Medical Research Future Fund

Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy

2026-2031



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Foreword

It is my pleasure to introduce the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy 2026-2031 (Strategy). This Strategy reflects the independent advice and stewardship of the Australian Medical Research Advisory Board (AMRAB), and is informed by evidence, consultation, and the perspectives of stakeholders from across Australia's health and medical research ecosystem.

The MRFF represents a significant national investment in improving the health and wellbeing of Australians. As an enduring fund, it provides the opportunity—and the responsibility—to take a deliberate, strategic approach to where and how research and innovation can deliver the greatest benefit.

This Strategy marks a clear evolution in that role. It sets direction for a system that must continue to support world-class discovery, while strengthening the pathways that translate research into improved prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care. It recognises that impact is not automatic—it requires prioritisation, coordination, and sustained effort over time.

The Australian health and medical research sector has many strengths—a high-quality research base, strong institutions, and a long history of public investment. At the same time, the challenges facing the health system are becoming more complex, and the pace of scientific and technological change continues to accelerate. In this context, the role of the MRFF is to be targeted, strategic and focused on where it can add the greatest value.

Accordingly, this Strategy provides a disciplined framework for investment. It focuses on areas of unmet need, gaps in translation, and opportunities to improve health outcomes at scale. It also reinforces the importance of complementarity across the funding system, including alignment with investigator-led National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funding and the broader National Health and Medical Research Strategy.

The MRFF is now a mature, mission-capable fund. Building on its first decade, this Strategy supports a more coherent research and innovation pipeline—from discovery and capability through to implementation, commercialisation and system adoption. It is designed to guide investment that is both ambitious and achievable over the next 5 years.

On behalf of AMRAB, I thank the many individuals and organisations who contributed to the development of this Strategy. Together, we will continue to guide investments that are focused, evidence-informed, and centred on improving the health and wellbeing of all Australians.



Professor Kathryn North AC

Chair, Australian Medical Research Advisory Board

I am pleased to support the release of the MRFF Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy 2026-2031. The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, through the Health and Medical Research Office (HMRO), is responsible for the MRFF—translating the direction set by AMRAB into effective, high-quality funding opportunities and outcomes for the Australian community.

The MRFF operates within a strong statutory and governance framework, underpinned by its endowment model and long-term investment approach. This provides a stable platform for sustained funding and enables a more deliberate, programmatic approach to supporting research and innovation over time.

Delivering on this Strategy requires more than funding alone. It depends on effective design and stewardship of grant opportunities, strong partnerships across the research and health system, and a continued focus on improving the pathways from research to real-world impact.

HMRO will continue to work closely with AMRAB, researchers, clinicians, health care professionals, industry, consumers, the community and other partners to:

- support high-quality, competitive funding processes
- strengthen coordination and coherence across the funding landscape
- enable translation into policy, practice and products
- ensure investments are informed by evidence, data and evaluation.

The Australian Government's recent commitment to increasing MRFF investment will further strengthen our collective capacity to support research and innovation that improves health outcomes for Australians. This increased scale heightens the importance of strategic alignment, effective delivery, and robust evaluation.

As the MRFF enters its next phase, HMRO remains focused on ensuring that investments are well-targeted, well-managed, and capable of delivering meaningful and lasting impact.



Ms Natasha Ploenges

Chief Executive Officer, Health and Medical Research Office

Vision

Transforming health through research excellence and lasting impact



Statement of intent

This Vision positions the Australian Government's MRFF to deliver world-leading health research that improve lives and strengthen health systems. The Strategic objectives will support the translation of high-quality research into sustained improvements in health outcomes and health equity. There will be a particular emphasis on prevention and implementation.

This approach is designed to complement funding from the NHMRC and other funders and will enable learning health systems that respond and adapt to population health needs. It will also strengthen and build on relationships with communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, health services, and industry.

Under this Strategy, MRFF-funded research will deliver enduring impact, global leadership, and healthier futures for all. It will do this by building workforce capability, embedding research in practice, and strengthening sovereign capability and translation pathways.



