



Australian Government

National Health and Medical Research Council

University of Melbourne/Melbourne Brain Centre  
6 September 2019

## NHMRC Investigator Grants – the first round

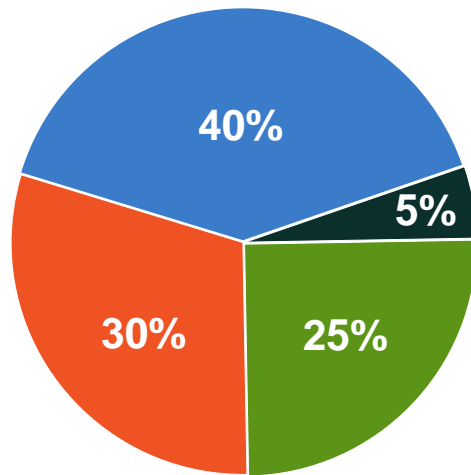
Professor Anne Kelso AO  
Chief Executive Officer



# NHMRC Investigator Grants – the first round

- 246 Investigator Grants
- Flagship scheme in new grant program
- Support for early career, mid-career and senior researchers across diverse fields of health and medical research
- Five years of flexible funding for salary (if needed) and research support for all career stages post-PhD
- Research support packages range from \$250,000 to \$3 million in total

# NHMRC Investigator Grants – the first round



- Investigator Grants
- Synergy Grants
- Ideas Grants
- Strategic and Leveraging Grants

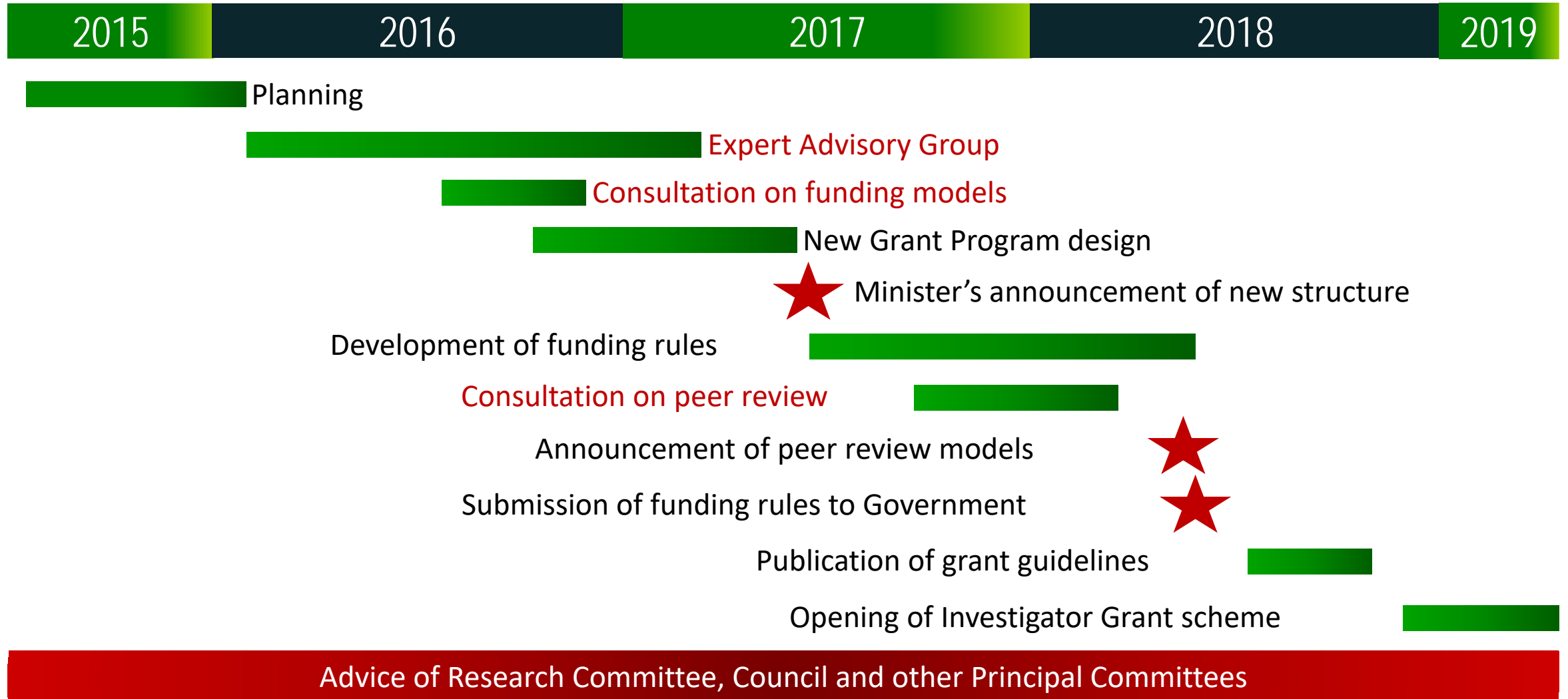
- >\$365 million: 40% of NHMRC's research budget
- Replaces separate applications for Fellowships and Project Grants
- Streamlines all previous fellowship schemes
- New track record framework
- Streamlined peer review

