



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**
Research Development Unit

COVID-19 Research Grants Program

Guidelines and Conditions

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The COVID-19 Research Grants Program is administered by the [Research Development Unit](#) (RDU), Department of Health in conjunction with WA Health Translation Network including the WA Consumer and Community Health Research Network. Queries regarding the program and the application process can be submitted to ResearchDevelopment@health.wa.gov.au.

1. Introduction

The Department of Health (Department) is committed to supporting efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. The COVID-19 Research Grants Program has been established to provide a coordinated mechanism to fund high-quality COVID-19 related research projects that have the potential to be translated into improved policy and/or practice across the Western Australian (WA) public health system.

The funding program aims to provide the following benefits:

- Fund COVID-19 research of direct significance to the WA public health system and the WA community.
- Support the attraction of COVID-19 related clinical trials into WA.
- Provide an avenue to access or leverage national or international funding related to COVID-19, including via National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) funding.
- Facilitate the knowledge creation and translation of research findings into evidence-based health and medical policy and practice related to COVID-19.

2. Eligibility

Applicants

Applications can be made by an individual researcher or a team led by a Coordinating Principal Investigator (CPI), through an Administering Institution in WA.

The Coordinating Principal Investigator must:

- (a) be an Australian citizen or permanent resident in Australia
- (b) be employed in a WA Administering Institution for the period of the grant.

Projects

COVID-19 research projects should:

- Address relevant medical and health challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic (including prevention, surveillance, diagnostics, treatments, vaccines and mental health repercussions).
- Demonstrate the potential for translation and implementation of research findings into improved health policy and practice and better health outcomes.

Please note research proposals that involve incapacitated adults cannot currently be accepted as involvement of these individuals in research is not currently permitted by the *Guardianship and Administration Act 1990*.

Applications

- A CPI can submit more than one application for this Research Grants program.
- In the event that similar proposals are recommended for funding the Department will liaise with the CPI(s) to discuss the situation.
- All required sign-offs and approvals must be provided at the time of submission. These will include the signing of relevant sections by each team member, Heads of Departments (or equivalent) that are contributing resources and/or access to patient cohorts/data relevant to the project, Business Manager, and the Administering Institution's research administration officer (or their equivalent).
- Electronic signatures are acceptable. The onus is on the CPI to ensure approval to use an electronic signature has been obtained.

3. Consumer involvement

In line with the NHMRC's definition, consumers are people who have lived experience of a health issue. They include patients, their friends, families, carers and members of the general public. Consumers can also be people who represent the views and interests of a consumer organisation, a community or a wider constituency.

Applicants should engage with health consumers during both the development of the research proposal and for the ongoing project.

There is increasing recognition of the benefits of involving consumers in the research process. Effective consumer involvement can ensure research is relevant to the WA community and improve the uptake of findings.

Consumer involvement should incorporate:

- Willingness to include consumers in the research team where appropriate.
- Plans to involve consumers in the project throughout the research timeline.
- Budget strategy with funds allocated to support, implement and acknowledge consumer involvement e.g. stakeholder training opportunities, honoraria and payments, additional time to support involvement activities, administration support and consultations and events associated with involvement activities.

Guidance on consumer involvement can be found at the [Consumer and Community Health Research Network](#) and the [NHMRC's Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research 2016](#).

4. Funding

Grant Monies

Requested funding must reasonably reflect the proposed research activity and be over a maximum period of 2 years.

Grants below \$50,000 will be released in one instalment subject to the relevant approvals (Section 6 – Approvals and Agreements) having been provided to the RDU.

Grants above \$50,000 will be released in two instalments as follows:

- The first instalment will be subject to relevant approvals (Section 6 – Approvals and Agreements) having been provided to the RDU.
- The second instalment will be subject to satisfactory progress being achieved against the project milestones, demonstrated in a Progress Report approximately half way through the project (Section 7 – Reporting).

A project may receive additional funds from other sources to meet its budget requirements. Additionally, a project can be a part of a larger research program or submission to an external funding body provided the project has its own discrete objectives and these can be completed within the specified period. In both cases RDU must be advised and it must be clearly outlined how the COVID-19 Research Grants Program funds will contribute to the project's outcomes (Application Form Section 10).

Funding is only made available for the scope of work described in the Application Form (or any modifications requested by the Department). The Department is not obliged to underwrite any recurrent or capital costs beyond the research phase of the project, or for the implementation of research findings.

It is intended that funds will be spent in WA only. An exception may be considered in the case where specific research expertise or equipment is required and is not available in WA. When this situation occurs, adequate justification must be provided.

Termination of Funds

Funds shall revert to, or be recoverable by the Department in instances where:

- The project is terminated by the RDU as a result of insufficient progress being made at the time of the Progress Report.
- Funds are not fully spent at the conclusion of the project, unless an extension has been agreed to by the RDU.
- Funds are used for purposes other than those for which they were awarded.

