

# Request for Proposals

March 2019



## 2019 HRC and CatWalk Trust partnership in spinal cord injury research

The Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC) and CatWalk Trust (CW) ('the funding partners') have formed a new partnership to fund research in spinal cord injury. This initiative is to be jointly funded by the HRC and CW and administered by the HRC. This initiative is managed through the HRC's Partnership Programme, through which the HRC forms strategic partnerships with funders and stakeholders.

Through this Request for Proposals (RFP), the HRC and CW are seeking high quality biomedical and clinical research in spinal cord injury treatment and cure to improve the quality of life and productivity of individuals with spinal cord injuries, and thus reduce the impact of spinal cord injuries on healthcare services.

Applications are invited for projects on one or more of the following areas, or other areas applicants consider to be of value to CW, the HRC, and the New Zealand health sector which align with the Research Objectives and Scope for this RFP.

- Prevention of secondary damage (protection of intact cells and preventing the spread of damage to otherwise healthy cells).
- Plasticity – including identifying, analysing and modulating natural growth factors.
- Remove scar tissue to promote axon regeneration.
- Regeneration - identify ways to stimulate nerves to regenerate, regrow and make appropriate connections.
- Neural reconstruction - replace damaged tissue through cell transplantation, growth factors and/or use of biomaterials to assist the repair of injured spinal cord tissue.
- Remyelination - restore the protective sheath and improve nerve cell function.
- Imaging - monitor changes in spinal cord tissue *in vivo*.
- Rehabilitation approaches which promote regeneration and plasticity of neural circuits.

The total budget for this research initiative is \$476,190 and the funding available per proposal is up to a maximum of **\$238,095** over **3 years** (fully-costed, exclusive of GST), although the full \$476,190 may be provided to one exceptional proposal.

Proposed research should realistically be able to be completed within a 3 year timeframe. Funding is available for immediate start of the project following notification of outcomes and it is expected that projects will commence within 6 months following notification.

## Application procedure

All forms and guidelines are available via the HRC website ([www.hrc.govt.nz](http://www.hrc.govt.nz)). The process below is outlined in more detail in the **2019 HRC and CatWalk Trust partnership application guidelines**. These guidelines provide full details on the application process for this RFP.

### STEP 1: REGISTRATION

Applicants are required to submit a Registration via HRC Gateway (the HRC's online application system) by **1:00pm, 8 May 2019**. This web-based form signals the intent of the applicant to submit a full application.

Once submitted, the Registration is forwarded (via HRC Gateway) to the applicant's host Research Office. The Research Office will need to approve the Registration and forward it to the HRC. For organisations without research offices, the application will be forwarded directly (via HRC Gateway) to the HRC.

Please note that first named investigators and all other named investigators must have an HRC Gateway account with an up to date profile, to be able to be included in an application.

### STEP 2: FULL APPLICATION

Applicants are then required to complete a full application using the **2019 HRC and CatWalk Trust partnership application form**, **2019 HRC and CatWalk Trust partnership budget form** and the **New Zealand standard CV template**, and submit via HRC Gateway by **1:00pm, 22 May 2019**.

Once submitted, the full application is forwarded (via HRC Gateway) to the applicant's host Research Office. The Research Office will need to approve the full application and forward it to the HRC. For organisations without research offices, the application will be forwarded directly (via HRC Gateway) to the HRC.

A complete PDF of the full application is created by the HRC Gateway after the deadline for submission, at which time it can be printed in hard copy and sent to the HRC to arrive by **5:00pm, 24 May 2019**. Refer to the **2019 HRC and CatWalk Trust partnership application guidelines** for details of this process.

Applicants must meet the three deadlines indicated above for their proposal to be eligible.

## ASSESSMENT

### Step 1: Peer review

The scientific integrity of full applications will be assessed through an external peer review process which is managed by the HRC. This involves comprehensive peer review of all applications undertaken by independent national and international experts.

### Step 2: Applicant rebuttal

Applicants are given an opportunity to view the peer review reports for their application and provide a rebuttal to the comments made. This is not an opportunity to rewrite major sections of a proposal, but rather the opportunity to respond to specific reviewer comments, to answer questions raised by the reviewer, or to clarify an issue so that your proposal may be viewed as equitably as possible by the Steering/Assessing Committee.

### Step 3: Assessment

An independent Steering/Assessing Committee will then assess full applications (submitted application, peer review reports and applicant rebuttal) using criteria outlined in the **2019 HRC and CatWalk Trust partnership application guidelines**. Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with these criteria.

The Steering/Assessing Committee will make recommendations for funding, to be considered and approved by the HRC and CW. Applicants will be informed of final funding decisions in October 2019.

