Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

hrc nz Health Research Council of New Zealand
Te Kaunihera Rangahau Hauora o Aotearoa

Request for Proposals

February 2025

2025 Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare

The Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC) has established a funding initiative to invest in health research centered on using artificial intelligence (AI) as a potentially transformative technology to support the delivery of timely access to quality healthcare for New Zealanders.

Through this request for proposals (RFP), the HRC is seeking to fund investigator-led research that will directly address priorities identified in the Government Policy Statement on Health 2024 – 2027. Proposals must clearly identify the health or healthcare area where AI can be leveraged safely and ethically to improve health outcomes in the New Zealand health system.

The HRC encourages applicants to consider a collaborative approach when developing their proposals, including a range of approaches and disciplines in the research team to ensure effective knowledge transfer and uptake. Proposals are invited from all health research disciplines. The proposed research must demonstrate strong collaboration with health system policy and decision makers, and a clear link to improving the provision of healthcare within the New Zealand health system.

A total funding pool of $5 million (exclusive of GST) is available. We expect to fund a range of projects across three grant tiers: small projects up to $100,000 ex GST over a term of 6 to 12 months; medium projects up to $400,000 ex GST over a term of 12 to 18 months; and large projects up to $700,000 ex GST over a term of 18 to 24 months.

There is a limit of **one** application per ‘first named investigator’ or ‘co-first named investigator’.

We anticipate that contracted projects will begin as soon as practicable. Funding outcomes will be released in July 2025, and funding will be available for an immediate start in August 2025.

1. Background

The healthcare system in New Zealand is facing a number of challenges, including significant barriers to access, timely provision of safe, effective, and continuously improving health services, and financial sustainability.[1]

[1] Minister of Health. 2024. Government Policy Statement on Health 2024 – 2027. Wellington: Ministry of Health. Government Policy Statement on Health 2024–2027 | Ministry of Health NZ

For the purpose of this RFP, the HRC is using the OECD definition of an AI system, defining AI as:
"a machine-based system that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments. Different AI systems vary in their levels of autonomy and adaptiveness after deployment"[2].

Artificial intelligence (AI) technology has significant potential to increase efficiency within the healthcare system, improve quality of care, and reduce costs to the health sector.[3] For example, through automation of administrative tasks such as scheduling and note taking, or through AI evaluation of medical imaging leading to quicker, more accurate diagnosis and treatment.

To enable AI to function effectively, access to relevant data at the appropriate time is critical. Enhancing the quality and consistency of data used to train AI algorithms is also important to ensure effective implementation. Associated ethical issues are also vital to support safe and effective adoption of AI in healthcare settings. These include considerations regarding mitigation of bias in data sets and algorithms, data privacy and security, and data sovereignty.[4]

2. Objectives

The key objectives of this RFP are to:

1. Fund high-quality health research that supports timely access to quality healthcare for New Zealanders.
2. Support research into AI as a potentially transformative technology to directly address government priorities and targets for the healthcare system as identified in the Government Policy Statement on Health 2024 – 2027.
3. Support the ethical and safe development and implementation of AI in healthcare, including consideration of matters relating to data management, privacy, governance, and data sovereignty.
4. Contribute to improved health outcomes for New Zealanders, including for populations with the highest health needs as specified in the Government Policy Statement on Health 2024 – 2027 and the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022.
5. Foster connection and collaboration between health researchers and health system stakeholders to support the effective implementation of AI in healthcare.
6. Invest in research that will generate timely and actionable evidence with potential for economic benefit to the health system.

Given the urgency of evidence need, successful applicants can expect a greater level of contract monitoring and engagement with the HRC, with an emphasis on how key findings are communicated to relevant stakeholders in a timely manner. This may include progress reports and other additional activities or deliverables.