Funding is offered subject to Department budget availability, which could be varied in the event of unforeseen circumstances.

Budget Requests

All budget requests must be reviewed and verified by finance officers at the Administering Institution.

Budget requests must be broken down by years as set out in the budget template (Application Form Section 9) and take into account when the expenditure for items such as equipment and salaries is expected to occur. Budgets should include in-kind support and other sources of funding.

Budget requests should be adequately described and justified. Applications that do not adequately justify claims may be scored lower than otherwise by the assessment panel.

Applicants should calculate budgets accurately, as requests for additional funding will not be considered.

Tips for completing the budget template in the application are provided in the table below:

Equipment	Major items - will not be funded. Minor items - only those considered essential to the project will be funded if successful. Written quotations must be provided. Equipment will become the property of the Administering Institution.
Salaries	Salary level and industrial award and agreement should be listed for each position in the project. For each, indicate if 'new' or 'existing' position. Salary scales should be confirmed by relevant officers (i.e. Business Managers).
Salary On-costs	On-costs must be separately identified and justified. On-costs can be claimed up to a maximum of 30%. For WA public health system applicants, salary on-costs should be calculated at the recommended level outlined in the Financial Management Manual .
Travel	Requests for travel funds will not be approved unless the travel is specifically required to undertake the project.
Infrastructure costs	Must be no greater than 10% of the total budget. Must be separately identified and adequately justified. WA public health system applicants cannot claim infrastructure costs.

Funding for the Employment of Personnel

The grant may be used to fund personnel working on the project. Funds allocated towards staff salaries should be outlined in the proposed budget (Application Form Section 9). Applicants should indicate whether the position to be funded is: i) a new position; ii) an existing position to be filled; or iii) an existing position that is already filled. The timeframe required for the creation and filling of positions should be factored into the 'Milestones against timeline' (Application Form Section 5).

Funding will not be provided for the salary of the CPI. However, in exceptional circumstances, the panel may consider requests where funding for these salaries is crucial to the success of the project.

5. Applicant Selection

Funding will be awarded on merit, based on a process of evaluation and selection. The assessment process shall be conducted by a panel comprising of experienced researchers, experts and consumer representation.

Conflicts of interest that may arise will be treated in accordance with the [WA Health Managing Conflict of Interest Policy and Guidelines](#).

The RDU reserves the right to request:

- Further information from applicants in the event that the reviewers assesses an application to be of particular benefit to the WA public health system but requires further clarification before a final decision is made.
- The right to negotiate lower amounts than requested.
- Modifications to research plans.

Applications must meet the defined eligibility requirements and will be assessed based on the criteria and weightings set out in the table below:

Assessment Criteria	%
Significance of the project Demonstration of contemporary relevance and significance of the research in relation to COVID-19	20
Innovation Novelty of project and distinction from similar or related research in this area	10
Research Plan Quality of research plan, including suitable methodology, objective measurement of outcomes and achievable timeline	20
Partnerships Appropriate level of engagement and collaboration with healthcare providers, policy makers and other relevant stakeholders during both the development of the research proposal and conduct of the research	10
Consumer Involvement Appropriate levels of Consumer involvement throughout the research timeline including project design	10
Research Translation Potential for translation and implementation of research findings into policy and practice, commercialisation and/or to lead to future funding proposals to external bodies such as the NHMRC and MRFF; and the projected timeframe for short-term and longer-term translational impact	10
Budget Appropriate budget request and justification of expenditure	10
Capacity Qualifications and availability of the Investigator(s) to conduct the project, based on individual expertise and experience, and the collective gain of the team to the project	10

6. Approvals and Agreements

Research Governance

All relevant research governance approvals shall be obtained and provided to the RDU, before the commencement of a funded project.

Research Governance approvals which will be required include:

- (a) Ethics approval, from each relevant Ethics Committee (human and/or animal).
 Depending on the type of project, additional HREC approvals may be required from:
 - (i) Department of Health WA HREC (*Department of Health Data Collections and Data linkage*).
 - (ii) Coronial Ethics Committee (WA) (*access to coronial material*).
 - (iii) WA Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee.

- (b) Research governance authorisation (also known as site specific authorisation) from each relevant institution/site conducting the project or providing access to data, participants or tissue samples.

Depending on the type of project, additional approvals may be required to be submitted with the research governance application, including:

- (i) Data Custodians.
- (ii) Gene Technology Regulator.
- (iii) Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC).
- (iv) NHMRC Embryo Research Licensing Committee.
- (v) NHMRC Human Genetics Advisory Committee (HGAC).
- (vi) Radiation Safety Officer (Dosimetry Report).
- (vii) Radiological Council.
- (viii) Reproductive Technology Council.
- (ix) Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

For information on ethics and governance submission requirements please refer to the following websites:

- <https://rgs.health.wa.gov.au/Pages/Research-Ethics.aspx>.
- <https://rgs.health.wa.gov.au/Pages/Research-Governance.aspx>.
- <https://rgs.health.wa.gov.au/Pages/Multi-centre-Research.aspx>.

