COVID-19 New Zealand Rapid Response Research

The Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC) and Ministry of Health (Ministry) have formed this funding initiative to immediately address the current threat of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and strengthen New Zealand’s response and readiness for this disease outbreak threat.

Through this Request for Proposals (RFP), the HRC and Ministry (‘the funding partners’) are seeking to fund high-quality research that immediately responds to the COVID-19 outbreak threat. The focus is on research that can provide actionable evidence in the short-term (within 3 - 6 months) to inform the Ministry and/or other agencies involved in the all-of-government COVID-19 response.

This RFP outlines the funding initiative’s objectives, scope and research areas of interest to Government. Proposals are invited from all fields of health and social science to respond to the RFP objectives. Note that proposals are not restricted to the identified research areas of interest. Research should be able to commence rapidly and proposals should detail how early and valuable findings will be disseminated for use by the Ministry and/or other agencies.

Applicants will need to outline how their proposal addresses the RFP and provide a clear justification for the proposed approach along with a description of the research team’s ability to deliver the specific components of the research. Applicants will also need to provide a fully costed budget.

A funding pool of $1 million (exclusive of GST) is available. The funding partners expect to fund multiple projects at a range of values within this funding pool. Proposals with a duration of up to 6 months are invited. The funding partners retain discretion to fund exemplary proposals with a duration of up to 12 months and/or up to $500,000, where warranted.

In keeping with a rapid response, applicants should note that the application process involves a rapid application and assessment process which requires submission of a condensed full application within three weeks of the release of this RFP. Applicants will be notified of funding results on 7 April 2020 with funding available for an immediate start. Applicants are encouraged to prepare for this immediate start.
1. Background

On 31 December 2019, a cluster of 27 pneumonia cases of unknown origin were reported to the Chinese National Health Commission and by 7 January 2020, Chinese authorities confirmed the identification of a novel coronavirus, now called COVID-19. As of 29 February 2020, COVID-19 has spread from the People’s Republic of China to 53 other countries. There have been 85,403 confirmed cases globally and 2,924 deaths, while the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) global risk assessment is ‘Very High’.

By 30 January 2020, following the recommendations of the Emergency Committee, the WHO Director-General declared that the outbreak constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). In response, the WHO, in collaboration with the Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness (GloPID-R), convened a global research and innovation forum on 11-12 February 2020 to construct a research roadmap for COVID-19 in line with the R&D Blueprint. The forum brought together major research funders and world experts to:

- assess the current level of knowledge about COVID-19;
- agree on critical research questions that need to be answered urgently; and
- work together to accelerate and fund priority research that can contribute to curtail this outbreak and prepare for future outbreaks.

The forum agreed upon eight immediate research actions of high priority, as well as targeted research priorities in thematic areas of research. The research priorities are broad, span many disciplines, and includes knowledge gaps around the optimal management, evolution, transmission and epidemiology of the virus, the development of treatments and diagnostics, and the importance of the social sciences in the outbreak response.

The Ministry and the HRC have been in discussions about how to best co-ordinate New Zealand’s research response to the current outbreak threat. Agreement has been reached that the investment offered in this RFP will be directed to research that will immediately strengthen New Zealand’s all-of-government response and readiness for the current COVID-19 disease outbreak threat, whilst also providing regional leadership in the Pacific and keeping connected to global efforts.
2. RFP Objectives

The key objectives of this RFP are to:

2. Ensure communities who experience health inequities are not further disadvantaged through New Zealand’s response to the current COVID-19 disease threat.

3. Scope

Applications submitted to this RFP must be within the following scope:

The focus is on research that can provide actionable evidence in 3 - 6 months that responds to the RFP objectives and directly informs the Ministry and/or other agencies involved in the all-of-government COVID-19 response.

The funding partners have identified the following research areas of interest although proposals are not restricted to these areas:

- Impacts on the health system, including for nurses, allied health professionals, and Māori and Pacific health service providers.
- Effectiveness of current and future border restrictions and any exemptions that may be applied.
- Impacts on Māori, Pacific peoples, communities experiencing health inequities and at-risk groups.
- Impacts on the Pacific region, including readiness, effectiveness of travel restrictions and impacts on island state health systems.
- Communication, including perceptions of communications to date, what channels and formats are being used and whether they are effective, preferred communication channels, and impact of health literacy.
- Comparisons with Australia in terms of public health measures and effectiveness.

Proposals are invited from all fields of health and social science. Because timeframes for this RFP are shorter than usual, applicants are encouraged to build on existing relationships and/or data, and work with the relevant next- and end-users (including the Ministry) to ensure translatability.

