Women's & Children's
Hospital Foundation | Research

WCH FOUNDATION RESEARCH GRANTS 2026

Guidelines for applicants

These guidelines are designed to assist prospective applicants in deciding whether to apply for a grant in the Women's & Children's Hospital Foundation (WCH Foundation) Research Grant round. It sets out the purpose of the WCH Foundation Research Grant program, eligibility criteria, the application process, details required in applications and the assessment process. **Prospective applicants are advised to read these guidelines thoroughly before applying.**

1. About the WCH Foundation

The WCH Foundation (WCH Foundation) is the principle charity partner of the Women's and Children's Health Network (WCHN). The WCH Foundation aims to improve the health and wellbeing of women, children and families under the care of WCHN by supporting health and medical research that ensures quality healthcare.

The WCH Foundation are committed to making a meaningful difference at every stage of their experience, from enabling research that improves health and wellbeing outcomes, to enhancing their care, to supporting families so they can make precious memories.

Together we make a positive and lasting impact on the lives of South Australians and beyond.

WCHN is the leading provider of health services to women, children and families in South Australia. The WCHN includes the Women's and Children's Hospital, as well as state-wide paediatric services including the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and the Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS).

2. About the WCH Foundation Research Grants

The WCH Foundation Research Grants aims to support WCHN researchers to undertake innovative research projects.

The objectives of the Research Grant are to:

- Support capacity building for researchers based at WCHN to establish independent research careers, and enable clinicians across medical, nursing, midwifery, and allied health disciplines to undertake research.
- enable protected research time,
- provide support to develop, test, and progress ideas toward larger-scale funding opportunities, including clinical trials,
- create new knowledge and strengthen research capability through projects that involve collaboration between consumers, the healthcare system, and academia
- promote the translation of research findings into policy and practice that improve health outcomes and deliver value and health system efficiencies across WCHN

Each year, the WCH Foundation Research Program directs funding towards projects that can make the greatest possible impact on the health and wellbeing of women, children and families under the care of the WCHN and across South Australia.

3. Key information for the 2026 Grants Round

3.1 Grant funds and funding limits

The funding allocation for the 2026 WCH Foundation Research Grants round is $1 million. The funding may be distributed across **two projects (each of a maximum value of $500,000)**, depending upon the applications received and the recommendations of the WCH Foundation Research Grants Committee. Applicants should consider the competitive nature of the program and the approximate total budget of the program.

A maximum of $500,000 may be requested per project, over a maximum of three years. This funding limit applies to all project types, including non-clinical, pre-clinical, clinical and health services research projects.

3.2 Key dates

Key dates for the 2026 WCH Foundation Research Grant round are as follows:

Date	Time*	Event
Monday, 23 March	9:00 am	EOI opens on SmartyGrants
Friday, 24 April	5:00 pm	EOI close

Monday, 25 May	9:00 am	Full applications open (shortlisted applicants by invitation only)
Friday, 26 June	5:00 pm	Full applications close
Late July	N/A	Funding decision made
January, 2027	N/A	Funding commencement (negotiable within 6 months of notification of funding decision)

*All times are in ACDT/ACST

3.3 Application process

The application and assessment process for this grant round will be conducted in two stages: an Expression of Interest (EOI) stage followed by a full application stage. All applications at both stages must be submitted via SmartyGrants by the published closing dates.

EOI stage

The EOI form will be available via SmartyGrants from 9am Monday 23rd of March, 2026.

It will include the following sections:

- Administering Institution
- Participating institutions/organisations
- Project leadership team
- Project proposal
- Alignment with WCHN strategic and research plan
- Approximate budget
- Approximate in-kind and voluntary contributions
- Administering Institution endorsement.

Full Application stage

Full application will be by invitation only, and must reflect the shortlisted EOI. Full applications will be due approximately one month after the invitation (see Section 3.2 for key dates). Any changes to the Administering Institution or leadership team must be communicated to the WCH Foundation for consideration and approval at least two business days prior to the closing of full applications. Changes that will not be accepted are those that would deem the application ineligible as per Section 4, a change to the Project Lead, or a significant number of changes to the project team (as determined by the WCH Foundation).

The full application includes the following sections:

- Project Lead and Administering Institution details, including Administering Institution endorsement
- Participating institutions/organisations, including a letter of support where voluntary and/or in-kind contributions are being made
- Project leadership team details
- Project summary, project title and a lay synopsis
- Project details, including background, significance, a project plan, research translation, and a supporting document with timeline, tables and figures, and a reference list
- Budget details, including budget item justification and any voluntary and/or in-kind contributions

Applicants are expected to provide all necessary information to make evaluation possible via SmartyGrants but the WCH Foundation reserves the right to request additional information from the applicant(s) and/or the Administering Institution if required.