### Key Dates Summary

| Action                                    | Date                     |
|---|--------------------------|
| Registration due (via HRC Gateway)        | <b>1pm, 8 May 2019</b>   |
| Full application due (via HRC Gateway)    | <b>1pm, 22 May 2019</b>  |
| Full application hard-copies due          | <b>5pm, 24 May 2019</b>  |
| External peer review (managed by the HRC) | <b>June 2019</b>         |
| Applicant rebuttal opens                  | <b>8am, 17 July 2019</b> |
| Applicant rebuttal due                    | <b>1pm, 24 July 2019</b> |
| Applicants notified of outcome            | <b>October 2019</b>      |

### Background

The incidence of spinal cord injury (SCI) in New Zealand is estimated to be 30.0-49.1 per million, and approximately 130-180 people are diagnosed with SCI in New Zealand every year – with approximately half of these new diagnoses in males 15-29 years of age. The incidence of SCI is approximately 1.8-fold and 2.4-fold higher in Māori and Pacific Island peoples, respectively, compared with European populations.

Although the life expectancy of many with SCI has improved in recent years, SCI still has a negative impact on quality of life, not only on those diagnosed with SCI, but also on their families and whānau who are often involved in their lifelong management. Those with SCI are also often supported by public healthcare services such as ACC and Disability Support Services.

CatWalk Trust (CW) and HRC have identified a strategic need to support further innovative research into SCI treatment and cure to enable New Zealand to develop solutions to this significant health issue.

CW was founded in 2005 to support research in SCI treatment and cure, through financial support as well as engagement activities. CW has to date invested \$2.2M in SCI research over the past 13 years. CW is seeking to fund further research that will deliver research evidence in SCI treatment and cure. This will improve the quality of life and productivity of individuals with SCI and thus reduce the impact of SCI on healthcare services.

# Research Project Requirements

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The key goals and objectives of this partnership and RFP are to:

- Fund biomedical and clinical research into a cure for SCI, and to assist the development of tools, techniques and treatments to alleviate the effects of SCI.
- Improve the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders and the efficiency of the health system, by improving the quality of life and productivity of individuals affected by SCI and thus substantially lowering associated healthcare costs and impact on healthcare services.
- Promote and engender a culture of scientific excellence, relevance, innovation and technological advancement in this area of research.
- Encourage meaningful engagement and partnership with key stakeholders (during the application and assessment processes and the research project, and in dissemination and implementation activities).
- Facilitate the development of New Zealand's health research workforce, by identifying and developing the best people to conduct high quality research that encompasses the scope of this RFP.

## SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

Research undertaken in response to this RFP should focus on one or more of the following areas, or other areas applicants consider to be of value to CW, the HRC, and the New Zealand health sector and that align with the Research Objectives and Scope for this RFP.

- Prevention of secondary damage (protection of intact cells and preventing the spread of damage to otherwise healthy cells).
- Plasticity – including identifying, analysing and modulating natural growth factors.
- Remove scar tissue to promote axon regeneration.
- Regeneration - identify ways to stimulate nerves to regenerate, regrow and make appropriate connections.
- Neural reconstruction - replace damaged tissue through cell transplantation, growth factors and/or use of biomaterials to assist the repair of injured spinal cord tissue.
- Remyelination - restore the protective sheath and improve nerve cell function.
- Imaging - monitor changes in spinal cord tissue *in vivo*.
- Rehabilitation approaches which promote regeneration and plasticity of neural circuits.

In responding to this RFP, researchers should not seek to undertake research on the pathophysiological mechanisms of SCI but should aim to develop this knowledge to facilitate research in one or several of the above areas in the treatment and cure of SCI.

## RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The research proposal needs to provide information on:

- How the research project appropriately addresses the scope and objectives of this RFP, and represents innovative and sound science.
- The collaborative nature of the research team, with expertise and skills that clearly match the proposed study.
- An appropriate budget reflecting the scope of the proposed research project.

- Where relevant, applicants should provide details of health equity issues and the specific health needs of Māori and Pacific peoples within the context of the research topic and ensure appropriate engagement has been undertaken.
- Where relevant, applicants should ensure appropriate engagement with other researchers in areas related to the proposed research has been undertaken, and applicants should provide details on how this engagement informed the research design.

## BUDGET

The total budget for this research initiative is \$476,190 and the funding per proposal is up to a maximum of **\$238,095** over **3 years** (fully-costed, exclusive of GST), although the full \$476,190 may be provided to one exceptional proposal. Funding is available for immediate start of the project following notification of outcomes and it is expected that projects will commence within 6 months following notification. Please carefully consider the project start date included in the application, as applicants will be held to the date that was proposed. The proposed research should realistically be achievable within the specified timeframe. Applicants should take into account the timeframe for obtaining ethical approval (if appropriate) and should ensure that this does not delay the start of the research project.