Research should be able to commence rapidly and detail how early and valuable findings will be disseminated for use.
4. Funding

A total funding pool of $1 million (exclusive of GST) is available for allocation. The funding partners expect to fund multiple projects across a range of values within this funding pool. Proposals with a duration of up to 6 months are invited.

The funding partners retain discretion to fund exemplary proposals that warrant a longer duration (up to a maximum of 12 months) and/or require a higher value grant (up to a maximum of $500,000, excluding GST). Note: early and valuable findings will still be required.

Applicants will be notified of funding results on 7 April 2020 with funding available for an immediate start. On contracting, a percentage of the total budget will be paid in advance to allow a rapid commencement of the proposed research.

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.

5. Proposal Requirements

Clear and coherently written applications are essential in allowing assessors to effectively read and assess applications submitted to this RFP.

Applicants will need to outline how their proposal addresses the objectives and scope of the RFP and provide a clear justification for the proposed approach along with a description of the research team’s ability to deliver the specific components of the research. Applicants will also need to provide a fully costed budget.

Proposals must demonstrate the following:

- The proposal is relevant to the objectives of this RFP, is scoped appropriately and represents high-quality science.
- The appropriateness, soundness and rigour of the research methodology and design, while allowing for solutions to be developed in a flexible manner; ensuring the approach leverages what is already known from the literature and related data sets and is complemented by primary data collection (as appropriate).
- How the research design and methodology will generate evidence to support New Zealand’s unique, diverse populations and social and cultural contexts, and to support development of solutions that are culturally responsive and relevant to New Zealand settings.
- The careful consideration of how the research will address health equity issues and respond to the needs of population groups at risk of adverse health or social outcomes. How the research will mitigate any potential of perpetuating current inequities through a mitigation plan (or similar).
- The specific health needs of Māori and Pacific peoples within the context of the research topic. Research should incorporate Te Tiriti O Waitangi and the principles underpinning it; in particular, the principle of active protection needs adequate consideration.
• The **appropriate mix of disciplines and expertise** in the composition of the research team, including Māori health and Pacific health expertise and leadership. The research team’s capacity and skills to work effectively with a range of stakeholders and key participants at different stages of the research. It is expected that applicants will make active use of existing stakeholder networks to engage a wide range of parties and work with the relevant next- and end-users to ensure translatability.

• Plans for research findings to be **disseminated nationally** via tailored, culturally appropriate approaches to a broad range of relevant audiences in order to maximise the utility of the research. Dissemination plans must consider mitigating the stigmatisation of those population groups affected. Dissemination should also include publication in international, peer-reviewed journals.

• The proposed research is **clearly achievable within the specified timeframe**. The research is required to provide actionable evidence in the short-term (3 - 6 months) to inform the Ministry and/or other agencies involved in the all-of-government COVID-19 response. Therefore time is of the essence. A detailed project management plan for all stages of the project should be included with clear and unambiguous milestones and associated timeframes for achieving the desired outcomes. An outline of the project management and organisational support available to the project should be included, with appropriate project management FTE included in the budget as applicable. The likelihood that the proposed research will be successfully completed within the stated timeframe will be specifically assessed. Applicants should take into account the timeframe for obtaining ethical approval (if appropriate), institutional approvals, and access to data from key organisations.

• The budget is appropriate for the proposed research.

### 6. Research Deliverables

Deliverables will be confirmed with the selected research providers, including how and when early and valuable findings will be disseminated for use; however, deliverables must include the following elements:

• A **final deliverable report** detailing results, key findings and evidence-based recommendations that can be used by the Ministry and/or other agencies involved in the all-of-government COVID-19 response to strengthen New Zealand’s readiness and response to the current COVID-19 disease threat.

Research providers will also be required to engage with the Ministry on a regular basis and present their research findings to the Ministry and other agencies at completion.

In addition to research deliverables, a **mid-way progress report** will also be required for the research. This written report details progress of the research and highlights any risks to its progress. Research providers will complete and submit progress reports via the HRC’s online reporting system.

An **HRC end of contract report** is also required upon completion of the research.
7. Application Procedure

All application forms and guidelines are available via [HRC Gateway](https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/), the HRC’s online application system. The [2020 COVID-19 NZ Rapid Response Research Application Guidelines](https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/) provide full details on the application process summarised below.

**Step 1: Registration**

Applicants are required to submit a Registration via [HRC Gateway](https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/) by **1:00pm, 16 March 2020**. This web-based form signals the intent of the applicant to submit an application. The project title, all named investigators, host organisation and lay summary will be required. These details should be similar to those in the application although minor adjustments are allowed.

