

Newcastle Permanent Innovators Program 2026 Guidelines

Applications open Friday 17 April and close Sunday 10 May 11:59pm

Late applications will not be accepted

Program Overview

The Newcastle Permanent Innovators Program is a six-week initiative that supports HMRI Early and Mid-Career Researchers (EMCRs) to strengthen research translation capability and accelerate their research concept towards real-world impact.

Created by the Hunter Medical Research Institute (HMRI) in partnership with Newcastle Permanent, the program is designed to support **HMRI EMCR affiliate-led ideas**, across research, clinical practice, and health service delivery.

Grounded in community-connected research, the program focuses on translating evidence and insights into practical solutions that respond to real-world health needs, with an emphasis on implementation, impact, and measurable outcomes.

EMCRs will refine and progress their novel ideas and concepts along the translational pipeline, culminating in a Pitch Showcase event, with seed grant awards and the chance to secure one of two \$100,000 Newcastle Permanent Innovator Fellowships.

How the Program works

Six participants will be selected to engage in a 6-week bespoke program designed for EMCRs. Participants are supported to build upon their concepts with practical innovation and translation skills through workshops led by the Institute's Research Development, Research Translation and Research Delivery teams.

Key program elements include:

- Tailored innovation modules – supporting skills and building capability across the research translation spectrum.
- Goal setting and roadmap development – participants receive strategic guidance on advancing their research, optimising translation and likelihood of impact.
- Seed funding – four participants will receive **\$20,000 seed grant awards** to continue developing their project. Two participants will be awarded a **\$100,000 Newcastle Permanent Innovation Fellowship** to further advance and fast-track their initiative.
- Pitch development – participants will be guided to develop and refine a pitch for their research project.

- Mentorship – Research translation and development mentors provide both personalised guidance throughout the program and opportunities for professional network expansion.
- Pitch Showcase event – Participation in a final showcase event where participants pitch their project to a panel of experts and decision makers.

Eligibility – Who should apply

Newcastle Permanent Innovators Program applicants must:

- Be a health and medical researcher, clinician researcher, or research active health professional
- Be an Early- or Mid-Career researcher (refer to career definitions in appendix)
- Be affiliated with Hunter Medical Research Institute (Apply to affiliate here: <https://hmri.org.au/about/team/careers>)
- Hold current employment with HMRI, the University of Newcastle and/or Hunter New England Local Health District (and maintain this employment status through the course of the program)

Additionally, applicants should:

- Have one clearly defined research project, concept, or translation idea that they wish to develop through the program (your idea can be at an early stage and does not need to be fully formed).
- Be available to attend in-person workshops and program activities scheduled as part of the Program between **June and August 2026**
- Be able to commit to active participation in the full 6-week program, including the Pitch Showcase event.

To ensure opportunities are available to new participants, individuals who have taken part in the Newcastle Permanent Program in previous years are not eligible to apply.

Application FAQs

Do I need a team to apply?

No, the Program is designed for you to apply as an individual. However, applicants should demonstrate the expertise and commitment to develop their idea and be open to collaboration. We acknowledge that research benefits from having a team to support you – this can be clinical or research collaborators and supports. This will be addressed in the workshop modules.

Do I need a fully developed project to be eligible?

No. Your idea should be well thought out, but it doesn't need to be fully developed. The program is designed to help refine and advance promising translation projects that respond to priority needs.

Can I apply if I have already received funding for my research?

Yes, but you must demonstrate how you see the program developing your idea beyond existing funding sources.

Do I need to be working on my project full-time?

No, but applicants should be prepared to dedicate time towards the program. Participation in key activities, including workshops and mentoring sessions, is required and estimated at around 4-6 hours per week.

Should you have any questions regarding your eligibility, please email your query to opportunities@hmri.org.au prior to submitting your application.

Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed based on the following criteria, ensuring that selected participants are well aligned with the Program's objectives and demonstrate strong potential for impact. The review panel will evaluate submissions against these criteria to identify the most promising candidates.

Idea Identification and Strategic Fit (15%)

1. What is the name of your idea/concept? (unmarked)
2. Describe your concept.
3. How does your concept align with HMRI's priorities?

Purpose:

- Ensures clear identification of the proposed idea and its relevance to the Innovators Program.
- Evaluates alignment with the Institute's strategic priorities, ensuring the idea contributes meaningfully to ongoing research and health system needs.

