A total average score of 2.50 or greater is to be classified as Excellent.

In cases where the Program Delegate has determined a GAC member has a material conflict of interest in relation to one or more applications, this will be indicated on the scoresheet and the committee member will be asked to leave the room and not be privy to any discussion around this application.

The meeting scores will be provided to the Health and Medical Research Office, which will make recommendations to the Program Delegate on which applications to fund, on the basis of the scores.

2.6 Confidentiality and Probity

The GAC will make sure that the assessment process is fair, according to the published guidelines, incorporate appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities and other inappropriate conduct.

2.6.1 Conflict of interest

GAC members, including the Chair and the Consumer Advocate, and all Australian Public Service (APS) employees involved in delivery of the grant opportunity must provide conflict of interest declarations prior to undertaking the evaluation.

A conflict of interest will exist if:

- through any current or proposed future dealings or relationships with an applicant or any related body, a relevant person or their family stands to gain a benefit or advantage from the outcome of the evaluation process; or
- there is any other reason why a relevant person may not deal with an applicant in an objective manner.

All members of the GAC must provide a written declaration to the Program Delegate (through the Secretariat) at the outset of the assessment process, or as soon as it arises, regarding any existing or potential conflict of interest.

On receipt of a declaration of a conflict of interest the Program Delegate, from Department of Health, Disability and Ageing will decide whether it is a material conflict. If the Program Delegate determines that the conflict of interest is material, the member will be excluded from the assessment process in relation to the application for which the declaration was made.

If the Program Delegate determines that the Chair has a material conflict of interest, the Chair will be excluded from the meeting during discussion regarding the application to which the declaration was made. A member of the secretariat team will act for the Chair during the time they are excluded.

2.6.2 Confidentiality

All confidential information must be disclosed only on a strict ‘need-to-know’ basis to ensure the security and confidentiality of the process.

Applications must be treated as confidential. Applications must be kept secure and not be used to prejudice their fair, open and objective assessment.

No discussion must occur with any person outside of the GAC, the Program Delegate or Business Grants Hub Secretariat regarding any aspect of the applications or the assessment process without the prior approval of the Chair and confirmation from the Program Delegate.

All application documents are confidential and are not to be disclosed or used for any other purpose. It is the responsibility of each member of the GAC to secure all printed and/or electronic material relating to the applications. All printed material must be returned to Business Grants Hub or securely destroyed, and all electronic material is to be irretrievably destroyed at the conclusion of the GAC meeting.

All proceedings for consideration of applications are confidential.

GAC members must not contact any parties related to the application to seek clarification or to discuss details of the application.

2.7 GAC Outcomes to the decision maker

The Business Grants Hub Secretariat will provide the decision maker (Program Delegate) a report of the outcomes of the GAC meeting, with the averaged criterion scores, the Overall Value and Risk rating, and a list of the Grants put forward as fundable by the GAC. The GAC will also make suggestions as to any conditions that should be applied, including consideration of advice from the Business Grants Hub Secretariat.

2.8 The decision maker

The decision maker may approve funding for a proposal, taking into account all relevant information in the assessment package and in accordance with governance requirements such as grant opportunity guidelines, CGRPs and the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, as well as any program specific legislation.

The decision maker's decision is final and there are no appeal mechanisms.

Appendix A: Assessment Criteria

Assessment Criterion 1 - Project Impact (40% weighting)

Project Impact is the extent to which the project's research outputs will contribute to meaningful advances in health outcomes, practice and/or policy, consistent with the objectives and outcomes described in section 2.3 of the guidelines. The assessment of Project Impact will also consider the project's contribution to the objective of the Initiative as described in section 2.2 of the guidelines and the statement against the MRFF Measures of Success.

In the response to this criterion, applicants should ensure:

- describe how the project builds upon existing knowledge to progress the area of research and how the research outcomes will contribute to meaningful advances in health outcomes, practice and/or policy in Australia
- clearly outline how the proposed project will produce knowledge and outcomes that address an area of unmet medical need.
- demonstrate how the views and values of consumers, the community, health providers and/or other end users have informed the proposed research, including how the needs and priorities of consumers (particularly those with lived experience and their carers) have informed the research question
- demonstrate the involvement of academic, industry, state/territory, and/or other partners in the project and how their needs and views have informed its conceptualisation, development and planned translation and implementation.