Strategic objectives

The strategic objectives of the MRFF are to deliver:

- A research-rich, data-enabled learning health system that continuously improves quality, efficiency, productivity, cultural safety, and equity
- Transformation of health care through AI and digital health advances that integrate preventive health, diagnostics and therapeutics across the care continuum
- End-to-end translation of discoveries and innovation into real-world impact—building sovereign capability and delivering measurable health and wellbeing, productivity and economic benefits
- Thriving health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through research that is community-governed and directed
- A health and medical research sector and health system positioned to understand and respond to determinants of health and wellbeing including climate and environment change
- A skilled, sustainable, inclusive and future-ready health and medical research workforce that accelerates innovation, translation and system capability

Cross-cutting principles



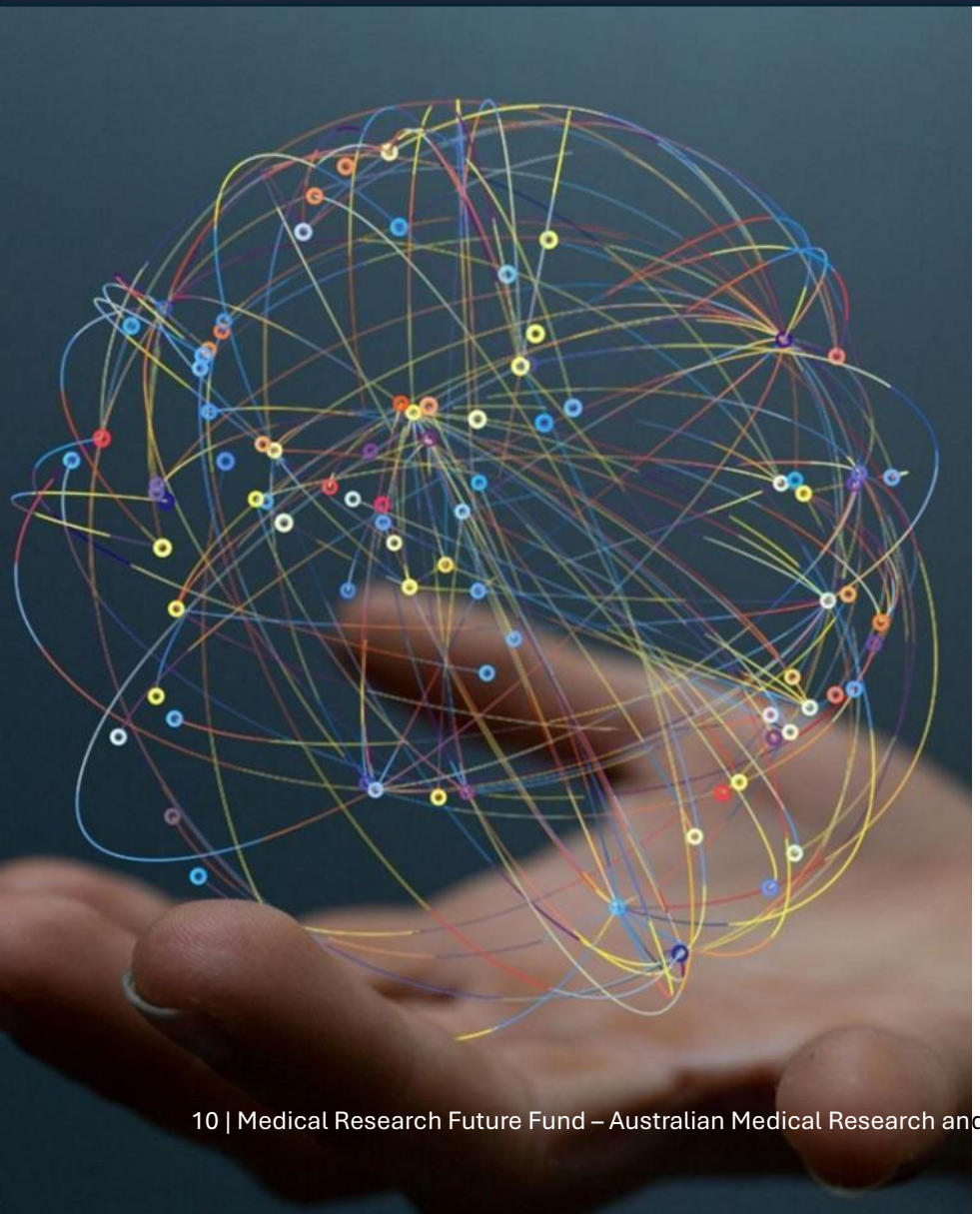
The following principles recognise the unique role of the MRFF within the health and medical research system in Australia. They are intended to be embedded across all the strategic objectives outlined above and to guide the activities and initiatives funded by the MRFF.