4. Eligibility Criteria

4.1 Eligible applicants

- Applications are open to those working in paediatric and/or maternal health and medical research at the Women's and Children's Health Network (WCHN).
- Project Lead must hold a Higher Degree by Research (HDR) from a recognised institution, or an equivalent combination of skills, training, and experience.
- Project Lead must be employed by or hold a formal position within WCHN.
- Applicants must be an Australian or New Zealand citizen or hold permanent residency in Australia at the time of application.
- Applicants who hold a current, ongoing WCH Foundation research grant as Project Lead at the time of funding commencement are not eligible to apply as lead applicant.
- Applicants may submit only one application as lead applicant per grant round.
- Project Lead will have full responsibility for the application, and, with the Co-Applicants(s), will be responsible for the delivery and financial management of the proposed research project if funded

Early and mid-career researcher-led projects are strongly encouraged, ensuring appropriate mentoring and support will be available throughout the life of the grant

4.2 Eligible Projects

Projects will be deemed eligible if, at the EOI and full application stages, they:

- Proposed budgets must comply with the funding guidelines outlined in Section 7.
- Projects must not use philanthropic funding to substitute a government responsibility.
- At least 80% of WCH Foundation funding must be spent within South Australia.

4.3 Administering Institutions

Applications must be submitted via one of the following Administering Institutions:

- Women's and Children's Health Network (WCHN)
- Adelaide University
- Flinders University
- South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute

Applicants must have prior approval from the Administering Institution at both the EOI and full application stages. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the relevant Administering Institution endorsement forms are uploaded to SmartyGrants before the closing date. The Administering Institution will ordinarily be where the largest proportion of funds are spent. The Administering Institution must also be able to commit and manage the time contribution of the Project Lead to the project.

Applications may involve multiple institutions. Each participating institution must nominate a CI and must be able to commit to providing the general facilities and supporting resources necessary for their contribution towards the project's conduct.

5. Assessment

The WCH Foundation Research Grant application and assessment process involves two stages – EOI and full application.

EOI stage

All EOI submissions received by the due date will be assessed for eligibility by the WCH Foundation against the eligibility criteria described in Section 4.

Eligible applications will then be assessed by the WCH Foundation Research Grants Committee against the following criteria:

- Outcomes and outputs of the project will (or have the potential to) benefit the health and wellbeing of women, children and/or families, either directly or indirectly
- Demonstrates innovation through challenging or shifting current concepts, approaches, methodologies technologies or interventions
- Project team involves diverse collaboration, with researchers at different career stages, from both health services and academic institutions
- Evidence of consumer and community engagement.

EOIs which are deemed eligible, and best meet the assessment criteria, will be shortlisted for invitation to submit a full application via SmartyGrants. The WCH Foundation reserves the right to invite some, all or none of the EOI applications.

Successful applicants are encouraged to contact the Research Centre at Health.WomenAndChildrenResearchCentre@sa.gov.au for support in developing the final application, including statistical analysis and consumer engagement planning.

Full application Stage

Full applications will be competitively and confidentially reviewed for scientific merit by the WCH Foundation Research Grants Committee, according to the following criteria:

Criterion
Quality - Scientific merit of the proposal, including the strength of the research question, lay summary and the study design
Significance - outcomes and outputs that have potential impact on women's, babies', children's and adolescents' health
Innovation - challenging or shifting current concepts, approaches, methodologies, technologies or interventions
Capability - appropriate capability and quality for the proposed project, and support of early and mid-career researcher development
Collaboration - diverse collaborations which will increase the likelihood of translation and impact, including researchers and clinicians from health services, academic institutions and in-kind and voluntary contribution commitments.
Consumer engagement – meaningful engagement of consumers (individuals, communities and/or organisations) at various stages of project (including conceptualisation, development and approval, data collection and management, analysis, report writing and dissemination of results)

The final project funding recommendations will be made by an Independent Research Grants Review Committee.

Allocation of funds will be entirely at the discretion of the WCH Foundation. This decision is final and no further negotiations will be entered into. A summary of reviewers' feedback will be provided to applicants following communication of the outcome.

Where an application is awarded funding, the WCH Foundation will enter into a funding agreement with the nominated Administering Institution detailing appropriate management and administration requirements for the approved project. Each participating institution will be required to enter into a multi-institutional agreement in accordance with, and under the leadership of, the Administering Institution. Unless otherwise agreed, the project must commence within six months of receiving notification of the award.