In addition, projects that specifically focus on the health of priority populations (defined as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, older people experiencing diseases of ageing, people with rare or currently untreatable diseases/conditions, people in remote/rural communities, people with a disability, individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQ+ people, youth) should:

- describe how the anticipated outputs will contribute to meaningful advances in health outcomes, practice and/or policy for the priority population
- demonstrate how the proposed research focuses on interventions that will be acceptable (e.g. culturally appropriate) to the priority population
- demonstrate leadership by, and involvement of, the priority population in the project, and how their needs, views and values have informed its conceptualisation, development and planned implementation.

Assessment Criterion 2 - Project methodology (30% weighting)

Project Methodology is a description of the design and conduct of the proposed research in the form of a project plan. The assessment of Project Methodology will consider the scientific quality and feasibility of the project plan and its ability to deliver on the project's intended outcomes. Projects are

expected to be original and build on (rather than duplicate) research that has already been undertaken.

In the response to this criterion, the applicant should ensure and clearly articulate:

- the research question and the proposed approach for addressing it, including (as appropriate) tools and techniques, participants (e.g. diversity of participants), interventions, controls, statistical approaches, and strategies for data collection and use, including:
  - demonstrate new linkage and/or use of data from multiple (at least two) existing research data infrastructure sources of different types (e.g. administrative and biobank data, registry and biobank data, wearables and use artificial intelligence); and/or
  - outline novel methodologies and approaches that leverage and enhance existing linked research data infrastructure of at least two different types
- how consumers will be involved in the proposed research, including their contributions throughout the life of the project
- arrangements for project governance and oversight to support its successful delivery
- appropriate milestones, performance indicators and timeframes.

In addition, projects that specifically focus on the health of priority populations should also articulate how the proposed methodology includes strong and meaningful leadership and involvement of the priority population, including its people, communities and organisations.

Assessment Criterion 3 - Capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project (30% weighting)

Capacity, Capability and Resources is the relevant skills, knowledge, experience and resources the research team and any partners are contributing to the project. The assessment of Capacity, Capability and Resources will consider the overall composition of the research team, the contribution of individual researchers to the project, and the involvement of partners in the successful delivery of the project.

In the response to this criterion, the applicant should demonstrate:

- the research team has an appropriate mix of skills (scientific, project management, etc) to undertake the proposed research
- the research team includes individuals that bring diverse experiences and expertise (e.g. across disciplines, genders, cultures, lived experience relevant to the research question, career stages and research sectors)
- the research team has the skills, experience and capacity to involve and support consumers (including those with lived experience) in the proposed research, and ensure that this is done appropriately and effectively
- the commitment of partners to the project and how they will support (through financial and in-kind contributions) its successful delivery.

In addition, projects that specifically focus on the health of priority populations should demonstrate that the research team includes leadership by the priority population, and that the research team has

experience in delivering research that has positively impacted health policies and programs of relevance to the priority population.

Each Chief Investigator should provide an example from within the last 5 years of how their research has contributed to meaningful advances in health outcomes, practice and/or policy through the translation or implementation of research findings.

Assessment Criterion 4. Overall Value and Risk of the Project (non-weighted)

Overall Value and Risk is the extent to which the project's research outputs will meaningfully contribute to objective/s and intended outcomes of the grant opportunity, the Initiative, and the MRFF more broadly. The response to this criterion will consist of the applicant's Measures of Success statement, proposed budget, and risk management plan submitted with the application.

The assessment of Overall Value and Risk will consider:

- the relative contribution of the outcomes or results identified in the applicant's Measures of Success statement to the intended outcomes of the grant opportunity, the goal and aims of the Research Data Infrastructure Initiative, and the MRFF
- the appropriateness of the requested budget (including the value and type of any contributions from partners) to support successful delivery of the project, including whether it is sufficiently detailed and justified and represents value with money
- the appropriateness of the risk management plan, including strategies for identifying, documenting, monitoring and reporting on key risks to the completion of the project.