To the greatest extent possible, these principles will inform the identification of the MRFF's Priorities and serve as the foundation upon which all grant opportunities are designed to realise the strategic objectives of the MRFF for 2026 to 2031.

- Health equity
- Translation and implementation
- Sustained consumer and community involvement
- Prevention and early-intervention
- Systems-based and scalability
- Partnerships and co-investments

A description and rationale for the cross-cutting principles is at Appendix 1.

Shared enablers



The shared enablers describe the common capabilities, infrastructure, coordination mechanisms and workforce needed to deliver the strategic objectives and strengthen the impact of MRFF-funded activity across the Strategy. They operate across all strategic objectives, providing the practical, system-wide foundations for measurable, equitable and enduring improvements in health and wellbeing from 2026 to 2031.

These shared enablers will guide the development of MRFF investment and help ensure funded research is coordinated, implemented and sustained across the health and medical research system.

- Coordinated and complementary MRFF and NHMRC investment
- Connected research workforce across academia, health services, industry and lived experience
- Integrated national research ecosystem
- Innovative trials design and methodologies
- Advanced and emerging research technologies

Descriptions of shared enablers are at Appendix 2.

Australian Medical Research Advisory Board



Professor Kathryn North AC (Chair) is a distinguished paediatric physician, neurologist and clinical geneticist, recognised for her leadership in research translation and genomic medicine.

"Australia has extraordinary scientific talent and world class research. The development of the MRFF Strategy in alignment with the National Health and Medical Research Strategy provides an exciting opportunity to make better use of our research and ensure more discoveries translate into meaningful outcomes."



Professor Kenneth Smith (Deputy Chair) is renowned for his expertise in clinical medicine, human immunology, scientific research and leadership across Australia, the United Kingdom and Asia.

"The development of the MRFF Strategy and Priorities is a significant opportunity to set a long-term direction for Australia's health and medical research future. The Strategy should drive innovation, support collaboration and create critical mass, and link fundamental research to translation to ensure research delivers real benefits for patients, communities and the broader health system."



Professor Fabienne Mackay is a world-leading biomedical researcher.

"An MRFF Strategy aligned with Australia's National Health and Medical Research Strategy and working alongside the NHMRC ensures medical research breakthroughs are translated into clinically deployable and scalable prevention programs, diagnostics, treatments and models of care. Its priorities aim to strengthen sovereign capability, build a more equitable and resilient health system, and deliver substantial economic benefit for Australia."



Professor Louise Maple-Brown is an esteemed expert and leader in Aboriginal, regional and remote health.

"The MRFF Strategy and Priorities play a critical role in guiding investment decisions of the MRFF across the spectrum of translational research priorities including upstream determinants of health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing, and a data-enabled learning health system."



Doctor Jack Nunn is a public and patient advocacy expert.

"Research is for everyone. It's vital to ensure the public are involved at every stage of setting the Strategy and Priorities, using transparent and evidence-informed methods, so that MRFF investment better addresses the burden of disease on the Australian community and improves health and wellbeing in Australia and beyond."



Professor Judy Searle is known for her work in health systems policy and equity.

"If the MRFF can enhance the aspirations outlined by the National Health and Medical Research Strategy and contribute to improving health outcomes for Australians most in need, then we have done our job."



Professor Donald Andrew Wilson AO is a distinguished expert in public health research and policy development.

"The MRFF Strategy and Priorities is our opportunity to show how MRFF investment can best support research and development, addressing our major health challenges while aligning and coordinating with other research investments as envisaged in the National Health and Medical Research Strategy and the Ambitious Australia review."



Professor Steve Wesselingh was CEO of the NHMRC Council and the Ex-Officio Member of AMRAB when this strategy was developed. Professor Wesselingh stepped down from these roles in August 2026.

"The development of the MRFF Strategy and Priorities is crucial to ensuring that the MRFF provides the optimal support for health and medical research and that this expenditure is strongly aligned with the National Health and Medical Research Strategy and the activities of the NHMRC."

Acknowledgements

AMRAB acknowledges all individuals and organisations who contributed to the development of this Strategy and the Australian Medical Research and Innovation Priorities 2026-2028 through consultation and engagement activities.

