



Responses to Medical Research Future Fund Post-Acute Sequelae of COVID-19 Research Plan Webinar Questions (6 September 2023)

The focus of the responses is in relation to the MRFF Post-Acute Sequelae of COVID-19 Research Plan (Research Plan) and MRFF 2023 Post-Acute Sequelae of COVID-19 Grant Opportunity Guidelines which opened on 6 September 2023 and closed on 1 November 2023.

Please note that some questions were outside of the scope of the MRFF and were not addressed in the responses below.

Themes	Responses
Administration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">How can I watch this webinar later?	A recording and transcript of the webinar can be viewed on the Department of Health and Aged Care (the Department) website here .
<ul style="list-style-type: none">How can I stay up to date with progress of the MRFF 2023 Post-Acute Sequelae of COVID-19 Grant Opportunity	<p>The MRFF releases a fortnightly newsletter that provides information on MRFF activities. You can keep up to date with these important messages by subscribing to our email list here.</p> <p>A full list of MRFF grants awarded is published on the MRFF website and can be accessed here.</p>
Grant Assessment Committees	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">How can researchers, doctors, allied health workers who have special interests in PASC be involved in the grant assessment process?	<p>Expressions of interest to be a Grant Assessment Committee member for National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) administered MRFF grant opportunities can be made here.</p> <p>More information on MRFF grant assessment committees can be found here.</p>

Themes	Responses
Consumer engagement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What role do consumers have in the Research Plan and how is consumer involvement encouraged in MRFF funded research? 	<p>The Research Plan was developed by the PASC Expert Advisory Panel (EAP), which was independently chaired and included members with expertise or experience in PASC and/or other post-viral syndromes and had consumer representation.</p> <p>The Principles for Consumer Involvement in Research Funded by the Medical Research Future Fund (the Principles) are also being implemented throughout the MRFF, which provide advice on how to promote and strengthen consumer involvement in MRFF-funded research.</p> <p>The Principles were developed by the MRFF Consumer Reference Panel whose membership brings a broad spectrum of perspectives on consumer involvement and represents a wide cross-section of the Australian community.</p> <p>\$50 million dollars over four years from 2023-24 has been allocated for the Research Plan from the MRFF's Emerging Priorities and Consumer-Driven Research (EPCDR) Initiative.</p> <p>The Research Plan must align its priority areas with the objectives of the EPCDR Initiative, which includes encouraging researchers to work together with consumers.</p> <p>Aim 1, Aim 3 and Aim 4 of the Research Plan provide explicit examples where consumer involvement is not only encouraged but is a requirement for the research.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can consumers be involved in PASC and/or MRFF research? 	<p>There are several ways for consumers to get involved in MRFF research, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contacting research institutions directly. Individuals may want to consider identifying particular grants of interest from the list of awarded MRFF grants here. Contacting/joining sector consumer organisations or community groups that represent your interests (for example, Health Consumer organisations in your state/territory). MRFF grant opportunity guidelines encourage consumer involvement at all stages of a research project from defining the need/priority of a research question, through to conduct of the research and sharing and translation of results, and are assessed on their consumer involvement. In some cases, research teams contact these consumer

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	<p>organisations/community groups to seek expressions of interest from consumers in being involved in research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign up to the MRFF newsletter here to receive the latest news, including expressions of interest for certain MRFF roles. For example, an expression of interest to become a member of the next MRFF Traumatic Brain Injury Mission Expert Advisory Panel (EAP) can be made here. • Register their interest via the MRFF GAC Nomination Portal. Potential members of GACs may be contacted directly by the Department or one of the grants hubs. <p>More broadly, individuals interested in becoming involved in research as a consumer may find resources online useful, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Clinical Trials Alliance • Monash Partners • Telethon Kids Institute.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the Research Plan ensure that research captures and is representative of differences in PASC lived experience? 	<p>As requested by the Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Research Plan is to provide advice on research investments to meet the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generate evidence on the current and future impacts of PASC in the specific Australian context (including individual health and wellbeing, carers, communities, health system) • design and evaluate clinical pathways and models of care, co-led by general practitioners and primary care, for Australians with PASC, including to address inequities in access and outcomes • generate new diagnostic and therapeutic approaches to prevent the occurrence of PASC and/or improve health outcomes for individuals with PASC <p>The Research Plan identifies four aims and priority areas for research investment to achieve these objectives and can be viewed here.</p>
International	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the research priority areas in the Research Plan complement research occurring internationally? • How do you reduce replication of research already done? 	<p>Applicants to all MRFF grants, including those funded under the Research Plan, are asked to show how their research is valuable and demonstrate how it compliments and builds upon existing research in Australia and internationally. An independent committee of experts will assess the claims made in applications as part determining the merit of each research project.</p>