This funding comprises 50 per cent contribution from government funds and 50 per cent contribution from non-government organisations. **Applicants should note that overhead costs can only be claimed for the share of the total funding pool that is derived from government funds (i.e. no overhead costs can be claimed for the share of the funds provided by non-government organisations).** The budget form for this initiative has been configured to automatically provide the correct total research costs once the appropriate overhead rate for the host institution has been entered in the spreadsheet.

Applicants should note that if competing proposals are equal in terms of their scientific value, the funding partners will consider best value for money offered by each proposal.

## ENGAGEMENT OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Research will include strategies for identifying and engaging other academic personnel working in SCI or other related areas to support knowledge translation and exchange. Research teams should also provide clear details of how their proposed research outcomes will address the strategic aims of the funding partners and how research progress and findings will be communicated in a meaningful way to these organisations (and their respective stakeholders).

## RESEARCH TEAM

Applicants responding to this RFP will have experience in undertaking health research, a strong academic record and a diverse range of skills that enables them to effectively work with research stakeholders.

It is expected that the composition of research teams developing applications in response to this RFP will reflect the focus of the initiative and that teams will work within an appropriate governance structure.

The funding partners are strongly supportive of collaborative approaches to this research initiative. This should include cross-sectoral collaboration in the composition of the research team, to include expertise from a range of backgrounds, disciplines and research institutions.

The research team may comprise individuals from a single institution or multiple institutions/agencies. Any such partnerships should be clearly articulated in the final application.

The funding partners also recognise the importance of developing New Zealand's capacity to undertake research in this area. If applicable, applicants should demonstrate how their project will contribute to workforce development.

## DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Dissemination of the research findings will be an important component of the research project. Applications should summarise their dissemination plan and incorporate the most appropriate methods for communication of research results to a broad range of stakeholders (including the funding partners).

The research providers will be expected to ensure that all information is tailored to the needs of the intended audience, so that research findings can be of maximum utility. It is also expected that the quality of the research will be reflected through publication in international, peer-reviewed journals.

## PROJECT DELIVERABLES

Research contracts for this partnership initiative will be tailored specifically to meet the needs of the funding partners and allow for review of the research at key milestones or annually.

Actual deliverables will be confirmed with a selected provider; however, deliverables must include the following elements:

- meaningful and detailed six-monthly reports on the progress of the requirements of the research contract and resulting outputs. The research provider will complete these reports via the HRC's online reporting portal
- **a final deliverable report with a clear, meaningful and detailed technical summary of the methodology, results, key findings and recommendations of the completed research project**
- **a 12-month post-contract report providing information on how the research has progressed or is being further developed**

All reports will be evaluated by both funders and both funders may request amendment of the reports prior to their acceptance, so that these reports are of a reasonable standard and contain all information required by both funders.

The research provider may also be required to provide verbal presentations to the funding partners on research progress and/or findings.

## General Notes

### DECISION ADVICE

No legal obligations will arise between the funding partners and applicants for this RFP until such time as the HRC enters into a contract with the successful applicant.

### PRIVACY PROVISIONS

In the event that an application is successful, the HRC reserves the right to release applicants' names, details of the host institution/company, contact details (work phone, fax or email), contract title and funding awarded for public interest purposes and to meet the statutory requirements of the Health Research Council of New Zealand Act 1990.

## HRC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

This RFP is a component of the HRC's Partnership Programme, through which the HRC forms strategic partnerships with funders and stakeholders to target resources towards developing the evidence base in key areas of need and strengthen the links between policy and practice. This collaborative approach to research ensures that stakeholders obtain the answers to pressing questions, but split the cost with multiple interested parties. The HRC's processes ensure that the track record of the research team, the scientific merit and the design and methods of the proposal will deliver the highest quality of evidence. Only limited funds are available to launch these co-operative research initiatives and the opportunities are strictly prioritised.

## MAILING ADDRESS

Printed hard copies of applications should be sent to the HRC's office as shown below:

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|--|---|
| <i>Mailing Address:</i><br>Health Research Council of New Zealand<br>PO Box 5541, Wellesley Street<br>AUCKLAND<br><i>Attn: Isabella Cheung</i> | <i>Physical/Courier Address:</i><br>Health Research Council of New Zealand<br>Level 3, 110 Stanley Street<br>AUCKLAND<br><i>Attn: Isabella Cheung</i> |
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## ENQUIRIES

All enquiries related to this RFP should be directed to Isabella Cheung, Research Investment Manager, Research Partnerships (09 280 3860 or [icheung@hrc.govt.nz](mailto:icheung@hrc.govt.nz)).