AMRAB thanks international advisors **Professor Lucy Chappell**, Chief Executive Officer of the United Kingdom's National Institute for Health and Care Research, and **Professor Tammy Clifford**, Vice-President of Strategic Science and External Relations at the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, for their contributions. Both provided an invaluable international lens, drawing on their experience in comparable research systems to support the development of documents that are ambitious, contemporary and responsive to emerging opportunities. AMRAB greatly appreciates the insight and considered advice they brought to this important work.

AMRAB is also grateful for the advice and expertise provided by the NHMRC Council, NHMRC Research Committee and NHMRC-MRFF joint advisory committees.

Further reading

- Department of Health, Disability and Ageing – Medical Research Future Fund
- MRFF 10-year Investment Plan
- MRFF initiatives
- MRFF monitoring, evaluation and learning
- Financial assistance to support the Australian Medical Research and Innovation Priorities reports
- MRFF funding statistics dashboard
- *Medical Research Future Fund Act 2015*
- Statutory review of the *Medical Research Future Fund Act 2015*

Appendix 1: Description and rationale for the cross-cutting principles

Cross-cutting principles	Why it's important

Health equity	• Enables health and medical research to deliver fair and inclusive benefits for all people in Australia, regardless of ancestry, background, identity, socioeconomic status, or location.
	• A research system that embeds equity across priority setting, design, workforce, and resource distribution, ensures diverse perspectives are reflected and supported.
	• Addresses structural barriers, including supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research that is community governed and directed and ensuring culturally safe approaches that translate evidence into improved health wellbeing outcomes.
	• Strengthens trust, relevance, and impact by enabling meaningful partnerships with, and genuine involvement of consumers and communities, particularly those historically under-served.
	• Ensures equitable access to innovative high-value care, including emerging technologies, data, and infrastructure, so that advances in health and medical research benefit all communities.
	• A health equity approach to MRFF-funded research will:
	  ◦ target investment to reduce disparities and improve outcomes for priority populations
	  ◦ embed equity considerations across the research lifecycle, from design to translation
	  ◦ improve access to data, technologies, and services across diverse populations and settings
	  ◦ strengthen involvement, representation and participation in research to enhance impact and relevance
	  ◦ deliver more equitable health outcomes and improved population health.

Cross-cutting principles	Why it's important

Translation and implementation	• Describes how research progresses from discoveries into real-world applications and services.
	• Bridges the "know-do gap", by progressing discoveries from laboratories and trials to improve health outcomes, prevent or address ill-health, inform policy, and increase health resilience.
	• Demonstrates stewardship of public funds by reducing research waste and delivering high-quality and high-value health products and services.
	• Appropriate translation and implementation planning, including clear pathways through early validation, regulatory readiness, implementation research, scale-up, and commercial and non-commercial routes to impact, are crucial to:
	  ◦ delivering measurable outcomes (for example adoption, scalability, economics, quality of life gained)
	  ◦ improving the cultural safety and protect the intellectual property of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determined health solutions
	  ◦ increasing the likelihood of MRFF-funded research being translated into policy and practice
	  ◦ reducing risks to support commercial viability, accelerating time-to-impact and increasing the likelihood of scalability and sustainability
	  ◦ attracting partnerships and co-investments from the public and private sectors
	  ◦ increasing public trust through visible and tangible health and wellbeing outcomes
	  ◦ ensuring MRFF-funded research delivers a return on investment and provides good value for money.

Cross-cutting principles	Why it's important

Sustained consumer and community involvement	• Ensures that research, including prioritisation, design, delivery, and evaluation, occurs in equal partnership with the people who use and provide them and is:
	  ◦ fit-for-purpose
	  ◦ can be adopted and maintained over time (sustainability)
	  ◦ can be expanded across settings and populations equitably and at a high quality (scalability).
	• Involving consumers and communities in research and centering the voices of people most affected (including under-served groups), improving equity and legitimacy, applicability and the quality of decisions of MRFF-funded research.
	• Enables experience-informed health products, services and applications arising from MRFF-funded research to continue delivering their intended outcomes safely, appropriately, equitably, and efficiently after initial funding or trial periods end. This is achieved by ensuring research appropriately embeds new approaches in routine systems, is resourced appropriately, and can adapt to changing environment without losing core functions.
	• Evidence-informed sustainability by design (where appropriate) will:
	  ◦ ensure that the diversity of lived experience voices is embedded at all stages of research (including priority setting, measurements, delivery, education, evaluation and refinements of health products, services and applications) so they continue to deliver equitable, high-quality outcomes over time
	  ◦ emphasise that consumer and community involvement is essential in MRFF-funded research
	  ◦ improves safety, quality, relevance, applicability, and lasting impact of MRFF-funded research, leading to the best possible research and health outcomes for improving the health and wellbeing of people in Australia.