HRC Gateway will forward the submitted Registration to the applicant’s host Research Office, who will need to approve the Registration and forward it to the HRC. For organisations without research offices, HRC Gateway will forward the Registration to the HRC.

All named investigators must have an HRC Gateway account *(with an updated profile)*, to be able to be included in an application. Creating an HRC Gateway account is easy and can be done by clicking on ‘New user – sign up for HRC Gateway’ on the HRC Gateway homepage ([https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/](https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/)).

**Step 2: Application**

Applicants are then required to complete an application. Applications should be submitted via HRC Gateway by **1:00pm, 23 March 2020**.


HRC Gateway will forward the submitted application to the applicant’s host Research Office or designated research manager who will need to approve the application and forward it to the HRC. For organisations without research offices or a research manager, HRC Gateway will forward the full application directly to the HRC.

HRC Gateway will create a PDF of the complete application after submission. Applicants should print two hard copies of this PDF and send to the HRC to arrive by **5:00pm, 25 March 2020**.

Applicants must meet the deadlines above for their proposal to be eligible.
8. Assessment Procedure

The assessment process will be undertaken by a specifically procured panel. Panel members will be selected based on their expertise in relation to the applications received, and their ability to undertake the tasks required. Conflicts of interest will be managed according to the HRC’s standard management of interests policy.

The assessment process will comprise two key steps:

Step 1

Each proposal will be assigned to three assessors based on the suitability of the assessor’s expertise relative to the proposal content. Each assessor will undertake a global assessment of each assigned application that considers the following three equally-weighted criteria:

- relevance to RFP objectives and scope (fit with RFP)
- proposed research (rationale, design and methods)
- appropriate team track record to undertake the proposed research (qualifications, experience, demonstrated skills)

The output of each global assessment is a single score for each application, using a 7-point word ladder, of which each score corresponds to a funding category:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Adequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Corresponding Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 - 7</td>
<td>Recommend Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 5</td>
<td>Maybe Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 2</td>
<td>Not Fund</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 2

The HRC will apply the following rules to the three individual assessment outcomes received for each proposal:

- Proposal determined ‘Recommend Fund’ where all three assessors assign a score corresponding to this category.
- Proposal determined ‘Maybe Fund’ where two or more of the three assessors assign a score corresponding to either one of ‘Maybe Fund’ or ‘Recommend Fund’.
- Proposal determined ‘Not Fund’ where two or more assessors assign a score corresponding to ‘Not Fund’.

The HRC will collate a list of the proposals by category for Ministry of Health and then Council consideration and funding decision.
Note: If the ‘Recommend Fund’ category is oversubscribed for the funding available, proposals may be selected for funding by taking into account the original scores provided by assessors. This rule may also apply to proposals in the ‘Maybe Fund’ category.

9. Key Dates

Applicants will be informed of final funding decisions on 7 April 2020.

Key actions and dates for this initiative:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration due (via HRC Gateway)</td>
<td>1pm, 16 March 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full application due (via HRC Gateway)</td>
<td>1pm, 23 March 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full application (hard copies) due</td>
<td>5pm, 25 March 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>23 March – 3 April 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicants notified of outcome</td>
<td>7 April 2020</td>
</tr>
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</table>

10. General Notes

Decision Advice

Unless specifically stated in this RFP, 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.

Intellectual Property Rights

It expected that any research provider awarded a research contract under this RFP will agree to the Intellectual Property Rights as stated in the Fifth Schedule of the MoH-HRC Research Contract (refer Appendix 1). Research providers should check the provisions of the Fifth Schedule and the research contract to understand their obligations and rights regarding intellectual property.

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 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. Applicants should note that Partnership Programme Requests for Proposals focus on key priority areas and are intended to support targeted, outcome-focused research.

Mailing Address

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mailing Address:</th>
<th>Physical/Courier Address:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Research Council of New Zealand</td>
<td>Health Research Council of New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO Box 5541, Victoria Street West</td>
<td>Level 3, 110 Stanley Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUCKLAND 1142</td>
<td>AUCKLAND 1010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attn: Scott Aitken</td>
<td>Attn: Scott Aitken</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enquiries

All enquiries related to this Request for Proposals should be directed to:

Scott Aitken, Research Investment Manager, Research Partnerships (09 282 4135 or sailken@hrc.govt.nz)

Fiona Kenning, Research Investment Manager, Research Partnerships (09 303 5208 or fkenning@hrc.govt.nz).
Appendix 1 – Fifth Schedule of MoH-HRC Research Contract

FIFTH SCHEDULE
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

1. The Research Provider acknowledges that HRC and the Ministry’s functions and priorities include:

   1.1 Providing and administering funding for the purpose of implementing national health and health research policy;

   1.2 Fostering the recruitment, education, training and retention of those engaged in health research in New Zealand; and

   1.3 Promoting and utilising the results of health research in ways that will be most effective in encouraging their contribution to New Zealand health policy, health systems, health care delivery and health science.