How did we get here?

# What was the problem we were trying to solve?

- Rising application numbers
- Rising costs of research
- No extra money
  - Falling success rates
  - Falling morale
  - Conservative research
    - More applications
    - Poor research outcomes

# How did we approach it?



# The outcome: NHMRC's new grant program

Investigator Grants	Synergy Grants	Ideas Grants	Strategic and leveraging grants
Support the research program of outstanding investigators at all career stages <b>*NEW*</b>	Support outstanding multidisciplinary teams to work together to answer major questions that cannot be answered by a single investigator <b>*NEW*</b>	Support innovative research projects addressing a specific question <b>*NEW*</b>	Research that responds to national priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centres of Research Excellence</li> <li>• Partnership Projects</li> <li>• Development Grants</li> <li>• Targeted Calls for Research</li> <li>• International schemes</li> <li>• Clinical trials and cohort studies <b>*NEW*</b></li> </ul>
Salary + research support package	Research costs (\$5 million)	Research costs	Research costs
One per investigator*	One per investigator*	Two per investigator*	No caps

\* Researchers may hold one Investigator Grant or up to two Ideas Grants

# Investigator Grants – structure and budget

	Salary		Research Support Package	
Category	Levels	Salary	Tiers	RSP per annum
Leadership	L3	\$175,201	LT4	\$600,000
	L2	\$164,911	LT3	\$500,000
	L1	\$141,474	LT2	\$400,000
Emerging Leadership	EL2	\$107,750	LT1	\$300,000
	EL1	\$75,738	ELT2	\$200,000
			ELT1	\$50,000

Research Support Packages

- based on level for EL1 and EL2
- based on peer review score, not seniority, for L1-L3
- discounted for concurrently held Program or Project Grants

# Investigator Grants – track record assessment

## 1. Publications (35%)

10 year list (taking Career Disruption into account)

