

National Health and Medical Research Council funding for mental health

Mental health research

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), through its Research Committee, is currently supporting \$27.28 million for mental health research and training, an increase from \$18.51 million in 2003. This funding has been awarded on the basis of scientific excellence in open, competitive funding application rounds with recommendations made by peer review expertise. The funding provided for 153 new and continuing grants in 2003, 145 new and continuing grants in 2004, 173 new and continuing grants in 2005.

In 2005, funding is directed towards six (new and continuing) major research program grants, funded under the NHMRC Program grant scheme established to support large teams working collaboratively to contribute new knowledge at a leading international level in important areas of health and medical research. Current funding for mental health research includes:

- Professor Perminder Sachdev
University of New South Wales
The prevention, early detection and effective management of neurocognitive disorders in the elderly
(\$4.64 million over five years);
- Professor Patrick McGorry
University of Melbourne
Emerging severe mental illness in young people: Clinical staging, neurobiology, prediction and intervention from vulnerability
(\$7.39 million over five years)
- Professor Richard Bryant
University of New South Wales
Posttraumatic Mental Health: Enhancing Resilience and Recovery
(\$4.84 million over five years)
- Professor Gordon Parker
University of New South Wales
Depressive and Bipolar disorders: Evaluating determinants of onset, recovery and treatment resistance
(\$7.7 million over five years) and
- Professor Anthony Jorm
Australian National University
Epidemiology of high prevalence mental disorders: Aetiology, course & public health intervention
(\$7.8 million over five years)
- Professor Colin Masters
University of Melbourne
Clinical Diseases of the Ageing Brain
(\$6.5 million over five years).

There are seventy four (three to five year duration) NHMRC research project grants currently funded in 2005 relating to various aspects of mental health:

- 19 Basic Sciences,
- 34 Clinical Research (medicine and science),
- 7 Health Services Research,
- 1 Preventive Health and
- 13 Public Health.

In addition, the NHMRC is funding 20 scholarships, 18 Training Awards, 10 Career Development Awards and 9 Research Fellowships in mental health in 2005.

Other specific NHMRC funding in Mental Health areas include:-

- *A Clinical Centre of Research Excellence in Preventive and Early Intervention Strategies in Emerging Mental Disorders in Young People* led by Professor Patrick McGorry, University of Melbourne. The Centre will have a major impact on the growth and sustainability of clinical research expertise in youth mental health and facilitate the translation of findings into clinical practice. Specifically it is to create an early career path for emerging young clinical researchers and innovative translation of clinical research into the real world of clinical practice. Commenced in 2005 with \$400,000 per annum over five years.
- *A Clinical Practice Improvement Network (C-PIN) for Early Psychosis*, awarded to Professor Stanley Catts, University of Queensland, to develop scientific evaluation tools for routine use in early psychosis (EP) services and to establish centralised data management infrastructure for de-identified information. This grant commenced in 2002 and completed in December 2004.
- *Mental Health Services Evaluation Research (MHSER)* to evaluate innovative mental health services in terms of their effectiveness, delivery of outcomes and sustainability. Commenced in 2003. A suite of four projects, involving evaluation of mental health services in the following domains:
 - Alcohol and other drug use disorders co-morbid with mental illness (Professor Vaughan Carr, University of Newcastle);
 - Group Triple P – Positive Parenting Program for Indigenous families in community and health settings in North Queensland (Professor Matthew Sanders, University of QLD);
 - Case conferences for consultant psychiatrists (Dr Jane Pirkis, University of Melbourne); and,
 - Adult mental health services using routine outcome measures (A/Professor Tom Trauer, Monash University).

Health services research

The Health Services Research Program has been specifically designed to support consortia, comprising researchers, clinicians and health service providers, with the capacity to engage policy makers. The Health Services Research Program will play an important role in the future in enhancing our understanding of the factors that are critical in facilitating the translation and uptake of research findings.

The objectives of the program are to:

- create new knowledge which is relevant to policy and practice in the health services field;
- increase the expertise and capacity of the research workforce to synthesise existing knowledge and identify areas where new knowledge needs to be created;
- improve or develop processes for the translation of research findings and evidence into policy and practice;
- facilitate better collaboration between researchers, policy makers and health service providers.

The program, for which \$50 million over five years has been allocated, commenced in 2004. The first round of Health Services Research Program focused on the *Economics and Financing of Health*.

