Medical Research Future Fund

Australian Medical Research and Innovation Priorities

2026-2028



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Preamble

In accordance with the *Medical Research Future Fund Act 2015* (the MRFF Act), the independent Australian Medical Research Advisory Board (AMRAB) must determine the Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy every 5 years and the Australian Medical Research and Innovation Priorities (the Priorities) every 2 years.

The MRFF Act requires AMRAB to take into account the following matters when determining the Priorities:

- the burden of disease on the Australian community
- how to deliver practical benefits from medical research and medical innovation to as many Australians as possible
- how to ensure that financial assistance provided under the MRFF Act provides the greatest value for all Australians
- how to ensure that financial assistance provided under the MRFF Act complements and enhances other financial assistance provided for medical research and innovation
- any other relevant matters.

AMRAB has developed the Priorities 2026-2028 in consultation with researchers, health professionals, consumers, industry, governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, and the broader community.

The Priorities reflect emerging opportunities and challenges facing Australia's health and medical research system, including advances in artificial intelligence, digital health and multiomics, the translation and commercialisation of new technologies, climate and environmental health impacts, health system sustainability, and workforce capability. They also recognise the importance of addressing health inequities, strengthening prevention, and supporting research that is responsive to the needs of priority populations.

The Priorities are intended to guide MRFF investment towards research and innovation that improves health and wellbeing outcomes, strengthens health system performance, accelerates translation and implementation, and supports a sustainable and internationally competitive health and medical research sector. Consistent with the objectives of the Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy 2026-2031, the Priorities promote collaboration across research, health care, industry, government and community settings to maximise the impact of MRFF investment.

Each priority is outlined with its relevance (the ‘why’) and a recommended implementation approach (the ‘how’). This provides the context on how each priority contributes to one or more strategic objective and supports prevention, early intervention, equitable access to health care, research translation and implementation, community involvement, Indigenous data sovereignty, workforce development, and a learning health system that continuously improves health outcomes.

Aligned with the 2026-2031 Strategy, the Priorities provide a broad, cross-cutting direction for MRFF activities. They are interconnected rather than standalone, and multiple priorities may guide a single research investment. Collectively, they aim to advance health equity, deliver health and economic benefits through transformative and innovative research, and support a responsive health system underpinned by a skilled and sustainable workforce.



Australian Medical Research Advisory Board

Front (left to right): Professor Steve Wesselingh, Professor Kathryn North AC (Chair), Ms Natasha Ploenges and Professor Judy Searle.

Back (left to right): Professor Louise Maple-Brown, Doctor Jack Nunn, Professor Kenneth Smith (Deputy Chair), Professor Fabienne Mackay and Professor Donald Andrew Wilson AO.

Priority populations

A fundamental aim of the Australian health system is to prevent disease, intervene early and reduce the burden of ill health, helping people to live healthier lives for longer. Population groups that experience social inequalities and disadvantage resulting in health inequity are considered 'priority populations'. The Australian Government's MRFF will promote research that is conducted with the genuine involvement of priority populations to investigate appropriate solutions to health challenges.

