



Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

NHMRC TARGETED CALL FOR RESEARCH into

Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples from Early Life to Young Adults Call-Specific Funding Rules

These Call-Specific Funding Rules must be read in conjunction with the [Funding Rules for NHMRC's Targeted Calls for Research Program](#) and the [NHMRC Funding Rules 2017](#).

1 Background and Justification for the Call

Social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) is a holistic concept which recognises the importance of connection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community, and how these affect the individual¹. At present, much of the information about SEWB relates to the narrow view of mental illness. Though this information is important and serves as a useful proxy for assessing SEWB, it has some inherent limitations and does not include broader social determinants of health, such as homelessness, unemployment, trauma and social disadvantage¹.

Mental health has been identified as one of Australia's national health priority areas², ranking third overall in Australian burden of disease estimates. Like physical health, a significant gap exists between the SEWB and mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples.

Adversity and disadvantage in child development are important determinants of longer-term mental health and SEWB. Young Indigenous people are disproportionately exposed to high risk factors for SEWB and mental health issues, meaning they are more likely to be at risk of behavioural and emotional problems than their non-Indigenous counterparts^{3,4}. This includes higher rates of suicide, out-of-home care, self-harm and trauma. Prevention and early intervention are therefore key to improving health,

¹ Australian Government (2013) *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023*, Commonwealth of Australia.

² National Mental Health Strategy (2009) *National Mental Health Policy 2008*, Commonwealth of Australia.

³ Walker, R. Robinson, M, Andermann, J. et al (2014) *Working with Behavioural and Emotional Problems in Young People*. In Dudgeon, P. Milroy, H. and Walker R. (Eds.) *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental and Health Wellbeing Principles and Practices [2nd Edition]*. Commonwealth of Australia, P. 383-397

⁴ Williamson, A. Raphael, B. Redman, S. et al (2010) *Working themes in Aboriginal child and adolescent mental health: findings from a qualitative study in Sydney, New South Wales*, Medical Journal of Australia, 192 (10): 603-5

along with culturally appropriate services (e.g. frontline services such as ambulance and emergency services, as well as community-based services). These services, and the system in which they operate, require well-informed models of care, particularly in areas of trauma exposure and intergenerational trauma which may be factors in alcoholism, criminal offences, incarceration and problem gambling. All of these issues have physical and mental health impacts that affect the individual, as well as their family, community and the next generation.

This TCR follows a Public Call for Research Priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health conducted in mid-2016.

2 NHMRC Aims in Implementing this Call

The aim of implementing this call is to provide funding for rigorous, culturally-informed research into maintaining and improving the SEWB and mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants, children, adolescents and young adults, and fostering wellness.

Quality evidence generated from research will allow for better planning, funding and implementation of policies and services to achieve and support good SEWB and mental health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants, children, adolescents and young adults.

This TCR responds to NHMRC's priorities as outlined in the [NHMRC Corporate Plan 2016-2017](#). The need to 'improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' has been identified as a major health issue.

This TCR also helps to address the [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan \(2013-2023\)](#), which identifies evidence-based practice and mental health and SEWB as priorities. One of the key strategies to address the former is 'Promote best-practice and innovative approaches guided by research, monitoring and evaluation activities'.

The [Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan \(2013-2023\)](#) identifies as an action 'Strengthened evidence base of knowledge across the life course and care continuum, in particular preventative health, including the factors that impact on childhood health and development.'

3 Definition and Scope

This TCR aims to support research that addresses the following research question:

Identify novel and culturally-informed approaches to maintain or improve the social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) and mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants, children, adolescents and young adults.

Specifically, the scope of this TCR is research into:

- prevention and early intervention strategies and initiatives, including strengthening parental responsiveness
- a responsive and culturally appropriate service system (both mainstream and community controlled)
- addressing consequences of poor SEWB and mental illness, such as incarceration and problem gambling, that reinforce poor mental and physical health.

For the purpose of this TCR, 'infants, children, adolescents and young adults' is defined as people under the age of 24.

Research Not Supported Under This Call

This TCR does not support research projects that have any laboratory-based research, including animal-based research or research based in animal models.

As previous NHMRC TCRs have focused on Indigenous youth suicide prevention, and dementia for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, research projects exclusively focused on these topics will not be supported under this call. Research projects that include aspects of these topics but do not focus on them exclusively are acceptable.