Second and subsequent rounds of the Health Services Research Program will call for applications addressing the National Health Priority Areas (NHPAs) which include Mental Health, and/or the National Research Priorities (NRPs). In addition the NHMRC is establishing strategic research schemes to address the specific goals of NRPs.

National Health Research Priority Initiatives

Announced in December 2002 by the Prime Minister, there are four NRPs, one of which is specifically aimed at Promoting and Maintaining Good Health. This NRP in turn has four priority goals:

1. *A healthy start to life*
2. *Ageing well, ageing productively*
3. *Preventive healthcare, and*
4. *Strengthening Australia's social and economic fabric.*

It is anticipated that mental health issues will be the focus of at least some of the applications received under each goal.

Both the *Ageing well, ageing productively* and *Preventive healthcare* NRPs specifically reference mental health in the broader descriptors attached to these priorities. Mental health issues could also be addressed in *A healthy start to life* through the identified goal of understanding the genetic, social and environmental factors which predispose infants and children to ill health and reduce their well being and life potential. Similarly mental health may be addressed in *Strengthening Australia's social and economic fabric* through the identified goal of understanding and enabling people to make choices that lead to positive pathways to self reliance and supportive family structures.

To date the NHMRC has established a scheme to address “*Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Research - A Healthy Start to Life*” and will shortly call, in conjunction with the Australian Research Council (ARC), for Expressions of Interest in relation to “*Ageing Well, Ageing Productively*”.

NHMRC guidelines

The NHMRC has, in the past, published a range of evidence-based guidance in the field of mental health, including a detailed literature review to support the National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy. Details of currently available publications (and historical copies of now rescinded publications) can be found on the NHMRC website at: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/index.htm>.

Issues of ethics in mental health research have been addressed by the NHMRC's Principal Committee, the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC). AHEC is required to issue guidelines for the conduct of medical research involving humans. In 1999, the NHMRC issued the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (National Statement) to fulfil this function.

The primary purpose of the National Statement is the protection of the welfare and rights of research participants. An important secondary purpose is to facilitate research that is, or will be, of benefit to the researcher's community or humankind. The National Statement applies to all institutions or organisations that receive NHMRC research funding and is highly recommended for use by other individuals, institutions or organisations.

Chapter One of the National Statement contains broad ethical principles for the conduct of all research involving humans. The principles in this chapter would apply to mental health research and could be supplemented by more specific guidance on research involving people in dependent or unequal relationships (Chapter Seven), and on research involving people with an intellectual or mental impairment (Chapter Five). The National Statement also contains specific guidance on different types of research, such as clinical trials and genetic research. The NHMRC is currently reviewing the National Statement.

In addition to the National Statement, the NHMRC published a complementary document titled *The Human Research Ethics Handbook — Commentary on the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (The Handbook) (2002). The Handbook contains detailed explanation of the ethical issues involved in research involving humans. Ethical issues contained in The Handbook that may be relevant to mental health research include determining the capacity or competence of potential participants to consent to participation in research and the ethical issues involved in psychiatric research.

A detailed spreadsheet covering NHMRC funding 2000-05 is available if required.

National Health and Medical Research Council mental health-related expenditure

Year	Actual payments made in that year	Total of new and ongoing grants	New grants to commence in that year	Details of new grants commencing in that year
2001	\$9,454,990	86	(54)	45 project grants and 9 people support awards
2002	\$14,543,209	123	(46)	2 large programs (Jorm — Public Health and Masters — Clinical) 2 strategic grants, 30 project grants and 12 people support awards
2003	\$18,511,490	153	(50)	1 large program (Parker — Clinical), 1 Partnership grant, 4 MH-SER ^a grants 3 research into Ageing grants 28 project grants and 13 people support awards
2004	\$19,439,081	145	(44)	1 large program (Bryant — Clinical), 1 facility (brain bank) 30 project grants and 12 people support awards
2005	\$27,288,755 Forecast expenditure for 2005	173	(67)	2 large programs (Sachdev — Clinical and McGorry — Clinical), 1 Centre of Clinical Research Excellence, 41 project grants and 23 people support awards

^aMental Health Service Entity Register

Summary of NHMRC funding for Mental Health 2001-2005

Year	Actual payments made in the year	Total number of new and ongoing grants	New grants to commence in that year	Details of new grants commencing in that year
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