Data Linkage

A research project that includes a request for linked data from the [Data Linkage Branch \(DLB\)](#) requires the research team to demonstrate feasibility to obtain, and adequate expertise to analyse, the requested data.

Where linked data is required, the [Data Linkage Branch \(DLB\)](#) should be contacted for assistance with the Application for Data process. The DLB should provide both i) a cost estimate; and ii) an estimate of time required to obtain the data. All requests should state that the data request is associated with the COVID-19 Research Grants Program, which requires the research to be completed within a 24 month period.

The preliminary cost estimate should be included in the proposed project's Budget (Application Form Section 9) and the time-estimate built into the project's Milestones against timeline (Application Form Section 5 iv).

Following confirmation of funding support, a full Application for Data must be submitted to the DLB for feasibility assessment. Following feasibility assessment, in-principle data governance support will be provided via a Feasibility Letter from DLB.

Data Linkage Feasibility must be obtained before a submission can be made to the Department of Health WA HREC or Research Governance Office.

Intellectual Property

Intellectual Property (IP) that arises out of the project will generally vest in the CPI's Administering Institution with an appropriate IP access agreement for other research team members' organisations. It is the Administering Institution's responsibility to ensure that appropriate agreements are in place with the research team members' organisations.

When a research team involves more than one institution and includes a member from the WA public health system, then the IP agreement must be authorised by the relevant WA public health system institution and the Administering Institution.

The IP agreement must be finalised within two months of the first instalment of the grant being received by the Administering Institution.

7. Reporting

The CPI will be responsible for coordinating the project and ensuring its timely execution. The CPI will also be responsible for meeting reporting requirements over the duration of the project and at its conclusion. Projects must be concluded within the allocated period which includes the obtaining of ethics and governance approvals, employment of research staff, data collection and analysis and submission of the final report.

A member of the RDU will be assigned to each project, and will liaise with the CPI to assist with grant payments, reporting and other operational issues as they arise. RDU liaison officers will provide researchers with the relevant reporting templates as required.

Progress Report

A report outlining the progress against the milestones listed in the project plan is required mid-project and prior to the second instalment of funds being released. The Department reserves the right to terminate and/or withdraw funding for a project where insufficient progress has been made.

Final Report and Community Stakeholder Brief

A final report detailing the project outcomes is to be submitted to the RDU at the conclusion of the project. Failure to submit the final report at this time may render all investigators on the grant application ineligible for further research funding from the RDU until the report is received.

In addition, in order to provide feedback to stakeholders and encourage research translation, a one-page *Community Stakeholder Brief* which includes an outline of the research project, its outcomes, and next steps is to be provided to all participating consumer groups (including Aboriginal communities) and a copy submitted to the RDU.

Financial Acquittal Statement

An acquittal statement outlining the expenditure of funds must be submitted to the RDU at the project's conclusion. Acquittal statements must be certified by an authorised finance officer at the Administering Institution.

8. Acknowledgment

The Department will promote their role as funder and publicly announce the recipients of this grant round. As such, all other parties must withhold announcement/media coverage promoting their association with the selected projects until after the RDU advises that the announcement of recipients has occurred. Full acknowledgment of Department funding must be made as opportunities arise in publications, conference presentations, public discussion, press statements etc.

The suggested citation is: “*this project was/is funded by the WA Department of Health through the COVID-19 Research Grants Program*”.

9. Complaints

Applicants who feel that their interests have been adversely affected by a decision made by the Review Panel and/or RDU may lodge a complaint. Complaints can only be considered when they refer to the administrative process and not to the actual outcome of a particular decision. Complaints must be submitted in writing to:

Executive Director, Clinical Leadership and Reform
Clinical Excellence Division, Department of Health
PO Box 8172
Perth Business Centre WA 6849

10. Confidentiality

Lay summaries and researcher statements provided in the Application Form or in reports may be used for publicity purposes as stated on the relevant templates.

All other information provided in the Application Form and reports will be maintained confidentially by the Department and the Review Panel. If requests are received by the Department to make public any aspect of funded projects, the authorisation of the CPI will be sought.

Applicants should be aware that the Department is subject to the *Western Australian Freedom of Information Act 1992*. This provides a general right of access to records held by State Government agencies. In addition, information pertaining to the receipt of State Government financial assistance is tabled in the Parliament of Western Australia.

11. Publications

Researchers are requested to forward copies of publications resulting from the funded project to the RDU. In order to maximise knowledge exchange researchers are asked to comply with the [NHMRC’s policy on the dissemination of research findings](#).

12. Evaluation

The Department of Health may undertake an evaluation of the COVID-19 Research Grants Program and all funded projects will need to participate in this.

The evaluation will focus on matters such as the extent of implementation of the research findings into clinical practice and health policy, contribution to capacity building, knowledge transfer, publications and further research funding/grants received as a result of COVID-19 Research Grants Program funded research.



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