4 Objectives to be Addressed in the Research Proposal

The objectives of this TCR are, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants, children, adolescents and young adults, to identify novel and culturally sensitive:

1. strategies and initiatives to reduce the prevalence of mental health conditions and improve SEWB
2. interventions to increase the responsiveness and appropriateness of mainstream and community-controlled services, individually and as a system, to address SEWB and mental health
3. interventions to mitigate the consequences of poor SEWB and mental illness.

To address the aims and objectives of this TCR, applicants should provide a research proposal including details on:

- the research design, including a description of the population, study design, methods for recruiting participants, intervention to be used, what the comparison will be, what outcomes will be measured and how this will occur, statistical rigour and reproducibility of the study
- how the research aligns with the scope, aims, objectives and expected outcomes of the call
- the relevant experience and expertise of the research team
- a description of the disciplines, sectors and policy and practice partners that will be involved in the research and the contributions of each of these
- how the research will address the social determinants of health, where appropriate, and
- how the research findings would be translated into changes in policy or used to develop new health services or programs.

Qualifying applications must address the NHMRC Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria ([see section 6.3 of the NHMRC Funding Rules 2017](#)). These include:

- Ensuring community engagement that shows how research and potential outcomes are a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Demonstrating the potential health benefit of the project by addressing an important public health issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Demonstrating how the results of the project have the potential to lead to achievable and effective contributions to health gain for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, beyond the life of the project.
- Demonstrating how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and researchers will develop relevant capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project.

5 Expected Outcomes

The key expected outcomes from funded grants will be:

- the generation of a body of evidence that will identify and improve public policy on the SEWB of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants, children, adolescents and young adults
- effective interventions to address the SEWB of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants, children, adolescents and young adults
- provision of a better framework to prevent ill health, manage conditions and reduce consequences, with the aim of helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities to live healthy, successful, fulfilling and contributing lives.

6 Budget

A total of \$5 million has been allocated to support a number of research projects identified via this call. Funding will be provided to the top ranked applications until the allocated funding is expended. The number of projects funded is therefore dependent on the size of the grants.

NHMRC reserves the right not to expend the amount allocated to this TCR if, in the assessment of the Peer Review Panel (PRP) for this TCR, applications of sufficient quality are not received.

Funding will be available over the period of five years, unless applications specify a shorter period. Applications must clearly justify the requested duration and budget and how it will support the proposed outcomes of the research. The PRP will consider this information and may adjust the duration and budget to ensure the research can be achieved while ensuring value for money.

7 Critical Dates

Process	Date
Open for Submissions in RGMS	15 November 2017
Minimum data due in RGMS*	24 January 2018
Close of Submissions in RGMS	7 February 2018
Completion of Peer Review	Mid-2018

*Minimum data must be entered into NHMRC's Research Grants Management System (RGMS) by **5.00 pm** AEDT on the specified due date to allow the NHMRC to start sourcing suitable assessors. Applications that fail to satisfy this requirement will not be accepted. Applicants are also reminded to complete the recommended fields with correct information. Using placeholder text such as "text", "synopsis" or "xx" etc. is not acceptable as minimum data.

Minimum data for NHMRC TCRs consists of the following:

- General – Application Information: You must complete fields for Administering Institution, Application Title, Synopsis and Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Research (yes/no) and Consent to provide information to International Assessors

- A-RC Research Classification
- A-RT Research Team and Commitment (core team with other members listed as TBA if not yet known)

Please note: Failure to meet this deadline will result in the application not proceeding ([see section 10.7 of the NHMRC Funding Rules for further information](#)).

Research Administration Officers (RAOs) are not required to certify applications for the purpose of minimum data; applications should only be certified once complete and ready for submission (see the [NHMRC Funding Rules](#) and [NHMRC Advice and Instructions to Applicants 2017](#)).

Completed applications must be submitted to the NHMRC in RGMS by **5.00 pm** AEDT on the specified closing date. Late applications will not be accepted.

8 Assessment of Applications

Applications will be assessed by peer review against: 1) the scientific quality and likelihood of the proposed research project successfully answering the research question(s) posed by the TCR (50%) and, 2) whether the team has all the necessary skills and expertise to achieve the expected outcomes of the TCR (50%). In doing so, assessors will also give consideration to the NHMRC Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria ([see section 6.3 of the NHMRC Funding Rules 2017](#)).