In the case that none of the applications are considered worthy of funding, the WCH Foundation may close the round without awarding funding, or revisit the EOIs and issue further invitations to applicants.

6. Project Leadership

Project Lead / Lead Chief Investigator

Refers to the person submitting the EOI or full application (also termed applicant). At full application stage, the Project Lead will have primary responsibility in managing and reporting on a successful application.

Applicants can only be the lead applicant on one (1) application per round.

Chief Investigator(s)

Investigators playing a major role in the project, with substantial time commitment. Multiple Chief Investigators may be included where appropriate, depending upon the scale of the proposed project.

Associate Investigator(s)

Investigators playing a minor role in the project and/or with an intermittent/low time commitment should be included as Associate Investigators (AI). Associate Investigators may include consumers or people with lived experience, or currently enrolled HDR candidates contributing to the project.

6.1 Chief Investigator categories

One of the following categories is to be selected for each Investigator:

- Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Candidate
    - o Masters by Research and PhD candidates may not be included as a Chief Investigator, unless their thesis will be submitted and under examination, or they are awaiting conferral at the time of funding commencement, otherwise they may be included as an Associate Investigator
- Postdoctoral Researcher
    - o Up to three years postdoctoral research experience from conferral of the PhD.
    - o Must be mentored by a senior researcher or enrolled in a mentoring program e.g. WCHN or university mentoring programs and research skills workshops
- Early-Career Researcher
    - o Three to five years postdoctoral research experience from conferral of the PhD.
    - o Must be mentored by a senior researcher or enrolled in a mentoring program e.g. WCHN or university mentoring programs and research skills workshops
- Mid-Career Researcher
    - o More than five years, and up to ten years postdoctoral research experience from conferral of the PhD, or equivalent research experience.
- Senior Researcher
    - o A senior researcher who has received national/international funding.
    - o More than ten years postdoctoral research experience from conferral of the PhD.
    - o Senior researchers are encouraged to include collaborations with and provide mentoring of Postdoctoral and Early and Mid-Career researchers.

Where an Investigator does not hold a PhD qualification, evidence of an equivalent combination of skills, training and/or experience in a relevant field must be provided during the application process.

7. Funding

Applications must be realistic in the amount of work that can be achieved in the time frame and within the budget requested. Funding guidelines shall generally be according to the current guidelines established by the National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC Direct Research Cost Guidelines) unless otherwise specified in these guidelines, or, where appropriate with respect to employment conditions, according to the South Australian Government or equivalent guidelines.

There is no minimum funding requirement, however the **maximum** funding for any individual project is $500,000 over a maximum of three years. The WCH Foundation Research grant funding cannot be used to support organisational indirect costs, infrastructure levies, intellectual property and patent costs.

7.1 Budget

Research applications *must include full budgetary details* on all consumables, maintenance, minor equipment and support staff requirements including statistical support and mentoring of Early-Career Researchers. Should the research project require statistical review, costings are to be included in the budget.

The WCH Foundation cannot provide funding for projects that have insufficient funding, personnel or other resources. Applicants are asked to provide details of other funding and infrastructure that will be available to them to ensure the project can be completed. Ideally, projects should leverage other forms of funding including grants, voluntary and in-kind contributions from collaborating research organisations encouraging maximum collaboration and impact. Additional funding from the applicant, collaborating partners and other sources (e.g. Research Block Grant and industry contributions), will be looked upon favourably during the review process and applications should include letters of support from the relevant organisations detailing the co-contribution amount and type (cash and/or in-kind).

The Research Grants Committee will make an assessment of the budget requested in terms of the level of support and items required to undertake the research and may make recommendations for adjustment if considered appropriate.

7.2 Salary support

Salary support may be requested for investigators and/or other project staff (see Table 1 for salary support funding limits). Justification must be provided for all salary support requested. Salary requests must be at the institutional award rate suitable for the position and include details regarding the fraction, level, step and on-costs (such as leave accruals and the superannuation guarantee contribution) in the justification, whilst adhering to the funding limits. On-costs are limited to a maximum of 30% of the base salary request. Salary requests at the maximum funding limits below with no further justification are not acceptable. Any shortfall between the funding limits below and the institutional award rate must be covered by the employing institution.

The salary of an investigator supported under a successful application will be subject to written confirmation from their employer that backfill resources will be made available to ensure the Project Lead is afforded the time required to conduct the research project. Project staff are to be appointed at standard award conditions, commensurate with experience, as determined by their Administering Institution and/or participating organisation.