3. Scope

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

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[2] OECD.AI Policy Observatory. (2024, March 6). *What is AI? Can you make a clear distinction between AI and non-AI systems?* What is AI? Can you make a clear distinction between AI and non-AI systems? - OECD.AI
[3] Gerrard, J., Town, I., Benson, R., Brown, E., & Varughese, C. (2023). *Capturing the benefits of AI in healthcare for Aotearoa New Zealand*. Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor. AI in healthcare | Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor
[4] AI Forum. (2019). *Artificial Intelligence for Health in New Zealand*. AI-For-Health-in-New-Zealand.pdf

Proposals are invited from research teams that can respond to the RFP's objectives and deliver research focused on using AI in healthcare to support timely access to quality healthcare for New Zealanders.

The scope includes all health research disciplines that are relevant to the implementation of AI in healthcare. The proposed research must demonstrate a clear link to improving the provision of healthcare within the New Zealand health system.

Transdisciplinary research teams are strongly encouraged, and proposals must demonstrate collaboration with health system policy and decision makers to support the transfer and uptake of findings into practice.

Research not within scope includes research intended *solely* for the purpose of developing AI tools, and research intended only to generate AI knowledge without a clear link to implementation in healthcare. The HRC does not fund evaluations with a sole focus on audits, surveys, and needs assessments undertaken as part of routine operational practice or as part of an organisation's performance, accountability, or monitoring activities. Evaluation research that is independent, has a clear research focus (e.g. clear research question and research aims), and has the potential to make a tangible contribution to health outcomes by informing wider healthcare, service provision or health systems is in scope.

Applications will be reviewed to ensure that there is no overlap of outcomes with other government-funded research opportunities.

4. Funding

A total funding pool of $5 million (exclusive of GST) is available. We expect to fund a range of projects across three grant tiers:

- small projects up to $100,000 ex GST over a term of 6 to 12 months
- medium projects up to $400,000 ex GST over a term of 12 to 18 months and,
- large projects up to $700,000 ex GST over a term of 18 to 24 months.

Funding will be available for an immediate start for successful applicants (from August 2025).

5. Proposal requirements

Clear and coherently written applications are essential in allowing quality assessment of applications.

Applicants will need to outline how their proposal addresses the objectives and scope of the RFP, provide a clear justification for the proposed approach, and describe 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:

- How the research is **relevant to the objectives** of the RFP and represents high-quality health research into **AI as a transformative technology** in healthcare settings to support **timely access to quality healthcare for New Zealanders.** Proposals must demonstrate a **clear line of sight to change**.

- Consideration of **ethical, safety, and data governance and sovereignty principles** at the outset, with a plan to identify ethical issues associated with the research. **Safety and security risks** are considered and mitigated to prevent harm, including **identifying and addressing the existing limitations and biases within the datasets**. Sound data governance, management and monitoring arrangements are required, including the consent of the person or collective whose data is being used.

- The intended **impact of the research**, specifically how the generation of timely and actionable evidence may **contribute to improved health outcomes**, and other potential uses and benefits for New Zealand (including economic benefits). Plans to **maximise the use and benefit** of the research should be outlined, beyond the generation of knowledge.

- The appropriate mix of disciplines in the composition of the research team, including communities and relevant stakeholders. Consider including a **broad range of research expertise related to AI and healthcare.** The proposal should demonstrate how the collective capability, skill, and experience of the research team will support the proposed research, and highlight any opportunities for developing the capacity and capability of the health research workforce.

- **Collaborations with healthcare system stakeholders** to affect knowledge transfer and uptake to maximise the likelihood that the research will result in change.

- The budget is appropriate for the proposed research and fully justified.

6. Deliverables

Successful applicants must produce a final report detailing results, key findings and evidence-based recommendations that can be used by the HRC and/or other key stakeholders to inform policy development and healthcare delivery for New Zealand.

In addition to research deliverables, **regular progress reports** will also be required. These written reports detail the research progress and highlight any risks. Research providers will complete and submit progress reports via the HRC's online reporting system, HRC Gateway (https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz).

An **HRC end of contract report** is also required upon completing the research.