Assessment of applications will include the following considerations:

- Relevance of the scientific approach to the scope, aims and objective of the call.
- Strengths and weaknesses of the research design.
- Appropriateness and robustness of the technical and methodological aspects.
- Suitability and calibre of the team to ensure delivery of the TCR, relative to opportunity ([see section 6.2 of the 2017 NHMRC Funding Rules](#)), and recognising applicant's industry relevant expertise ([see section 6.1 of the 2017 NHMRC Funding Rules](#)) and relevant career disruptions ([see section 6.2.1 of the 2017 NHMRC Funding Rules](#)).
- Likelihood of successfully completing the proposed research.

Note: It is recognised that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander applicants often make additional valuable contributions to policy development, clinical/public health leadership and/or service delivery, community activities and linkages, and are often representatives on key committees. If applicable, these contributions will be considered when assessing research output and record of achievement.

Further information on the scoring of applications against the category descriptors is available at [Attachment A](#).

9 Additional Reporting Requirements

Administrative obligations and processes specific to the SEWB and mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples TCR grant awardees are outlined below. Unless otherwise stated, these are in addition to the general requirements set out in the [NHMRC Funding Agreement, section 12 of the NHMRC Funding Rules 2017](#) and on the [NHMRC website](#).

Applicants who are successful in receiving funding under this TCR must be willing to provide additional reporting on their completed research at the close of a grant or at any time subsequently at the reasonable request of NHMRC. This may, for example, be in the form of a written report for inclusion on the NHMRC website at any time during or after the conclusion of a grant.

Attachment A: 2017 NHMRC Targeted Call for Research Category Descriptors and Assessment Criteria for Health Research Involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Category	Scientific Quality and Relevance to Successfully Delivering the Expected Outcomes of the TCR (50%)	Record of Achievement of the Team in Areas and Disciplines Relevant to the TCR – relative to opportunity (50%)
7 Outstanding	<p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is highly relevant to the call • is without question, highly feasible and will successfully achieve the expected outcomes of the call • has objectives that are well-defined, highly coherent and strongly developed • has a near flawless design • will provide very high quality evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the call • is highly competitive with the best comparable research proposals internationally • is highly likely to be translated into changes in the practice of clinical medicine, public health or in health policy • will almost certainly result in highly influential publications. 	<p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a track record that specifically targets the proposed research both in terms of depth and breadth • has all the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes.
7 Indigenous Criteria	<p>Sustainability and transferability</p> <p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is outstanding in demonstrating how the research and potential outcomes are a priority for the community • will definitely lead to major and effective health gains for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples • will have a very high impact on health services delivery or other community priorities. <p>Benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcomes from the proposal will have a strongly significant health benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. <p>Building capability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant team has an outstanding track record in working with communities and building capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. • The research proposal outstandingly demonstrates how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and researchers will develop outstanding capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project. 	<p>Community Engagement</p> <p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates outstanding levels of community engagement, ensuring that the proposal is highly feasible and will build outstanding capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

6 Excellent	<p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is very relevant to the call • is highly feasible and is highly likely to achieve the expected outcomes of the call • has objectives that are clear, logical and well developed • is excellent in design • will provide high quality evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the call • is competitive with strong comparable research proposals internationally • is very likely to be translated into changes in the practice of clinical medicine, public health or in health policy • is very likely to result in highly influential publications. 	<p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a track record that is highly relevant to the proposed research in terms of depth and breadth • has all the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes.
6 Indigenous Criteria	<p>Sustainability and transferability</p> <p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is excellent in demonstrating how the research and potential outcomes are a priority for the community • will lead to considerable and effective health gains for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples • will have a high impact on health services delivery or other community priorities. <p>Benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcomes from the proposal will have a significant health benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. <p>Building Capability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant team has an excellent track record in working with communities and building capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. • The research proposal demonstrates excellently how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and researchers will develop excellent capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project. 	<p>Community Engagement</p> <p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates excellent levels of community engagement, ensuring that the proposal is highly feasible and will build excellent capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
5 Very Good	<p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is relevant to the call • is feasible and is likely to achieve the expected outcomes of the call • has objectives that are clear and logical • raises a few minor concerns with respect to the study design • will provide some high quality evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR • may not be highly competitive with comparable research proposals internationally • may be translated into changes in the practice of clinical medicine, public health or in health policy • may result in influential publications. 	<p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a track record that is very relevant to the proposed research in terms of depth and breadth • has most of the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes.

