



Evaluation of the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) Research Missions program

Submission to the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

February 2026

About

The Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative (the Collaborative) is the national multicultural health peak body.

***Vision Statement:** In a truly multicultural Australia, our health and social care system is committed to health equity, and works proactively towards sustained improvement in the physical, mental and spiritual health and wellbeing of our multicultural communities.*

The Collaborative is an initiative of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA). We provide a national voice, leadership and advice on policy, research, data, and practice to improve access and equity, address systemic racism, and achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes for Australians from multicultural backgrounds.

The Collaborative is representative, and membership based. Members include consumers and carers; health services and wellbeing/social care services; practitioners; and researchers. The Collaborative also welcomes as affiliates other national health peak organisations.

Introduction

The Collaborative welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) Research Missions program. The MRFF's Research Missions bring together researchers, partners and stakeholders to tackle major health challenges across ten priority areas: Cardiovascular Health; Brain Cancer; Dementia, Ageing and Aged Care; Genomics; Indigenous Health; Mental Health; Health Inequities; Stem Cell Therapies; and Traumatic Brain Injury. Together, these Missions play a major role in shaping Australia's future health system.

Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity is a major national asset. More than half of Australians were born overseas or have a parent born overseas, and over 5.6 million people speak a language other than English at home. Yet research consistently shows that multicultural communities experience poorer access to health care, a higher burden of preventable disease, and underrepresentation in research design and participation.

Preliminary analysis indicates that research explicitly focused on culturally and linguistically diverse populations accounts for only one per cent of total MRFF and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) awarded funding. Stronger alignment between research funding and population need is essential to achieve meaningful policy reform and equitable health outcomes for all Australians.

As the national multicultural health peak body, the Collaborative is providing input to ensure that the MRFF Research Missions are assessed not only on scientific excellence, but on their capacity to deliver equitable impact. Multicultural communities are central to Australia's demographic profile and future health needs. If research investment does not meaningfully include these communities, the evidence base that informs policy and service design will remain incomplete. Our submission draws on our representative membership, sector partnerships, and system-level insights to highlight practical, achievable steps that can strengthen the MRFF's contribution to health equity and ensure that its benefits extend to all Australians. We have chosen to focus our submission on the themes of the consultation, addressing the evaluation questions directly rather than responding to the online survey items.



Response to Evaluation Questions

1. How do MRFF Research Missions sit in the national and international research funding landscape?

Research funding in Australia, including MRFF-funded Missions, does not reflect our cultural and linguistic diversity. As mentioned, research explicitly focused on culturally and linguistically diverse populations accounts for an insignificant percentage of MRFF and NHMRC funded projects. This structural underinvestment limits the evidence base required to design effective, culturally responsive health interventions and contributes to the persistence of avoidable health inequities.

Internationally, comparable research systems embed inclusion from the outset. For example, the UK National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Research Inclusion Strategy explicitly aims to fund “more inclusive research undertaken by more diverse research teams”.¹ The Strategy establishes formal requirements for inclusive research design across all NIHR funding opportunities and prioritises research that reduces health inequities. The MRFF lacks a comparable cross-cutting funding requirement to ensure Missions meaningfully include multicultural communities

2. What is the alignment and contribution of funded research across and between Missions?

Many Missions disproportionately impact multicultural communities, yet there is no requirement that Missions engage communities or examine cultural or linguistic determinants. The absence of standardised cultural and linguistic data collection limits the ability to translate findings for multicultural populations. At the same time, the MRFF Principles for Consumer Involvement in Research do not establish clear expectations for meaningful participation of communities.

Community-led co-design is a crucial component of meaningful engagement and remains underutilised across Missions. Only seven per cent of all MRFF-funded research from 2017–2023 used community-led co-design.² The Collaborative’s work has shown that trust and relevance are achieved only when communities are part of decision-making. Without this, the needs of multicultural communities remain unmet, and the benefits of MRFF Missions are significantly limited

3. What progress and impact has Mission-funded research had towards benchmarks?

Progress against key benchmarks, including improved policy, health outcomes and system efficiency, remains limited for multicultural communities. While some Missions, such as Mental Health and Dementia, Ageing and Aged Care have shown a stronger focus on multicultural health³, multicultural perspectives are largely underrepresented. As a result, translation of Research Mission findings often does not extend to groups facing the highest barriers to care and disproportionate burdens of preventable disease.

When research design does not account for multicultural communities’ needs, policy and practice can inadvertently widen health inequities by embedding models that were not designed with multicultural communities in mind. This gap also contributes to system inefficiencies, through delayed diagnosis, preventable hospitalisations, and repeated care.

It is important to note that the absence of standardised cultural and linguistic data collection makes it difficult to fully assess the impact of Mission-funded research for multicultural communities. Without consistent data, gaps remain invisible and progress cannot be reliably measured.

¹ NIHR. (2022). Research Inclusion Strategy 2022-2027. NIHR. <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/who-we-are/research-inclusion/strategy-2022-27>

² Yerrabi Yurwang. (2024). Consultation, Co-Design and Community Control in Aboriginal Research. https://yerrabi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CCCC-position-statement-June-2024-Feb_2026.pdf

³ See: Mhc Group. (2025). Review of the Medical Research Future Fund Dementia, Ageing and Aged Care Mission. <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-08/review-of-the-medical-research-future-fund-dementia-ageing-and-aged-care-mission.pdf>; UTS. (2022) Million Minds Mental Health Research Mission Review. <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/10/million-minds-mental-health-research-mission-review.pdf>



A stronger and more deliberate focus on multicultural health across the research lifecycle would significantly improve the progress and impact of Mission-funded research and ensure that outcomes are relevant for all Australians.

4. What are the opportunities to improve the impact of MRFF Research Missions?

1. Targeted Investment for Multicultural Health

The Collaborative welcomes the new Reducing Health Inequities Mission. Given more than half of Australians have a migration background, targeted funding for multicultural health research through this Mission would fill a major structural gap. Aligning funding mechanisms with population need is critical for reducing inequities and improving health outcomes.

2. Establishing a cross-cutting Equity Strategy for all Missions

An overarching equity framework, like the Indigenous Health Research Fund Roadmap⁴, should apply across all Missions. This would improve the quality and relevance of MRFF Research Missions for multicultural communities. In line with global best practice, this should require meaningful partnership and co-design with communities, and standardised collection of cultural and linguistic indicators. MRFF Missions cannot accurately capture disparities or demonstrate outcomes for multicultural populations if these variables are not collected.

3. Building a culturally diverse research workforce

Further efforts are needed to improve the cultural and linguistic diversity of MRFF Missions' research teams. This can be achieved through dedicated fellowships, capacity building, and pathways for bicultural and multilingual researchers. This will create a research system that reflects the population it serves and improve trust, participation, and translation.

Conclusion

For MRFF Research Missions to have real impact, multicultural perspectives must be explicitly embedded throughout all stages of research: from funding through to workforce, design, and implementation. We encourage the MRFF to treat multicultural inclusion not as an optional feature but as a core requirement of research excellence. This will ensure that the knowledge generated is relevant to all Australians and the research system is actively contributing to reducing, rather than entrenching, health inequities. The Collaborative stands ready to support the MRFF in strengthening multicultural inclusion across its Research Missions to ensure that research outcomes benefit all Australians.

⁴ Department of Health. (2023). Indigenous Health Research Fund Roadmap. <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-11/mrff-indigenous-health-research-fund-strategic-documents.pdf>



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