Five best publications

## 2. Research Impact (20%)

Knowledge

Health

Economic

Social


## 3. Leadership (15%)

Research programs and team leadership

Institutional leadership

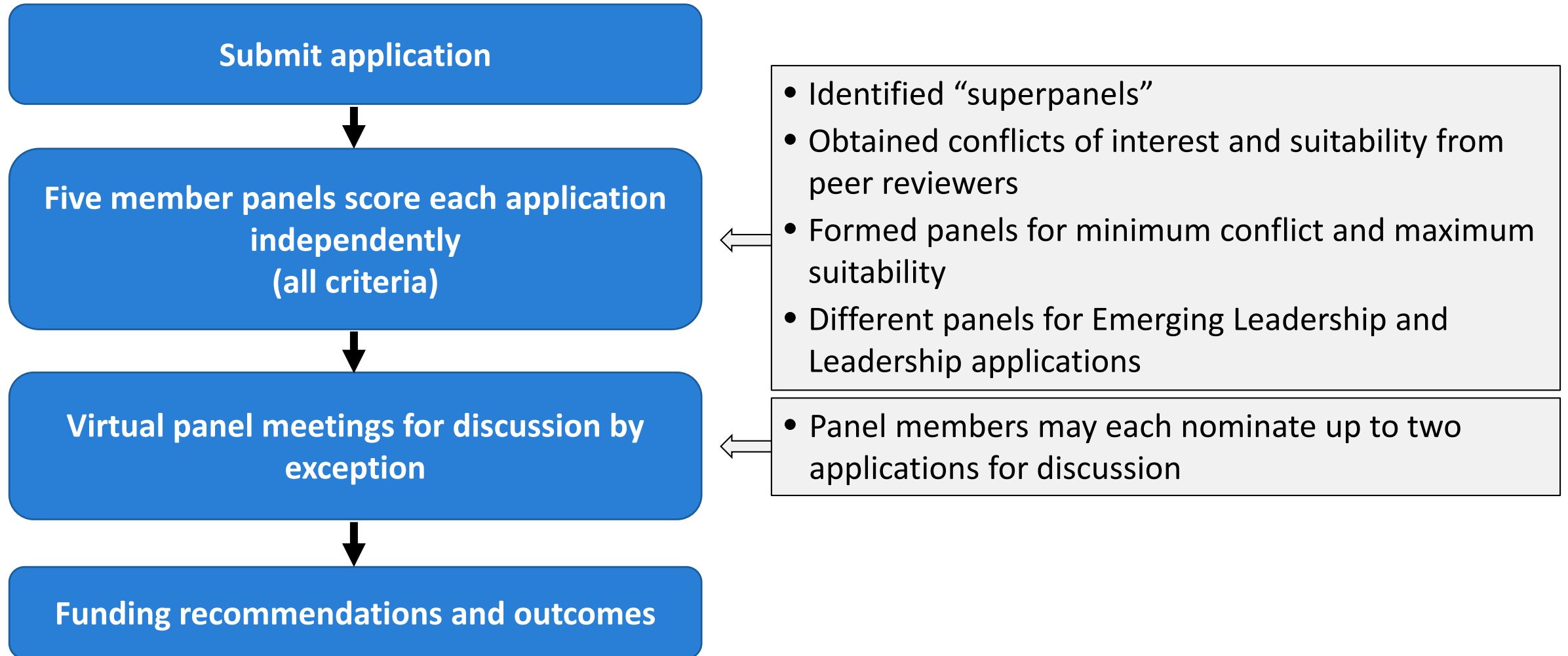
Research policy and professional leadership