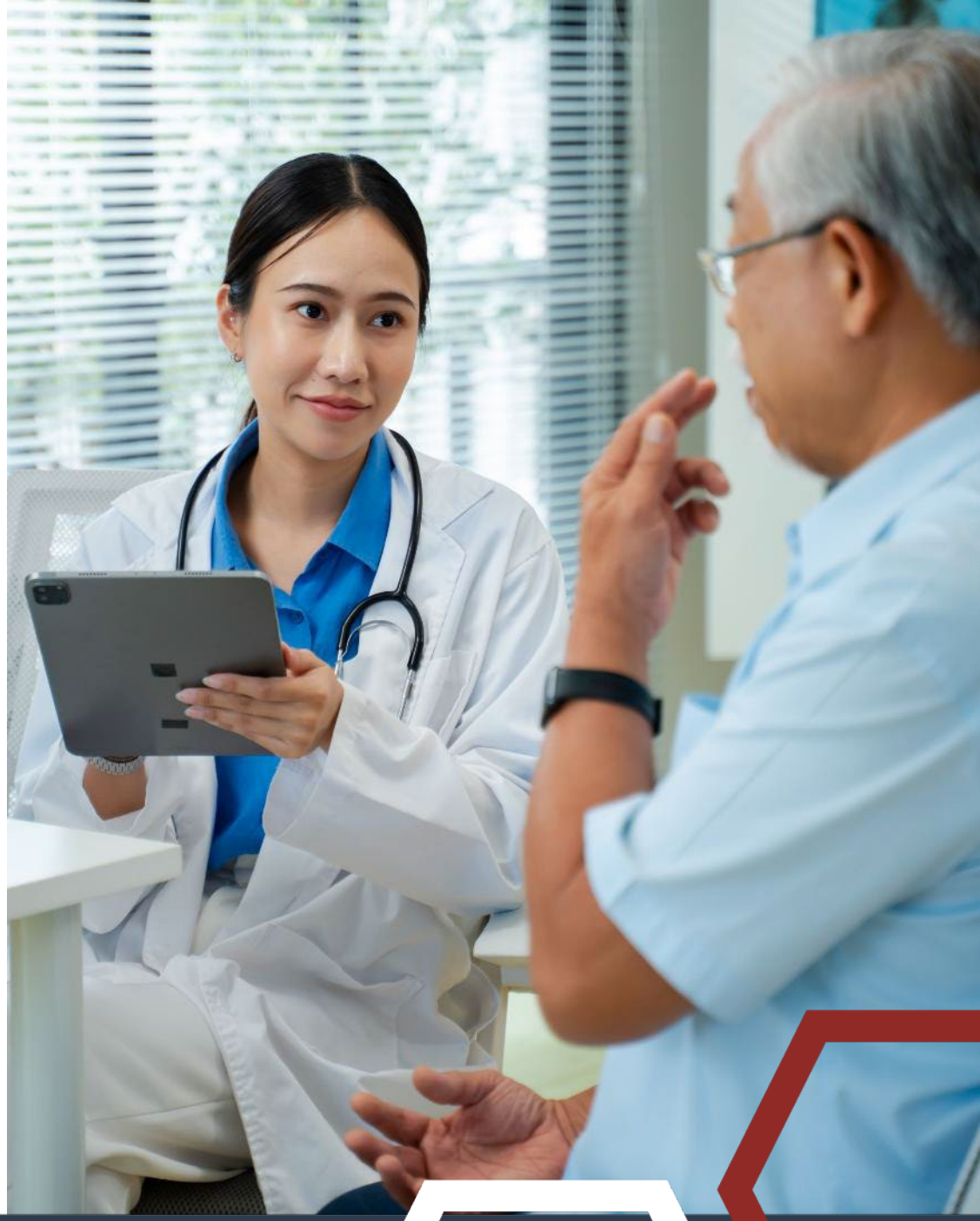
For the duration that the MRFF Priorities 2026-2028 are in force, MRFF priority populations include:

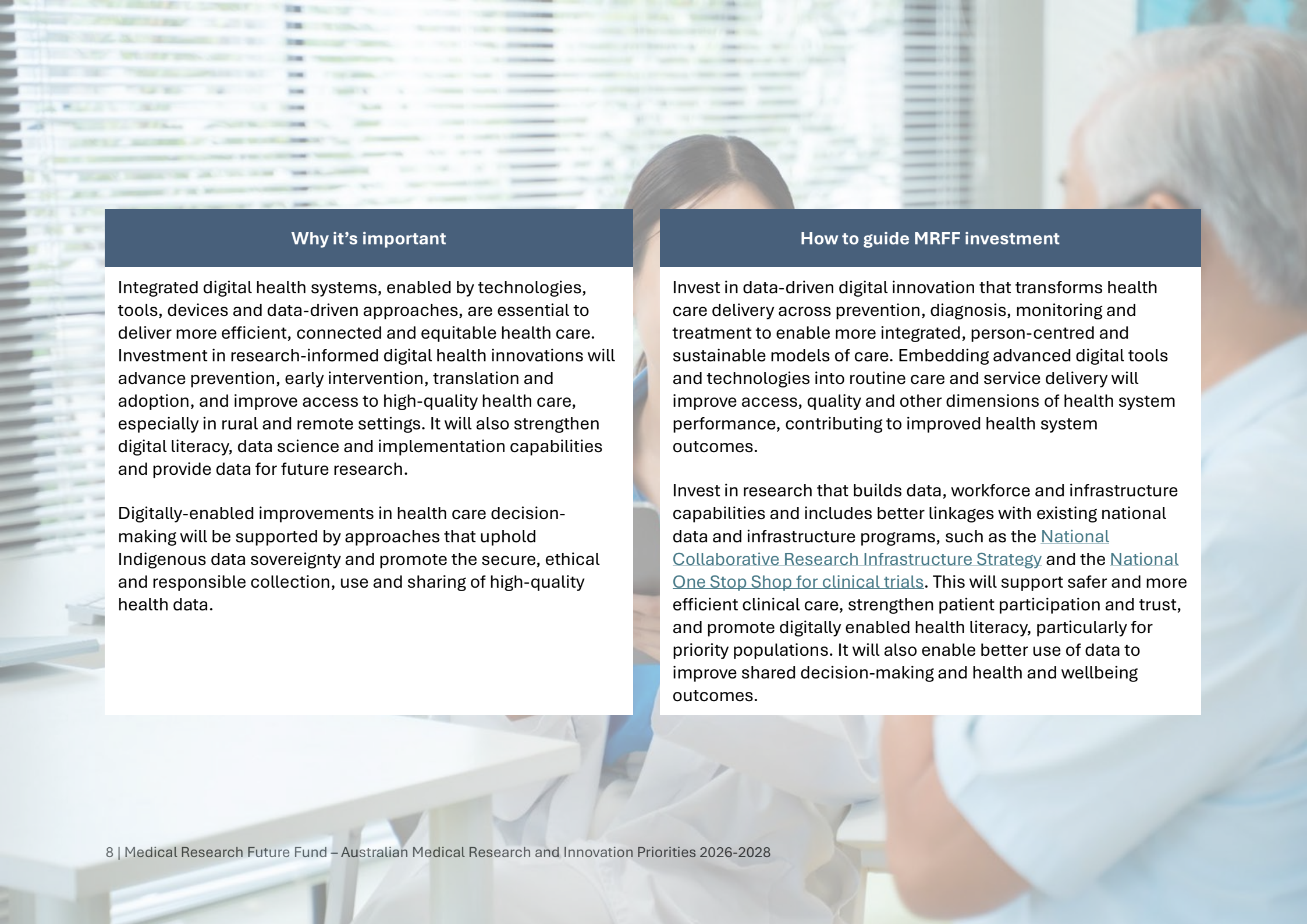
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
- people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage
- people in remote/rural communities
- people with disability (including people with intellectual disability)
- people from CALD communities (including people who are immigrants or refugees)
- LGBTIQ+ people
- children and youth
- older people experiencing diseases of ageing (e.g. cognitive decline and dementia)
- women and girls
- people with rare or currently untreatable diseases/conditions
- people with mental health conditions (including substance use disorders).

Priority:

Integrated digital health systems

Research-informed, person-centred and data-driven digital health capabilities that improve the efficiency and quality of the health system through interoperable, secure and high-quality data utilisation, linkages and infrastructure.