2. In relation to the Research Material, the Research Provider acknowledges that it is expected to:

   2.1 Ensure that the Research Material is assessed for any potential value beyond the peer review publication of the Research Material. Wherever possible, the Research Material shall be developed and/or disseminated so that the potential benefits of any New IP flow to health policy, health systems, health care delivery and health science. Where any Research Material contains anything that can be commercially and economically protected as New IP the Research Provider shall notify HRC and take reasonable steps required by HRC and the Ministry to seek formal protection of this New IP for the benefit of HRC and the Ministry;

   2.2 Generally, maximise the impact of any New IP on health and economic outcomes, for the benefit of New Zealand.

3. HRC and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Her Government in New Zealand (acting by and through the Ministry of Health) (Ministry) will own all New IP immediately on creation. To the extent required the Research Provider assigns and will assign all New IP and all moral rights in the New IP to HRC and the Ministry.

4. The Research Provider will:

   4.1 Ensure that the Research Provider’s employees, sub-Research Providers and agents engaged in the Research Activity (Researchers) agree with the Research Provider in writing that HRC and the Ministry own all New IP immediately upon creation and to the extent required, the Researcher assigns, or will assign, all New IP and all moral rights in the New IP to HRC and the Ministry;

   4.2 Maintain resources in place to undertake the processes and procedures for the discovery, invention, creation, assessment and development of New IP;
4.3 Take all reasonable steps required by HRC and the Ministry to secure protection of the New IP for the benefit of HRC and the Ministry (including, without limitation, assistance in the registration of patents or trademarks);

4.4 Ensure that theResearchers do not disclose the New IP (except to those within the Research Provider who must be informed on a need to know basis) or use the New IP in any manner which is inconsistent with the Research Provider’s obligations under this Contract;

4.5 Provide to HRC a copy of any Research Material in the format reasonably requested by HRC and the Ministry in a reasonable timeframe on request from HRC (provided that shall be no longer than 20 Business Days from the request);

4.6 Provide HRC and the Ministry with copies of any proposed publication of Research Material not later than 20 Business Days prior to publication.

4.7 Acknowledge the ownership and contribution of HRC and the Ministry in any publication or public statements relating to the New IP;

4.8 Report annually to HRC, and more often if requested by HRC and the Ministry (acting reasonably) on its progress on the impact generated by the development and dissemination of the realised and potential benefits of the New IP that flow to health policy, health systems, health care delivery and health science. It will also report progress, including amount invested in commercialising New IP, and, if required minutes of decisions taken at meetings of the Research Providers processes and procedures during the commercialisation process, from triage, proof of concept and pre-seed investment through to licensing and spin-out company formation;

4.9 The Research Provider will, following the submission of Research Provider progress reports, provide to HRC as soon as practicable such additional information on the nature and details of commercialisable New IP as HRC and the Ministry may reasonably request; and

4.10 Keep all matters relating to the New IP and its commercialisation in absolute confidence except where any part of that information is in the public domain, or is required by law to be disclosed, or it is necessary to disclose that information for the purpose of the Research Provider fulfilling its obligations under this Schedule:

5. The Research Provider must ensure that any third party who is involved in the commercialisation of the New IP, is bound by the same obligations as the Research Provider as set out in this Schedule and that such obligations are expressed to be for the benefit of and enforceable by HRC and the Ministry (and the Research Provider must provide evidence of that to HRC and/or the Ministry upon request).

6. HRC and the Ministry grant to the Research Provider a permanent, non-exclusive, irrevocable, royalty-free, worldwide licence (including a right to sub-
(licences) to use, reproduce, publish and adapt the Research Material and any New IP for any purposes.

7. All Intellectual Property Rights discovered, invented, created or developed prior to the Research Activity (Existing IP) remains the property of its owner and where the Research Provider’s Existing IP is incorporated into any New IP the Research Provider grants to HRC and the Ministry a permanent, non-exclusive, irrevocable, royalty-free, worldwide licence (including a right to sub-licence) to use the Existing IP for any purpose in connection with the New IP.

8. For the purposes of the Contract and Commercial Law Act 2017 Part 2, Subpart 1, this Schedule is intended to be for the benefit of and is enforceable by the Ministry.