Research mentoring

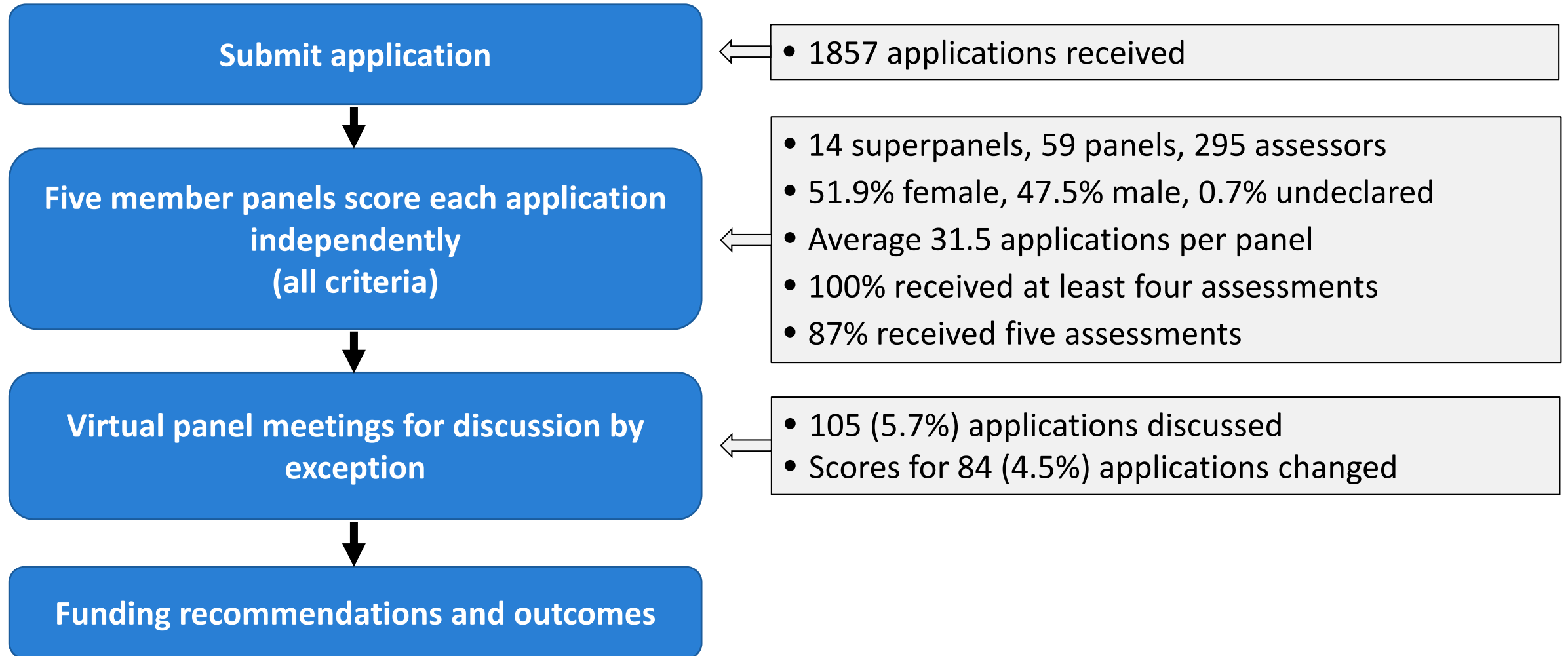
- 
- Impact: verifiable outcomes that research makes to knowledge, health, the economy and/or society
  - Actual, not potential, impact – case study with evidence



# Investigator Grants – peer review process



# Investigator Grants – peer review statistics



# Outcomes

# Effects of new grant program on funding rates

## ***This is what we said in 2017:***

- Funding rates depend on application numbers, grant sizes and the available budget.
- Without an increase in budget, NHMRC must focus on reducing application numbers.
- The integration of capping across some schemes with consolidation of funding in Investigator Grants is designed to reduce application numbers at steady state.
- While researchers test the new system during transition, we may not see improvements in funding rates. They will decline if application numbers rise.

# Investigator Grant outcomes

Category	Number of applications	Number funded	Funded rate	Total value (average)
Leadership (Level 1 – Level 3)	765	117	15.3%	\$254,393,162 (\$2.17 million)
Emerging Leadership Level 2 (EL2)	475	43	9.1%	\$59,770,105 (\$1.39 million)
Emerging Leadership Level 1 (EL1)	617	86	13.9%	\$51,710,190 (\$600,000)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1857</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>\$365,873,457</b>

Three “races”: EL1, EL2 and L had separate budgets.

# Investigator Grant outcomes

Category	Number of applications	Number funded	Funded rate	Total value
Leadership Level 3	92	42	45.7%	\$93,241,988
Leadership Level 2	195	40	20.5%	\$83,637,031
Leadership Level 1	478	35	7.3%	\$77,514,144
Emerging Leadership Level 2 (EL2)	475	43	9.1%	\$59,770,105
Emerging Leadership Level 1 (EL1)	617	86	13.9%	\$51,710,190
<b>Total</b>	<b>1857</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>\$365,873,457</b>

Three “races”: EL1, EL2 and L had separate budgets. Leadership Levels 1-3 had a single budget.