Why it's important	How to guide MRFF investment
Integrated digital health systems, enabled by technologies, tools, devices and data-driven approaches, are essential to deliver more efficient, connected and equitable health care. Investment in research-informed digital health innovations will advance prevention, early intervention, translation and adoption, and improve access to high-quality health care, especially in rural and remote settings. It will also strengthen digital literacy, data science and implementation capabilities and provide data for future research. Digitally-enabled improvements in health care decision-making will be supported by approaches that uphold Indigenous data sovereignty and promote the secure, ethical and responsible collection, use and sharing of high-quality health data.	Invest in data-driven digital innovation that transforms health care delivery across prevention, diagnosis, monitoring and treatment to enable more integrated, person-centred and sustainable models of care. Embedding advanced digital tools and technologies into routine care and service delivery will improve access, quality and other dimensions of health system performance, contributing to improved health system outcomes. Invest in research that builds data, workforce and infrastructure capabilities and includes better linkages with existing national data and infrastructure programs, such as the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy and the National One Stop Shop for clinical trials. This will support safer and more efficient clinical care, strengthen patient participation and trust, and promote digitally enabled health literacy, particularly for priority populations. It will also enable better use of data to improve shared decision-making and health and wellbeing outcomes.

Priority:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community governed and directed research

Community-governed and directed research and capacity building to support thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and wellbeing.



Why it's important	How to guide MRFF investment
Research that addresses priorities identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and that are led by, and conducted in partnership with communities, is critical to closing the gap in health and wellbeing outcomes. Anchoring Indigenous values, knowledge and worldviews within community-led, governed, and directed health research will enable thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and wellbeing. Investing in self-determined solutions, grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, with Indigenous governance and data sovereignty is key. This includes building workforce capability in research directed and governed by and conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, so that research is culturally safe, trusted, and positioned to support thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and wellbeing.	Invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and organisations to lead, design and deliver community governed and directed research and to implement innovative solutions. This includes replicating, adapting and accelerating effective interventions that will improve health and wellbeing. Additionally, this will strengthen career pathways and effective skills and knowledge transfer, while building workforce capacity and capability. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research will embed community voices, values, knowledges and worldviews, and uphold Indigenous governance and data sovereignty. Invest in the prioritisation of health and wellbeing research by and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Community partnership and early-stage innovation will be governed and directed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. This will increase community capability and participation in research, strengthen trust and improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and wellbeing. Research prioritisation should be contextual and, where appropriate, should align with national and local initiatives to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. These include the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031 and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework 2021–2031.

Priority:

Advanced therapeutics and emerging technology

Accelerated translation and commercialisation of advanced therapeutics and technologies into effective health products and services.



Why it's important	How to guide MRFF investment
A coordinated, end-to-end approach to translating and commercialising research discoveries into health products, technologies and services is an important driver for reducing translational bottlenecks, strengthening sovereign capabilities and streamlining pathways to implementation and commercialisation. Health technology development, assessment and commercialisation have the potential to advance Australia's biomedical industry, generate jobs, and build domestic workforce and infrastructure capabilities. This will attract and retain expert talent, diversify the economy, increase productivity, and deliver improved health outcomes.	Invest in translation and commercialisation research that moves high-potential discoveries from pre-clinical development and proof-of-concept towards clinical validation. This approach will facilitate the implementation and adoption of effective therapeutics, technologies and models of care into practice. Embedding consumer and community involvement where appropriate across the translation pathway will facilitate innovations which are culturally appropriate, acceptable and responsive to consumer needs, while strengthening the likelihood of successful uptake and real-world impact. Invest in coordinated translational research and partnerships that connect researchers, industry, health services, governments and communities. This will accelerate regulatory readiness (including health technology assessment), manufacturing capability, implementation, early market development and scale-up of advanced therapeutics and health technologies. De-risking innovation and enabling Australian discoveries to be translated into scalable products and services will strengthen sovereign capability, deliver economic benefits, and improve productivity and health system performance and outcomes.

Priority:

Health impacts from environmental factors, including climate change

A climate-resilient health system that is prepared for and responsive to pandemics and the health impacts of environmental factors, including climate change.