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Grant Funding	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can researchers access MRFF funding for PASC research? 	<p>Individuals are encouraged to register on GrantConnect to be notified about MRFF grant (or funding) opportunities. We publish guidelines with information about all grant opportunities on GrantConnect.</p> <p>Other useful ways for researchers to keep up to date on MRFF news and grant opportunities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keeping an eye on the MRFF Grant Opportunities Calendar Subscribing to the fortnightly MRFF newsletter Follow the Department of Health and Aged Care X, formerly known as Twitter, and LinkedIn pages, which we use to highlight MRFF news.
Evidence-based treatment for post viral conditions and myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the Research Plan look at primary prevention? 	<p>The focus of the Research Plan is on research into the effective management of PASC in the Australian community. As a result, primary prevention of PASC is not included in the Research Plan.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will the Research Plan build better evidence for future treatment of other post-viral conditions including myalgic encephalomyelitis / chronic fatigue syndrome, and enable more equitable access to high quality health care? 	<p>While there may be some cross over with post-viral conditions such as myalgic encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS), it's important to note that the primary focus of the Research Plan is post-acute sequelae of COVID-19 (PASC), otherwise known as Long COVID.</p> <p>In regards to ME/CFS, the Government is providing \$880,000 over four years (2022-23 to 2025-26) to Emerge Australia, the national patient organisation for people living with ME/CFS, to undertake activities to improve support services for Australians with ME/CFS through the provision of a nurse-led patient information and support service, resource development, advocacy and facilitation of community support groups including online support. Emerge Australia can be contacted by email via their website at www.emerge.org.au or by phone on 1800 865 321.</p> <p>Emerge Australia's primary focus is to advocate for people with ME/CFS, and to educate the wider community and healthcare practitioners about ME/CFS. The organisation also assists people by providing information on accessing various social and financial supports.</p>

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2023 Post-Acute Sequelae of COVID-19 Grant Opportunity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why is the grant opportunity addressing Aim 4 of the Research Plan opening later than the other Aims? 	<p>A grant opportunity addressing Aim 4 of the Research Plan is expected to open in 2024, with research commencing in 2025. This is based on the advice of the independent Expert Advisory Panel – it will enable more time for research teams to collaborate and design proposals that address the objectives and outcomes of Aim 4, which is to improve the quality of care received by people who have symptoms consistent with PASC and/or who are living with PASC, including priority populations.</p>
Research Areas	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is research in the Research Plan limited to symptom management for PASC? 	<p>The Research Plan does not limit research to symptom management of PASC. The Plan does however recognise that symptom management plays a critical role for the effective management of PASC within the Australian community and other priority areas of research in the Research Plan. Other areas covered in the Research Plan include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying short, medium, and long-term effects and impacts of PASC on consumers, the community and the health system Building knowledge of the mechanisms and pathways that lead to PASC; and Ensuring equitable access to high quality and safe care, including priority populations living with PASC.
Translation and Commercialisation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will outcomes, findings or new treatments be translated into practice? 	<p>A translation and implementation plan for research outcomes, findings and new treatments may differ depending on the type of research being undertaken. Researchers are encouraged to seek a range of partnerships to ensure the proposed research is of relevance to consumers and delivery of services, and to support translation of research outcomes into practice.</p>

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Research	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can research help with fast tracking access to treatments including antivirals? 	<p>Stream 4 (Aim 3 of the Research Plan) of the 2023 Post Acute Sequelae of COVID-19 grant opportunity is designed to accelerate the assessment of therapeutic interventions both pharmacological (e.g. antivirals) and non-pharmacological to support optimal management approaches for people living with PASC.</p>