Appendix B: Assessment scoring scale

When assessing the merits of your application against the assessment criteria, the GAC will use the following ten-point scale (10 highest, 1 lowest). Note that no half scores or scores of zero are allowed.

Score	Rating Scale
10	Excellent Quality – response to this criterion significantly exceeds expectations. Evidence confirms consistent superior performance against this criterion in all areas. Claims are fully substantiated.
9	Outstanding Quality - response to this criterion exceeds expectations in most key areas and addressed to a very high standard in others. Most claims are fully substantiated with others very well substantiated.
8	Very Good Quality - response to this criterion meets expectations to a very high standard in all areas. All claims are well substantiated.
7	Good Quality – response to this criterion meets expectations to a high standard in all areas. Claims are well substantiated in key areas.
6	Fair Quality – response to this criterion addresses all areas well. Claims are well substantiated in most areas. Some minor shortcomings.
5	Acceptable Quality – response addresses most key areas to a consistent acceptable standard with no major shortcomings. Most claims are adequately substantiated. Some proposals may be questionable.
4	Marginal Quality – response is marginal and does not fully meet expectations. Some claims unsubstantiated; others only adequately substantiated or lack sufficient detail. Some proposals may be unworkable.
3	Poor Quality – response poorly addresses some areas or fails to address some areas. Claims largely unsubstantiated. A number of proposals may be unworkable.
2	Very Poor Quality – response inadequately deals with most or all areas. Claims almost totally unsubstantiated. A number of proposals may be unworkable.
1	Unacceptable Quality – response does not meet expectations. Criteria not addressed or insufficient or no information to assess the criterion. Claims unsubstantiated, no evidence and unworkable.

Appendix C: Rating scale for assessment criterion 4: Overall Value and Risk

Rating	Descriptor
Excellent	▪ The application provides **excellent** overall value ▪ The identified outcome/s or result/s against which the project's contribution to the MRFF measures of success will be evaluated are clearly articulated and well aligned with the overall goals of the MRFF, the initiative and the grant opportunity ▪ The proposed budget is detailed, aligns very well with the scope and scale of the proposed project, and is sufficient to undertake all components of work. ▪ The applicants risk management plan is well considered and appropriate to the project. ▪ The stated approach to the management, monitoring and reporting of risks is clearly articulated within their application. ▪ Any risks arising through the assessment are tolerable and well mitigated, and not likely to adversely impact on the achievement of stated objectives of the project.
Good	▪ The application provides **good** overall value. ▪ The outcome/s or result/s against which the project's contribution to the MRFF measures of success will be evaluated are articulated reasonably clearly and are somewhat aligned with the overall goals of the MRFF, the initiative and the grant opportunity ▪ The proposed budget, with some minor shortcomings, is substantiated and will meet the scope and scale of the proposed project. ▪ The applicants risk management plan is appropriate to the project, with some minor shortcomings. ▪ The stated approach to the management, monitoring and reporting of risk is articulated within their application, with claims supported across key areas. ▪ Any risks arising through the assessment are tolerable and unlikely to adversely impact on the achievement of stated objectives of the project, although some risks may require additional mitigations and/or monitoring to ensure the delivery of project outcomes.

Rating	Descriptor
Marginal	▪ The application provides **marginal** overall value. ▪ The outcome/s or result/s against which the project's contribution to the MRFF measures of success will be evaluated are not clearly articulated and do not align with the overall goals of the MRFF, the initiative and the grant opportunity ▪ The proposed budget is higher than expected for a project of the same scale and scope, with some line items questionable. ▪ The applicant's risk management plan lacks detail in some areas, there are some gaps in risk identification or analysis or some mitigation and management strategies appear questionable. ▪ Some risks arising through the assessment may require additional mitigation and/or monitoring to ensure that they are managed in a way that does not impact on the delivery of some project outcomes.

Note that when applying an average to criterion 4 the ranking will be calculated as the average of all scoring members for that criterion, where each individual Marginal ranking is assigned a value of 1, each individual Good ranking is assigned a value of 2 and each individual Excellent ranking is assigned a value of 3. An average score less than or equal to 1.49 is to be classified as Marginal. An average score between 1.50 and 2.49 is to be classified as Good. An average score of 2.50 or greater is to be classified as Excellent.