Why it's important	How to guide MRFF investment
Pandemics and human-caused environmental change amplify chronic disease, poor mental health, antimicrobial resistance, zoonotic spillover, habitat destruction, food insecurity, and infectious disease risks, disproportionately impacting priority populations. Coordinated research investment into understanding, preventing, and addressing pandemics and the health impacts of environmental factors, such as pollution and climate change, will translate evidence into practical interventions and support robust surveillance and monitoring systems. This will also help address misinformation and disinformation and strengthen global and regional leadership. Research outcomes will support a climate-resilient health system with an emphasis on prevention, surveillance, preparedness, and rapid response to existing and emerging health threats, improved social and emotional wellbeing, and equitable access to care.	Invest in trans-disciplinary and cross-sectoral research and partnerships to understand and address global health and biosecurity issues, including surveillance, pandemic preparedness, prevention, response and countermeasures through a One Health approach. This includes research that will strengthen Australia's capacity to detect, prevent and respond rapidly to emerging health threats across human, animal and environmental systems, and improve regional and global health security. Invest in trans-disciplinary and cross-sectoral research to address health challenges resulting from pandemics and environmental factors, including pollution and climate-related risks. This will build the evidence needed to inform more effective interventions, surveillance, prevention and climate-resilient health care.

Priority:

Multiomics-informed health care

Multiomics[1]-informed research systems that accelerate precision therapeutics, preventive strategies, and early-intervention approaches.



[1] Multiomics refers to the application of multiple layers of molecular data – such as genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics and metabolomics – to provide a more comprehensive understanding of biological systems in health and disease.

Why it's important

A transformative shift from reactive to preventive care can be achieved through genomics and multiomics-informed, risk-stratified approaches. This shift will improve the effectiveness and targeting of interventions while strengthening population health outcomes.

Investment in multiomics-informed research will enable advances in precision medicine that are translated into equitable, cost-effective and sustainable health system practices, so that benefits are realised across diverse populations and care settings. This includes enabling Indigenous data sovereignty and the safe and ethical use and sharing of data.

How to guide MRFF investment

Invest in research that advances the translation, validation and testing of genomics and multiomics-informed prevention, early intervention and precision therapy approaches. This includes screening across the life-course and risk stratification, to enable targeted, effective and scalable interventions with stronger population health impact. Promote research to develop screening approaches for rare and common diseases that will improve health system efficiency and population health outcomes.

Invest in consumer and community co-designed implementation research to support the adoption of equitable, multiomics-informed precision medicine into routine health care. This supports the delivery of preventive, diagnostics, monitoring, and therapeutic approaches that are acceptable, equitable, accessible and tailored to diverse populations.

Priority:

Determinants of health

Evidence-informed and equity-driven health research that addresses determinants of health and wellbeing, including structural, social, and environmental.





Why it's important	How to guide MRFF investment
Health is shaped beyond the healthcare system. Addressing the structural, systemic, commercial, environmental and social determinants of health and wellbeing is essential for driving systemic change by focusing on the upstream contributors to health outcomes. Outcomes-focused, evidence-informed research across prevention, food systems, physical activity, urban planning, housing, nutrition, education and related domains will generate scalable interventions that reduce preventable conditions and address persistent health inequities. Shaping environments that make healthy choices easier and more equitable will deliver lasting prevention-focused improvements in population health and wellbeing.	Invest in the development of population-level prevention and early intervention strategies addressing the determinants of health, embedding implementation pathways and community co-design to ensure policy-ready impact. This includes funding local- or system-level research that partners with communities and policy makers and generates evidence to inform policy, support health technology assessment and population-level policy adoption. Invest in preventive health research to promote long-term health and wellbeing across all stages of life, with consumer and community involvement and a focus on equity. This will enable the implementation, evaluation and translation of early risk identification and coordinated, accessible care pathways to support scalable and sustained impact.