Cross-cutting principles	Why it's important

Prevention and early-intervention	• Proactively reduces the risks of ill-health by acting on the early signs and symptoms so that illnesses are prevented where possible or addressed early (if possible), minimising harm, cost, and inequity.
	• Prevention and early intervention are the highest leverage investments in health and medical research. They save lives now, bend the cost curve later, reduce inequities, and make communities more resilient.
	• Preventive health (including primordial and primary prevention) and early intervention research can close gaps for priority populations, including young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, where the preventable burden is higher and access barriers are modifiable.
	• Improving preventive health and early interventions tools, services and strategies will:
	  ◦ accelerate implementation models that can scale quickly through policy or service redesign, reducing time-to-impact
	  ◦ reduce future health-system liabilities by decreasing avoidable hospitalisations, preventable long-term care, and strengthening the resilience and fiscal sustainability of health care delivery
	  ◦ shift population health risk and reduce deaths and disability, leading to more healthy and productive years across the life course
	  ◦ deliver a high return on investment for MRFF-funded research, and low cost per quality-adjusted life years (QALY) relative to late-stage care, resulting in more impact per dollar.

Cross-cutting principles	Why it's important

Systems based and scalability	• Describes approaches that examine and intervene in the whole health system, recognising the interdependencies of its constituent parts to produce durable, equitable, cost-effective and high-value care that can be expanded, adapted, and maintained (sustainability) across diverse settings and populations.
	• Systems-based approaches to MRFF-funded research enable transparent evaluation and continuous improvement across the research to practice pipeline by helping to identify and mitigate unintended consequences and patient safety risks.
	• Ensures scalability is planned from the start, reducing research waste and duplication, and allowing proven solutions to scale to whole regions or nationwide more rapidly.
	• A systems-based and scalability approach to health and medical research will:
	  ◦ promote equity-by design in research that helps identify and remove structural barriers to high-value and equitable care
	  ◦ increase the preparedness and resilience of health services, including its workforce, supply chain, and data systems—to adapt to evolving health needs or emergencies
	  ◦ embed implementation and sustainability approaches into the design of health care and service delivery, reducing the gap between research and practice
	  ◦ move beyond single-point approaches and incremental improvements, producing more efficient, sustainable and scalable outcomes that deliver a better return on investment.

Cross-cutting principles	Why it's important

Partnerships and co-investments	• Describes structured collaborations between academic and clinical researchers, health services, consumers, policymakers, industry and/or philanthropy to co-design, test, share risk, and match funding with the MRFF to accelerate research translation and implement evidence into health products, services, practice or policies.
	  ◦ **Partnerships:** structured collaborations between researchers, health services, consumers, policymakers, industry, and philanthropy, to design, test, implement and evaluate solutions in real-world settings
	  ◦ **Co-investment:** matched funding and shared risk across MRFF and other funders to increase scale and speed of translation into products, practice and policy.
	• Matching investment from other Commonwealth programs, states/territories, industry and philanthropy stretches limited resources and aligns priorities across researchers, clinicians, policymakers, consumers, and industry to address national priority problems through co-design and co-creation.
	• Improves the relevance, suitability, and quality of research outcomes, delivering better value for money, faster access to better care, and greater real-world impact from MRFF investment.
	• A structured approach to partnerships and co-investment across MRFF-funded research can:
	  ◦ encourage crowd-in philanthropic and/or private capital to de-risk early steps, strengthen governance and speed up proof-of-concept, scale-up and implementation
	  ◦ reduce time between discoveries to products, services and practice through embedded partnerships, better connections to health technology assessment processes, and providing commercial and/or implementation mentoring to researchers
	  ◦ embed researchers in health services to co-design, test and implement evidence in routine care, improving uptake and system performance
	  ◦ coordinate funding strategies with philanthropies to close gaps in the research translation pipeline and bridge translational bottlenecks
	  ◦ increase accountability and reduce duplication by aligning priorities and enabling nation-wide coordination of research investments and capabilities.