7. Application procedure

All application forms and guidelines are available via HRC Gateway, the HRC's online application system. A summary of the application process is included below. For full details, refer to the **2025 Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare Application Guidelines**.

Applicants should use the **2025 Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare Application Form**, **2025 Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare Budget Form**, and **NZ Standard CV template**. Applications should be submitted via HRC Gateway by **1pm, 23 April 2025**.

All named investigators must have an HRC Gateway account (with an updated profile) to be included in an application. To create an HRC Gateway account, click 'New user – sign up for HRC Gateway' on the HRC Gateway homepage (https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/).

HRC Gateway will create a PDF version of the complete application after submission for applicants to download and review. 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. Please allow sufficient time for this process before the application deadline. For organisations without research offices or a research manager, HRC Gateway will forward the application directly to the HRC.

Applicants must meet the deadline above for their proposal to be eligible.

8. Assessment procedure

The assessment process for the 2025 AI in Healthcare RFP is outlined below.

Step 1: Compliance check

The HRC will not process any application that does not comply with stated page limits, font sizes/styles or other requirements detailed in the 2025 Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare Application Guidelines.

Step 2: Assessing Committee

The HRC Assessing Committee will assess applications. The assessment criteria are outlined in the **2025 Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare Application Guidelines** available on HRC Gateway. Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with these criteria.

Depending on the number of applications received, a triage process may be used to determine which applications will be discussed at the assessing committee meeting. This process would involve committee members scoring applications before the meeting using the assessment criteria to yield a ranked list. The lowest-ranked applications based on the pre-scores would then be triaged and not discussed at the meeting.

Note: Applications received in the Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare round will not receive external peer review. Therefore, there is no opportunity to provide a rebuttal. The assessing committee members will consider each application on its own merit and score it on the relevant criteria for each category.

The Assessing Committee will make recommendations for funding to be considered and approved by the HRC Council. Applicants will be informed of final funding decisions in July 2025.

Assessment criteria

Applications will be assessed against several score criteria, using the following 7-point score descriptor word ladder:

Score	Descriptor
7	Exceptional
6	Excellent
5	Very Good
4	Good
3	Adequate
2	Unsatisfactory
1	Poor

The **AI in Healthcare RFP applications** will be assessed using the criteria listed below. Information about how each criterion will be applied can be found in the **2025 Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare Application Guidelines**.

Criteria	Score	% Score
Fit with RFP	**7**	**30**
Design and methods	**7**	**15**
Research impact	**7**	**25**
Māori health advancement	**7**	**15**
Research team	**7**	**15**
Total score	**35**	**100**

Key dates:

Event	Description	Due date
AI in Healthcare RFP opens	AI in Healthcare RFP opens in HRC Gateway	1pm, 26 February 2025
AI in Healthcare RFP closes	Complete online sections and upload 2025 AI in Healthcare Application Form	1pm, 23 April 2025
AI in Healthcare RFP results	Outcome released	3 July 2025

9. General notes

Intellectual Property Rights

It is 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 HRC Research Contract (refer Appendix 1 in the Fifth Schedule). 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

The information you provide will be used to assess your application. In a non-identifiable form, some information will be used for HRC's statistical and reporting purposes. The HRC stores all applications in a secure place, which may include the New Zealand Research Information System (NZRIS) curated by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) with details provided by funders of the science sector. Personal information in your application will be available to members of the HRC assessing committees.

The HRC publishes details of research contracts including named investigators, the host organisation, research title, lay summaries and funding awarded for public interest purposes and to meet the statutory requirements of the Health Research Council Act 1990.

Official Information Act

Official Information Act requests for information about an application or research contract, beyond information that has already been publicly disclosed, will be discussed with the host organisation and first named investigator before responding to the request. Where appropriate, the request may be transferred to the host organisation.

Enquiries

All enquiries related to this RFP should be directed to your host organisation's Research Office.

Please contact the HRC at info@hrc.govt.nz if:

- your organisation does not have a Research Office
- your organisation's Research Office cannot assist you
- you have any technical difficulties (i.e. with HRC Gateway).