Need, Significance and Potential for Impact (20%)

4. How significant is the problem your project idea addresses? Can you quantify or describe the scope of the issue (e.g., disease burden, cost to the health system)? Provide references.

Purpose:

- Evaluates the problem's significance and the potential impact of the idea on public health and the healthcare system.

Novelty & Research Validation (20%)

5. Describe how your idea is different and innovative.
6. Briefly describe any research you have conducted to ascertain your project is novel (e.g., literature review, environmental scan)

Purpose:

- Assesses the originality of the concept and the extent to which the applicant has done due diligence of its application

Expected Pathway to Impact (10%)

7. Can you describe the expected pathway to impact for your idea? Explain how it could benefit the community and the health system in the short and long term. What is the next step your idea needs in the translation pathway?

Purpose:

- Assess that the applicant understands the pathway to impact, with potential benefits for end-users, healthcare providers, or policymakers.

Feasibility (15%)

8. Detail feasibility indicators. What feedback or validation have you received from potential stakeholders, end-users, or decision makers about the need for your concept and your solution?

Purpose:

- Determines whether the applicant has taken steps to test their idea's feasibility, demand, and practical application.

Video Pitch (20%)

Applicants should record a 2-3 minute video pitch. In the video, applicants should clearly communicate (with plain English), and address the following:

1. Introduce themselves and their idea.
2. Describe your idea and its potential impact.
3. Explain why they are a strong fit for the program and describe how the Program will further advance your idea.

The video does not need to be polished or edited post-recording. It should instead, focus on clarity and comprehension.

Purpose:

- Determines whether the applicant can clearly articulate in plain English their idea, the potential for impact, and how they plan to advance their idea throughout the Program.

Additional Considerations

9. Is there anything else you think we should know or any other information that should be addressed in evaluating your idea?

Purpose:

- Allows applicants to provide relevant details that may not fit into other categories.

Assessment Considerations:

- Unique circumstances that may enhance the application's strength.
- Consideration of factors such as equity, diversity, and inclusion in research and innovation.
- Additional partnerships, networks, or resources the applicant can leverage.

Review Process

A panel will assess applications against the assessment criteria, and as detailed in Appendix 2.

The assessment panel will be chaired by the HMRI Director or nominee, with a review panel comprising representatives from HMRI and partners.

Please note: that reviewers will NOT be experts in the field of research, so it is essential that the application is easy to follow and written in plain English. Avoid jargon and acronyms as much as possible. Ensure complex concepts are well defined or explained.

Notification of Outcome

Applicants will be notified by email as soon as practicable after the assessment process as to whether they have progressed as a finalist in the Program or if their application is unsuccessful.

Out of the applicants, **six (6) finalists** will be selected to join the Newcastle Permanent Innovators Program.

Steps for Submitting an Application

Step 1: Determine your eligibility

Please refer to page 2 of the Guidelines and Appendix 2.

Step 2: Prepare your Application

- Eligible researchers should self-nominate and complete one application form, complying with the word count limit for the response to assessment criteria.
- Save your application form, and all attachments as one PDF document. Please use the following naming convention: *Full Name_NP Innovators Program 2026*

Step 3: Submit your Application

- Please upload your 2-3 minute video and submit via the below Dropbox request link:
<https://www.dropbox.com/request/A1YDYX7fjRW98g3xv3kp>
- Please email opportunities@hmri.org.au with your completed application form by the closing date of **11.59pm 10 May 2026** using the subject: *Full Name_NP Innovators Program 2026*

Please note: Both submission steps are required for a complete application. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

Appendix 1 – Category Descriptors

Newcastle Permanent Innovators Program: Assessment Criteria Category Descriptors

The selection process for the Program will be based on a detailed scoring system designed to evaluate each applicant's research idea, based on the category descriptors and assessment criteria outlined below.

Assessment is undertaken relative to opportunity taking into consideration any career disruptions where applicable.

Idea Identification and Strategic Fit (15%)

1. What is the name of your idea/concept? (unmarked)
2. Describe your concept.
3. How does your concept align with HMRI's priorities?