5 Indigenous Criteria	<p>Sustainability and transferability</p> <p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly demonstrates how the research and potential outcomes are a priority for the community • will lead to effective health gains for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples • will have an impact on health services delivery or other community priorities. <p>Benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcomes from the proposal will have some health benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. <p>Building Capability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant team has a very good track record in working with communities and building capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. • The research proposal demonstrates well how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and researchers will develop very good capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project. 	<p>Community Engagement</p> <p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates very good levels of community engagement, ensuring that the proposal is likely to be feasible and will build very good capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
4 Good	<p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is somewhat relevant to the call • raises some concerns regarding feasibility and likelihood to achieve the expected outcomes of the call • has objectives that are clear • raises some concerns regarding the study design • will provide some evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR • is not likely to be competitive with similar research proposals internationally • may be translated into changes in the practice of clinical medicine, public health or in health policy • may result in modestly influential publications. 	<p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a track record that is somewhat relevant with the proposed research in terms of depth and breadth • has some of the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes.
4 Indigenous Criteria	<p>Sustainability and transferability</p> <p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates how the research and potential outcomes are a priority for the community • may lead to effective health gains for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples • may have an impact on health services delivery or other community priorities. <p>Benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcomes from the proposal may have some health benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. <p>Building capability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant team has a good track record in working with communities and building capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. • The research proposal demonstrates how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and researchers will develop good capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project. 	<p>Community Engagement</p> <p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates good levels of community engagement which may build good capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—this raises some concerns about feasibility

	Raises some concerns about feasibility.	
3 Marginal	<p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is not particularly relevant to the call • raises several concerns regarding feasibility and likelihood to achieve the expected outcomes of the call • is somewhat unclear in its objectives • raises several concerns regarding the study design • may provide limited evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR • is not competitive nationally or internationally • unlikely to be translated into changes in the practice of clinical medicine, public health or in health policy • may result in publications of marginal influence. 	<p>Community Engagement</p> <p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has limited track record in the field of the proposed research • has minimal skills and expertise required to successfully achieve the expected outcomes.
3 Indigenous Criteria	<p>Sustainability and transferability</p> <p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may lead to limited or short-term health gains for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples • may have a moderate impact on health services delivery or other community priorities. <p>Benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcomes from the proposal are likely to have a minimal health benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. <p>Building capability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant team has a marginal track record in working with communities and building capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. • The research proposal minimally demonstrates how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and researchers may develop minimal capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project. This raises several concerns that the proposal is feasible and achievable. 	<p>Community Engagement</p> <p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates limited community engagement and may build minimal capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples— this raises several concerns that the proposal is feasible and achievable
2 Unsatisfactory	<p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raises several major concerns regarding feasibility and likelihood to achieve the expected outcomes of the call • is unclear in its' objectives • raises several major concerns regarding the study design • is not adequately relevant to the call • is not competitive nationally or internationally • unlikely to provide evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR • very unlikely to be translated into changes in the practice of clinical medicine, public health or in health policy 	<p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a track record which does not relate well to the proposed research • is deficient in many of the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unlikely to result in influential publications. 	
2 Indigenous Criteria	<p>Sustainability and transferability</p> <p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is unlikely to lead to any health gains for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples • is unlikely to have any impact on health services delivery or other community priorities. <p>Benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcomes from the proposal are likely to have little or no health benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. <p>Building capability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant team has an unsatisfactory track record in working with communities and building capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. • The research proposal is unlikely to build capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and researchers—therefore the proposal is unlikely to be feasible and achievable. 	<p>Community Engagement</p> <p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has little or no community engagement and is unlikely to build capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—therefore the proposal is unlikely to be feasible and achievable.
1 Poor	<p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contains a research plan that does not seem to be feasible and is unlikely to be successfully completed • is very unclear in its objectives • contains a study design that is not adequate • is not relevant to the call • is not competitive nationally or internationally • very unlikely to provide evidence that addresses the expected outcomes of the TCR • no potential to be translated into changes in the practice of clinical medicine, public health or in health policy • very unlikely to result in influential publications. 	<p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not have a relevant track record in the field of the proposed research • is deficient in most of the required skills and expertise to successfully achieve the expected outcomes.
1 Indigenous Criteria	<p>Sustainability and transferability</p> <p>The research proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will not lead to any health gains for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples • will not have any impact on health services delivery or other community priorities. <p>Benefit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcomes from the proposal will have no health benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. <p>Building Capability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant team has a poor track record in working with communities and building capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. • The research proposal will not build any capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 	<p>Community Engagement</p> <p>The applicant team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has no community engagement and will not build any capability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—will not be feasible.

	peoples, communities and researchers —will not be feasible.	
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