# Investigator Grant outcomes – what about...?

- Structural priorities for funding “below the line” (\$30.5 million in 2019):
  - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander researchers
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research
  - Female lead investigators
  - Health services research
- Early career researchers
- Broad research area

# Investigator Grant outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research and researchers

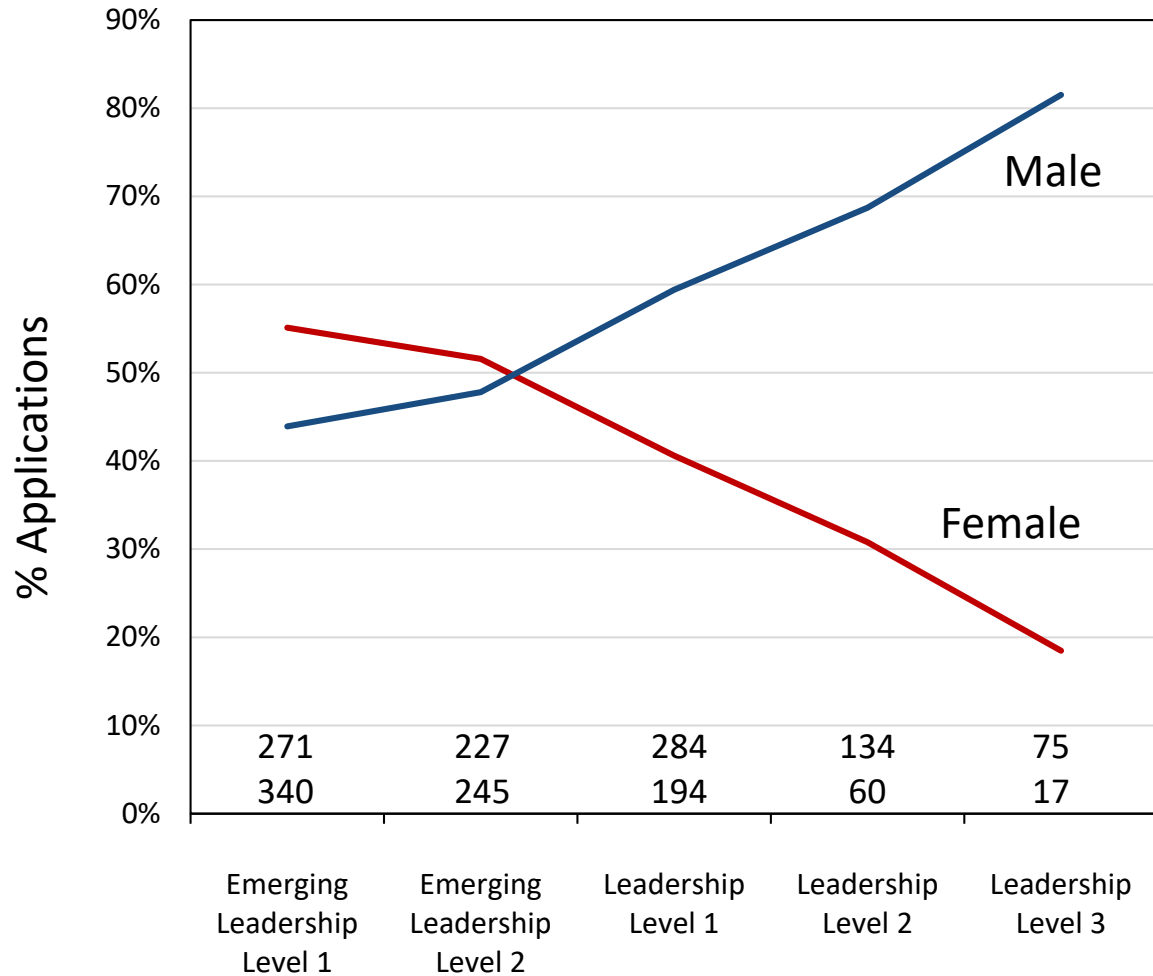
Research and researchers	Number of applications	Number funded	Funded rate	Total value	Proportion of total funding awarded
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research	66	15	22.7%	\$19,370,843	5.3%
Researchers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent	11	7	63.6%	\$8,545,900	2.3%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research led by researchers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent	9	5	55.6%	\$5,949,861	1.6%

There is overlap between the first two rows, as shown in the third row.