Score	Performance Indicator	Category Descriptors
7	Outstanding	The idea is clearly defined and has strong and direct alignment with HMRI research priorities
6	Excellent	The idea is clearly defined and has moderate and direct alignment with HMRI research priorities
5	Very Good	The idea is somewhat defined and has moderate connection to one or more of HMRI's research themes.
4	Good	The idea is satisfactorily defined and has some connection to one or more of HMRI's research themes.
3	Fair	The idea is not well defined and has some connection to one or more of HMRI's research themes.
2	Marginal	The idea is not well defined and has limited connection to one or more of HMRI's research themes.
1	Poor	The idea is not defined and has no connection to HMRI research priorities

Need, Significance and Potential for Impact (20%)

4. How significant is the problem your project idea addresses? Can you quantify or describe the scope of the issue (e.g., disease burden, cost to the health system)? Provide references.

Score	Performance Indicator	Category Descriptors
7	Outstanding	The problem addressed is critical, well-defined, and highly impactful, with clear and compelling evidence to support the problem's significance.
6	Excellent	The problem is significant and well-supported with data; strong potential for impact.
5	Very Good	The problem is well-articulated but may need further evidence; impact is clear, but needs more refinement.

4	Good	Addresses an important problem but lacks strong quantification or clear steps for impact.
3	Fair	The problem is relevant but not clearly defined; impact is uncertain.
2	Marginal	Limited evidence of significance or relevance; unclear impact.
1	Poor	The problem is poorly defined, with no clear pathway to meaningful impact.

Novelty & Research Validation (20%)

- Describe how your idea is different and innovative.
- Briefly describe any research you have conducted to ascertain your project is novel (e.g., literature review, environmental scan)

Score	Performance Indicator	Category Descriptors
7	Outstanding	The idea is groundbreaking, demonstrating exceptional originality and innovation, supported by strong validation.
6	Excellent	Highly innovative idea with strong differentiation from existing solutions, validated with research.
5	Very Good	Novel concept, though similar efforts exist; validation is present but not comprehensive.
4	Good	Some originality but potential overlap with existing solutions; limited validation.
3	Fair	Idea shows only modest innovation and lacks differentiation; minimal research conducted.
2	Marginal	Not particularly novel, with similar approaches widely in use; little research or validation.
1	Poor	The idea is not innovative and lacks validation or differentiation.

Expected Pathway to Impact (10%)

- Can you describe the expected pathway to impact for your idea? Explain how it could benefit the community and the health system in the short and long term. What is the next step your idea needs in the translation pathway?

Score	Performance Indicator	Category Descriptors
7	Outstanding	The expected pathway to impact is clearly defined with significant short- and long-term community/health system benefit. The next step for the concept is clear, demonstrating strong knowledge about how research translates in order to achieve impact.
6	Excellent	The expected pathway to impact is considered and appropriate with good potential for community/health care benefit. Next step is considered. Demonstrates good understanding of translation pathway.

5	Very Good	The expected pathway is well articulated but may need further evidence; community benefit is clear but pathway and next steps need refinement.
4	Good	The community/healthcare benefit is relevant, but the pathway is not clearly defined.
3	Fair	Pathway is unclear. Community benefit/healthcare system benefit needs refinement.
2	Marginal	Limited evidence of community/healthcare system relevance; unclear pathway.
1	Poor	The pathway is not considered with no identified benefit to community/healthcare system. Demonstrates no understanding of translation pathway

Feasibility (15%)

- Detail feasibility indicators. What feedback or validation have you received from potential stakeholders, end-users, or decision makers about the need for your concept and your solution?

Score	Performance Indicator	Category Descriptors
7	Outstanding	Extensive feasibility assessment with strong stakeholder or end user feedback captured on the demand and practical application of the concept. Risks and barriers identified and considered.
6	Excellent	Meaningful feedback from key stakeholders or end users and evidence of practical application/risk consideration.
5	Very Good	Good validation with some stakeholder input; feasibility is promising but needs refinement. Risks and barriers need refinement.
4	Good	Feedback is limited. Feasibility has been considered. Minimal consideration of practical application/risks.
3	Fair	Minimal stakeholder or end user feedback and feasibility is unclear.
2	Marginal	Little to no assessment or feedback.
1	Poor	No stakeholder or end user engagement and no assessment of feasibility.

Video Pitch (20%)

Applicants should record a 2-3 minute video pitch. In the video, applicants should clearly communicate (with plain English), and address the following with pitch style communication:

- Introduce themselves and their idea.
- Describe their idea and its potential impact.
- Explain why they are a strong fit for the program and describe how the Program will further advance their idea.