Priority:

Embedding research in the health system

A research-rich learning health system informed by real-world evidence that drives culturally safe, high-value care and prevention, continuous system-wide learning, equity, and capability building.



Why it's important	How to guide MRFF investment
Strong partnerships between researchers and health service providers enables research that is integrated and rapidly translated into practice. Co-locating and co-producing research within health systems – supported by a hybrid workforce of clinician-scientists, health service leaders and researchers from a diverse range of disciplines – will break down barriers between evidence generation, implementation, uptake and scale. In addition, this will support the critical need to enable research across the continuum of health systems and services from primary and community care to hospitals. This approach will support continuous learning and sovereign capability to deliver measurable improvements in outcomes, equity and system performance, including reduced risk of re-hospitalisation.	Invest in programs that embed research and researchers within health systems, integrating evidence generation, translation and adoption into culturally safe routine health care across the care continuum. Aligning research more closely with health service priorities and consumer needs will accelerate the uptake of evidence into practice, inform policy, attract, grow and retain a skilled workforce, and improve health system performance and outcomes. Invest in trans-disciplinary and collaborative research that enables continuous learning and adaptation across the research-to-practice pipeline. Research that is co-produced and implemented with researchers from a diverse range of disciplines, clinician-scientists, health services, consumers and community, and that is responsive to the needs and experiences of diverse population groups, will improve relevance, uptake, equity, and impact.

Priority:

Skilled and sustainable health and medical research workforce

Sustainable, skilled and future-ready health and medical research workforce that strengthens research translation, implementation and innovation.





Why it's important	How to guide MRFF investment
Health and medical research workforce capability and capacity building is critical to build a productive, stable and inclusive sector that is equipped with stronger trans-disciplinary skills to deliver lasting impact. This includes creating equitable opportunities for researchers from under-represented backgrounds, and better recognition of diverse career stages. Support for researchers, innovators and inventors across academia, health services, alongside peer researchers will broaden research expertise, improve the relevance and public trust of research outputs and accelerate the translation of research into practice.	Invest in high-quality research that creates career opportunities for researchers across diverse career stages, pathways, expertise and locations. This includes investment in interdisciplinary teams comprising diverse skillsets and career stages, alongside targeted capability building for under-represented research disciplines. This will attract, grow and retain a skilled, valued, inclusive and future-ready health and medical research workforce across academic, clinical, health services, industry, consumer and community research sectors. Strengthening workforce diversity and providing stable, long-term support promotes continuity. This will accelerate research outcomes into equitable and sustainable products, services and practice that improve health and wellbeing.

Priority:

AI in research and health systems

Nationally coordinated, safe, and ethical use of artificial intelligence across research and health systems that accelerates equitable innovations in preventive health, diagnostics, therapeutics, and service delivery across the care continuum.





Why it's important

The establishment of safe, trusted and innovative AI-enabled health care requires nationally coordinated, expert-led and evidence-based approaches, with consumer involvement and transparency at every stage of research. This includes strong AI governance that supports responsible AI across the full lifecycle of research from priority setting and data and model validation through to deployment and monitoring.

Building Australia's sovereign AI capability will strengthen research to translate into more effective, equitable care, particularly for priority populations, wherever they live. This includes Indigenous data sovereignty and the ethical stewardship of health data. It will also strengthen workforce capability, improve clinical decision-making, and enable prevention and early intervention.

How to guide MRFF investment

Invest in nationally coordinated research programs to advance AI-enabled health and medical innovations across prevention, diagnostics, therapeutics and service delivery. This will require embedded safety, ethics and transparency, alongside robust governance and evaluation, to ensure AI-enabled health innovations deliver measurable improvements in health outcomes and health system performance.

Invest in trans-disciplinary programs that accelerate the translation of system wide, AI-enabled health innovations. This will build workforce, data and infrastructure capabilities across health systems and industry, leading to strengthened sovereign capability for scalable AI adoption and health system performance.

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