



Embedding sex and gender considerations in research for better medical outcomes

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (responsible for the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF)) have today launched a new requirement for applicants for funding from their grant programs. Applicants must consider sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and sexual orientation (the Variables) at all stages of their research project and integrate the relevant Variables in the research, where appropriate, and describe this in their application.

The requirement will ensure that the principles in the joint [*Statement on Sex, Gender, Variations in Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation in Health and Medical Research*](#) (the Statement) are embedded in NHMRC and MRFF funded research. This will ensure that the Commonwealth continues to fund research that is high quality, reproducible and equitable, delivering an evidence base that informs our health care system and improves health outcomes for all people living in Australia.

The requirement will apply to NHMRC and MRFF grant opportunities opening for applications from 1 January 2026, noting a small number of grant opportunities may be exempted based on their nature and focus. It is supported by new guidance for applicants and assessors, which includes links to resources for researchers and their institutions.

Why are we doing this?

The Variables can influence a person's experience of health and illness, including the conditions they develop, symptoms and disease progression they experience, their responses to treatments and outcomes as well as their experience of the health system.

Historically (and continuing in many cases) limited consideration of the Variables has led to many population groups being underrepresented in health and medical research, leading to gaps in the evidence base that informs our health care system. In addition, consideration of the Variables is fundamental to high quality research that is rigorous, transparent, and widely applicable and provides researchers with opportunities for new discoveries and innovation.



What the changes mean

For most grant opportunities, applicants for NHMRC and MRFF funding will be required to demonstrate that they have considered the Variables at all stages of their research project. Applicants may choose to include or exclude the Variables in their application, provided they offer a sound, evidence-based justification for their decision.

Applicants will need to respond to a new question in the application form on the integration of the Variables. For each of the Variables, applicants will need to either summarise how the Variable is being integrated in the proposed research or justify why it is not being integrated. When a Variable is being integrated in the research, the incorporation of the Variable into the research question setting, design, conduct, analysis, reporting and/or implementation/translation must also be described in the grant proposal.

The Variables are being incorporated into assessment criteria. Assessors will need to take the information applicants provide about the Variables into account when scoring applications against the relevant criteria. Assessors should focus on the strength and validity of the rationale provided rather than the presence or absence of the Variables.

Training and support

Some researchers will be seeking to build their capability for appropriately integrating the Variables in their research, and we will support researchers to address the new requirement and implement better practice in this area.

Grant opportunity guidelines and peer review guidelines will include guidance on how to address the Variables in applications and how this will be taken into consideration during assessment.

The [Statement](#) provides useful definitions, and better practice prompts to guide researchers to consider the Variables at all stages of the research life cycle.

The NHMRC [gender equity webpage](#) provides additional guidance, including answers to frequently asked questions and links to relevant resources.

The NHMRC and the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing are jointly hosting a webinar on the Variables in health and medical research, which will include information on the new requirement in the grant programs and presentations from experts on better practice. You can [register](#) to attend the session being held on **21 November 2025 from 11:30am to 1:00pm AEDT**.



Quotes attributable to NHMRC CEO, Professor Steve Wesselingh:

"The consideration of sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and sexual orientation in health and medical research is fundamental to high quality science and provides opportunities for novel discoveries and innovation.

"The new requirement for applicants to account for the Variables in their research ensures that research funded by NHMRC and MRFF will create an evidence base that can improve the health outcomes for all people in Australia."

Quotes attributable to Natasha Ploenges, CEO Health and Medical Research Office, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing:

"This work was developed in partnership with relevant researchers and people with lived experience. We are grateful for the valuable input received through public consultation.

"The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing and NHMRC will work closely with researchers and their supporting organisations to appropriately consider and integrate, where relevant, these variables at all stages of research projects."