Score	Performance Indicator	Category Descriptors
7	Outstanding	Exceptionally clear, engaging, and persuasive in plain English. Idea and impact are groundbreaking and articulated clearly. Strong demonstration of how the Program will advance the concept.
6	Excellent	Clear explanation using plain English. Good articulation of idea, impact and Program fit.
5	Very Good	Core idea is communicated well with articulation of impact and Program fit. Clarity, structure, or plain-English delivery needs refinement.
4	Good	Idea and impact are communicated but lack clarity. Plain English delivery needs improvement. Considered relevance to Program.
3	Fair	Idea is difficult to follow. Limited connection to impact and limited relevance to Program.
2	Marginal	Articulation of idea and impact are inadequately explained. Program fit is minimal.
1	Poor	Unclear and poorly articulated. No consideration of program fit.

Additional Considerations

- Is there anything else you think we should know or any other information that should be addressed in evaluating your innovation?

Assessment Considerations:

- Unique circumstances that may enhance the application's strength.
- Consideration of factors such as equity, diversity, and inclusion in research and innovation.
- Additional partnerships, networks, or resources the applicant can leverage.

Final Weighted Scoring Breakdown

Each application will be scored out of **100 points** as follows:

- Idea Identification & Strategic Fit - 15 points
- Need, Significance and Potential for Impact – 20 points
- Novelty & Research Validation - 20 points
- Feasibility - 15 points
- Expected Pathway to Impact – 10 points
- Video Pitch - 20 points
- Additional Considerations - (not scored but factored into the overall assessment)

Appendix 2 – HMRI Research Career Stage and Career Disruption Definition

Definition	Research Career Start Date	Early Career Researcher (ECR)	Mid-Career Researcher – MCR	Senior Researcher
<p>An Academic Researcher is a person who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has been awarded their PhD in a health-related field; and - is not a Health Practitioner or Clinician Researcher. 	<p>Date PhD is awarded in a health-related field, taking career disruption into consideration. For example: <i>For a PhD awarded in March 2010, with a career disruption of 16 months, the equivalent research career start date = July 2011</i></p>	<p>Research career start date must be 5 or less years as of 17 April 2026.</p>	<p>Research career start date must be more than 5 but less than 15 years as of 17 April 2026.</p>	<p>Research career start date must be more than 15 years as of 17 April 2026.</p>
<p>A Health Practitioner or Clinician Researcher is a person who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is qualified to practice in medicine, nursing, an allied health discipline, and/or holds a health service practitioner position in a health service delivery organisation; <i>and</i> - is currently practising as a health practitioner or clinician in their area of qualification no less than 0.2 FTE; <i>and</i> - can demonstrate that they have achieved at least one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. received competitive project funding of \geq \$20k with the researcher as the lead investigator; <i>or</i> published an article in a peer reviewed journal as a lead or co-lead author; <i>or</i> b. been awarded their PhD in a health-related field. 	<p>The earliest of the dates on which the researcher:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. received competitive project funding of \geq \$20k where the researcher was the lead investigator; or published an article in a peer reviewed journal as a lead or co-lead author; or 2. was awarded their PhD in a health-related field. <p>If relevant, add time for career disruption. e.g. <i>For an article published in March 2010, with a career disruption of 16 months. the equivalent research career start date is July 2011</i></p>	<p>Research career start date must be 5 or less years as of 17 April 2026.</p>	<p>Research career start date must be more than 5 but less than 15 years as of 17 April 2026.</p>	<p>Research career start date must be more than 15 years as of 17 April 2026.</p>

Career Disruption	Relative to Opportunity
<p>A career disruption involves a prolonged disruption to a researcher’s capacity to work, either due to absence (for periods of three months or greater) and/or long-term partial return to work, to accommodate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - carer’s responsibilities including parental leave; and/or - illness; and/or - completion of health qualification in the area in which the researcher is currently practicing. <p>The HMRI Director has the discretion to make the final decision on career disruption.</p>	<p>Relative to opportunity takes into account the percentage a researcher is allowed to allocate to research e.g. 40% (2 days/week). If appropriate, clinical, teaching and administrative workloads can be shown. This information should be detailed in the relative to opportunity section on the application form (if relevant). Full time equivalent (FTE) should also be stated.</p>