



Health and medical research funders highlight importance of sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and sexual orientation in science

Addressing research gaps related to the historical lack of consideration of sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and sexual orientation (the Variables) in health and medical research is central to the joint [Statement on Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation in Health and Medical Research](#) (the Statement).

By providing guidance on how to consider the Variables at all stages of research projects, and effectively, sensitively and safely involve people with lived experience, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Health and Medical Research Office, in the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, are seeking to improve health outcomes for all people living in Australia.

The CEO of NHMRC, Professor Steve Wesselingh, and CEO of the Health and Medical Research Office, which administers the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF), Natasha Ploenges, are both committed to implementing the Statement in their respective grant programs. Applicants for NHMRC and MRFF funding should start doing what they can now to improve consideration of the Variables in their research. Work is underway by both funders to more fully integrate the Statement into future grant rounds – at which time the requirement to consider the Variables will become mandatory in relevant research funded by NHMRC and MRFF.

‘It is the responsibility of all researchers, research institutions and funders to promote appropriate consideration of sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and sexual orientation at all stages of every research project,’ said Professor Steve Wesselingh.

‘Fostering cultural change around consideration of the Variables is critical to ensure Australia remains a world leader in high quality health and medical research to improve health outcomes for all people in Australia,’ said Natasha Ploenges.



The Variables are a fundamental component of high-quality and responsible health and medical research, which provides an evidence base to support better health outcomes for the diversity of people in Australia. The value of integrating the Variables in scientific research is widely acknowledged internationally by health and medical research funders and leading scientific publishers, including [Nature](#) and [Cell Press](#).

Consideration of the Variables is important throughout the research pipeline. Integration of the Variables into basic science research can improve rigor and reproducibility, as well as providing opportunity for new discoveries and innovation. In clinical, public health and health services research, accounting for the Variables can improve the applicability of research findings, support health equity and ensure that health care can be tailored to meet the needs of all populations.

The Statement promotes improved consideration of, and accurate data collection about the Variables in all relevant research. It acknowledges that every person in Australia has the right to be included in safe, high-quality research and that better partnerships between consumers, researchers, clinicians, and other research stakeholders ultimately lead to improved health outcomes.

For more information, refer to the Statement, which contains better practice prompts over the research life cycle and additional resources on the [Statement website](#).