Table 1: Salary support and direct research cost funding limits

Budget item	Max annual funding (per individual for salaries)[a]	Max funding period
PhD Scholarship stipend	$40,000	≤ 3.5 years
Postdoctoral Fellowship	$150,000	≤ 3 years
Early-Career Researcher	$170,000	≤ 5 years
Mid-Career Researcher	$190,000	≤ 5 years
Senior Researcher (max 0.2 FTE)	$100,000	≤ 5 years
Other project staff	No limit	≤ 5 years
Direct Research Costs[b]	$220,000	≤ 5 years
Travel to present results	$8,000 (max per grant)	≤ 5 years

a Maximum amounts for salaries are inclusive of on-costs.

b Direct research costs include those expenses that directly related to the conduct of the proposed project, and integral to achieving the objectives and outcomes.

7.3   Databases and registries

Databases and registries have merit but to be eligible for funding they need to be designed to answer a research question and aims / hypotheses must be presented. Funding for access to existing databases and registries may be eligible however the need must be well-justified.

7.4   Equipment and travel

Funds should be spent to directly support the research project. Applications to support funds for major equipment items and infrastructure, and indirect costs will not be considered. Individual minor equipment items (<$5,000 each) may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Travel for attendance and presentation of research at a conference may be requested up to $8000 per grant. Further travel expenses may be considered on a case-by-case basis, and only where the travel is directly related to achieving the research objectives of the project. Telephone and computer costs cannot be funded unless justified to be directly related to the grant.

7.5   Duplication of funding

The WCH Foundation is seeking to fund projects which do not duplicate or substantially overlap with existing projects or pending proposals. This is to prevent any conflict or "double dipping" to fund the same or similar research. Research which builds upon previous proof of concept or pilot studies are acceptable. The WCH Foundation will not fund people or projects that form part of the core activity of another funded grant.

Where funding is being sought from another organisation for the same/similar project, an application may only be made to the WCH Foundation where the applicant can provide evidence that their alternate application has been unsuccessful.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to notify the WCH Foundation when receiving funding from another organisation for the same/similar project. Failure to do so will result in ineligibility to apply for WCH Foundation funding for a period of five years and repayment of WCH Foundation grant funds.

If other funding (e.g. NHMRC, philanthropic, industry collaboration etc.) is successfully obtained for a project that is funded by the WCH Foundation, then WCH Foundation funding will be withdrawn and may be reallocated to another fundable project as appropriate.

8. Ethics and governance

Research proposals cannot be undertaken until they receive all relevant ethics and governance approvals from the appropriate Research Ethics/Biosafety Committee(s), the Research Governance Officer of WCHN and any institution where any work is to occur. The WCH Foundation must be notified of the approvals within 6 months of project commencement otherwise funding may be withdrawn.

The project lead will be required to undertake the research as proposed and report any unexpected delays or changes to the research plan in a timely manner. No major variation to the research protocol will be accepted, without WCH Foundation approval, and in accordance with the relevant funding agreement.

It is the responsibility of the project lead of the successful proposal to provide copies of all relevant ethics and governance approvals to the WCH Foundation. l

9. Reporting and publicity

The project lead is responsible for reporting, and agrees to provide regular reports on the progress of the research through SmartyGrants. Progress will be monitored against agreed milestones, with the timing and frequency of reporting being set out in the funding agreement. The project lead will be required to report outcomes against a framework based on the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes (AAMRI) Research Impact Framework, capturing the impact of the project on outcomes such as health and wellbeing, decision making, knowledge, research capacity, and social and economic outcomes.

The WCH Foundation reserves the right to discontinue funding should it deem that the research conducted does not comply with the proposal submitted and the assessment criteria. Evaluation on the research project's success on completion is also required to assess its quality and verify its completion.

The project lead will agree to:

- complete progress reports, annual reports and an annual financial statement (detailing expenditure) and a ***final report*** and ***financial statement*** upon completion of the project as set out in the relevant funding agreement,
- ensure all research work receiving funding from the WCH Foundation is acknowledged explicitly in any presentations or publications arising from the research and submit copies of publications to the WCH Foundation,
- ensure the WCH Foundation is consulted regarding any potential media opportunities relating to the project prior to public release,
- provide updates at intervals agreed upon in consultation with the WCH Foundation about their funded project for the promotion of their research, including a lay summary for use by the WCH Foundation to promote the research outcomes, and
- attend WCH Foundation donor events and participate in media opportunities organised by the WCH Foundation from time to time.