Appendix 2: Descriptions of the shared enablers

Shared enablers	Description
Coordinated and complementary MRFF and NHMRC investments	The Australian Government provides direct support for health and medical research through the complementary MRFF and the NHMRC. The MRFF provides opportunity to strategically fund research and address national priorities through its focus on priority-driven research, particularly research translation, commercialisation and implementation science. The NHMRC funds grant applications across any area of research relevant to human health. NHMRC funding primarily supports investigator-led schemes, taking account the applicant's expertise to build capacity and advance health and medical knowledge. Coordinated and complementary research between government funders, including the MRFF, the NHMRC and the Biomedical Translation Fund, will reduce duplication, address research and health gaps, lower system complexity and workforce burden, preserve distinct roles and responsibilities across the research continuity, and improve translation of research into better health outcomes and sustainability of the Australian health system. Together, coordinated and complementary research investment can support the full research pipeline—from discovery and capability-building through to translation, implementation, and scale-up—through a coordinated and complementary approach.

Shared enablers	Description
Connected research workforce across academia, health services and lived experience	A strong, diverse, and collaborative research workforce, informed by lived experience, provides the capability, expertise, and experience needed to translate research discoveries into real-world impact. Effective collaboration between researchers, consumers and the health services delivery workforce will: • break down silos between evidence generation and service delivery • accelerate the translation of safe, appropriate, and sustainable care into practice and policy • encourage innovation through interdisciplinary and intersectional perspectives • enhance capability building and shared expertise across the research to practice continuum.
Integrated national research ecosystem	Health and medical challenges are complex and cannot be addressed effectively through fragmented or isolated research efforts. An integrated national research ecosystem approach is important to create the conditions needed for research to be coordinated, efficient, equitable, and impactful at scale. An integrated national research ecosystem approach will: • promote alignment of research priorities at a national level and ensure research delivers better health outcomes for all people in Australia • strengthen collaborations and partnerships across individual research organisation/institution, government and non-government organisations and industry • reduce duplication by aligning research investments, expertise, and infrastructure to national priorities to ensure resources are directed to areas of greatest need • increase interoperability of shared resources and data to accelerate translation of discovery to impact in areas of national need • enable a coordinated response to health emergencies and rapidly mobilise expertise and infrastructure to generate evidence that informs care and policy.

Shared enablers	Description
Innovative trials design and methodologies	Innovative trial designs and methodologies accelerate the generation of robust evidence, improve efficiency and value for money, and produce findings that are more applicable to evolving real-world health system delivery. These methods build national capability, strengthens collaboration, and increase the likelihood that research delivers high value outcomes for people in Australia. Innovative trials design and methodologies will: • support equitable and intersectional approaches to care delivery by increasing participation and relevance across diverse populations and settings, helping ensure that care is safe, appropriate and sustainable • shorten timelines by allowing pre-planned adaptations to trials design and methodologies, testing multiple interventions simultaneously or supporting faster evidence-based decisions and ongoing refinement • increase efficiency through shared resources, registries, data, and infrastructure to generate evidence on the clinical benefits and cost effectiveness of health interventions that can inform practice and policy • enable adaptive and decentralised trials design that reduce participant burden, support participation across multiple sites, and increase inclusion of under-represented communities. This will help ensure that care is inclusive, equitable, sustainable over the long term and that benefits are shared across diverse communities • enhance translation by generating evidence to inform practice and policies and strengthen preparedness through rapid and adaptive responses to emerging threats.

Shared enablers	Description
Advanced and emerging research technologies	Appropriate, well-governed and ethical use of advanced and emerging research technologies can: • accelerate discovery • improve the precision and real-world relevance of health products and services • strengthen data capability, interoperability and quality • accelerate scalable translation of discoveries into practice and policy. These technologies include artificial intelligence and data science approaches, health informatics, and other technological innovations such as quantum technologies, precision medicine and other data-driven or research-enabling technologies. When supported by robust governance, workforce capability, and interoperability, these technologies increase the impact and value of research investment and help deliver better health outcomes. This is critical to realising the benefits of more digitally and technologically integrated research and health care ecosystems that deliver on the best possible health outcomes for all people in Australia.

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