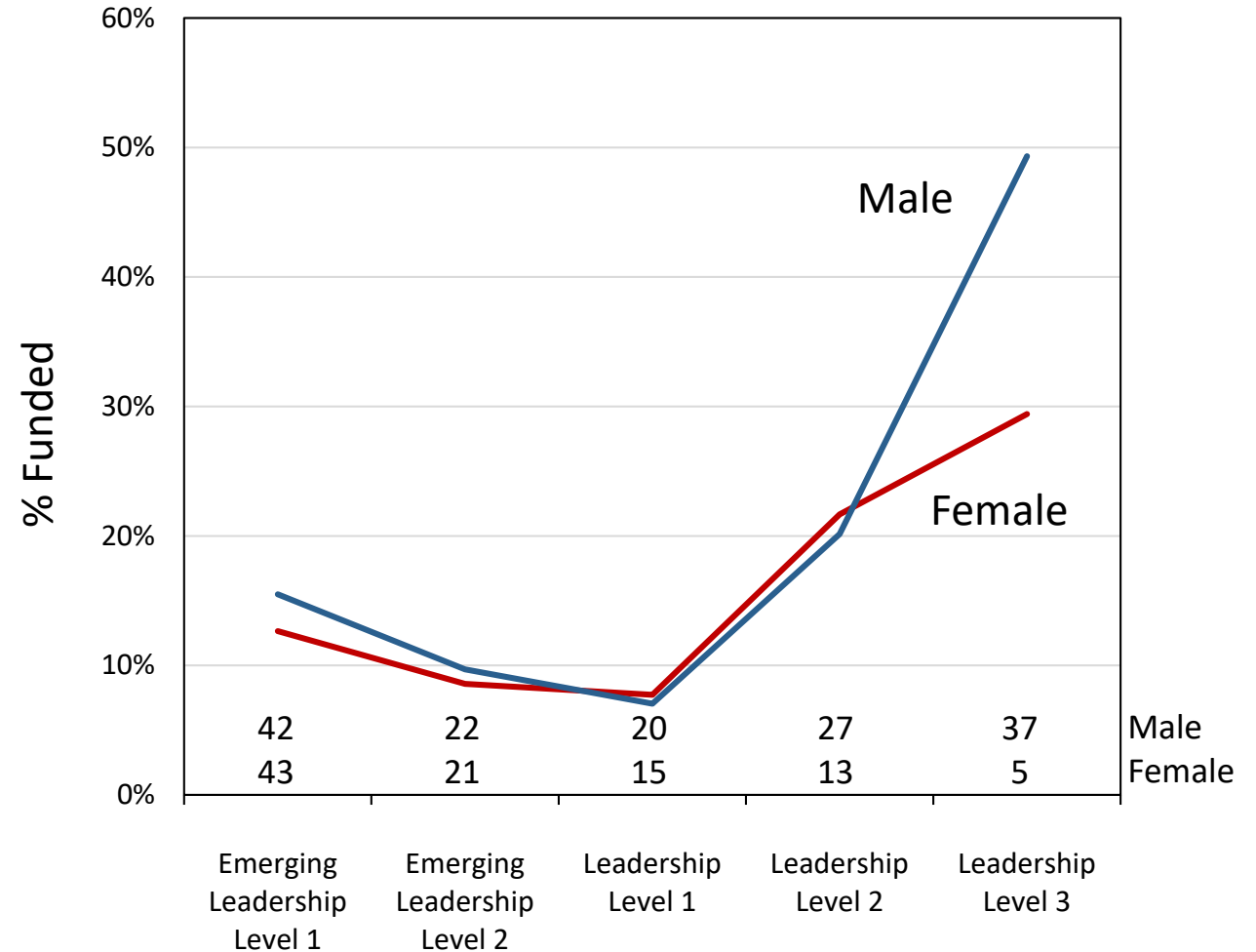


# Investigator Grant outcomes by gender

## Application numbers



## Funded rates

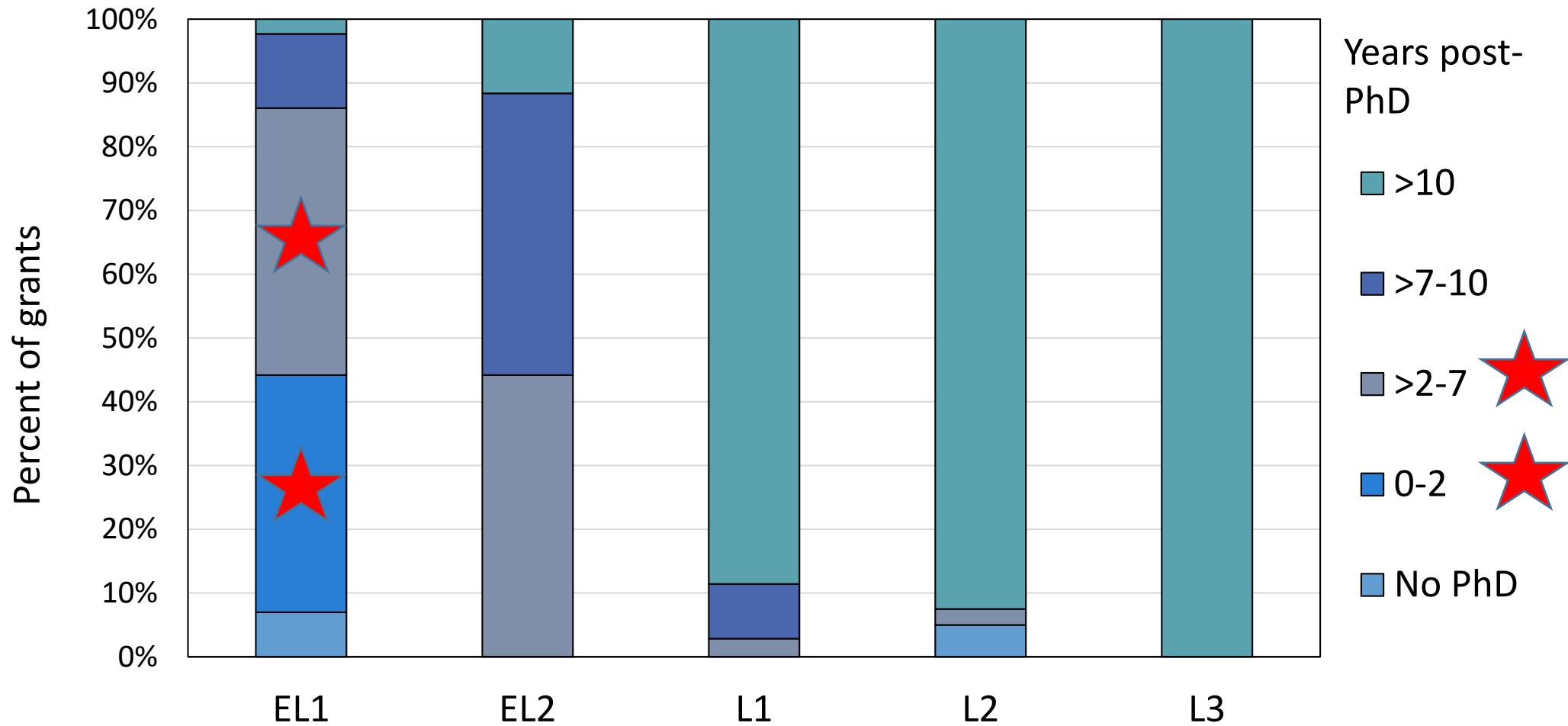


# Investigator Grant outcomes by years post-PhD

Level	No PhD	0–2 yr	>2–7 yr	>7–10 yr	>10 yr	Total
L3	0	-	-	-	42 (47%)	42 (46%)
L2	2 (100%)	-	1 (33%)	0	37 (20%)	40 (21%)
L1	0	-	1 (20%)	3 (19%)	31 (7%)	35 (7.3%)
EL2	0	0	19 (10%)	19 (9%)	5 (9%)	43 (9.1%)
EL1	6 (18%)	32 (16%)	36 (12%)	10 (18%)	2 (18%)	86 (14%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>8 (20%)</b>	<b>32 (15%)</b>	<b>57 (11%)</b>	<b>32 (11%)</b>	<b>117 (15%)</b>	<b>246 (13%)</b>

Figures are number of grants (funded rate), not adjusted for career disruption.

# Investigator Grant outcomes by years post-PhD

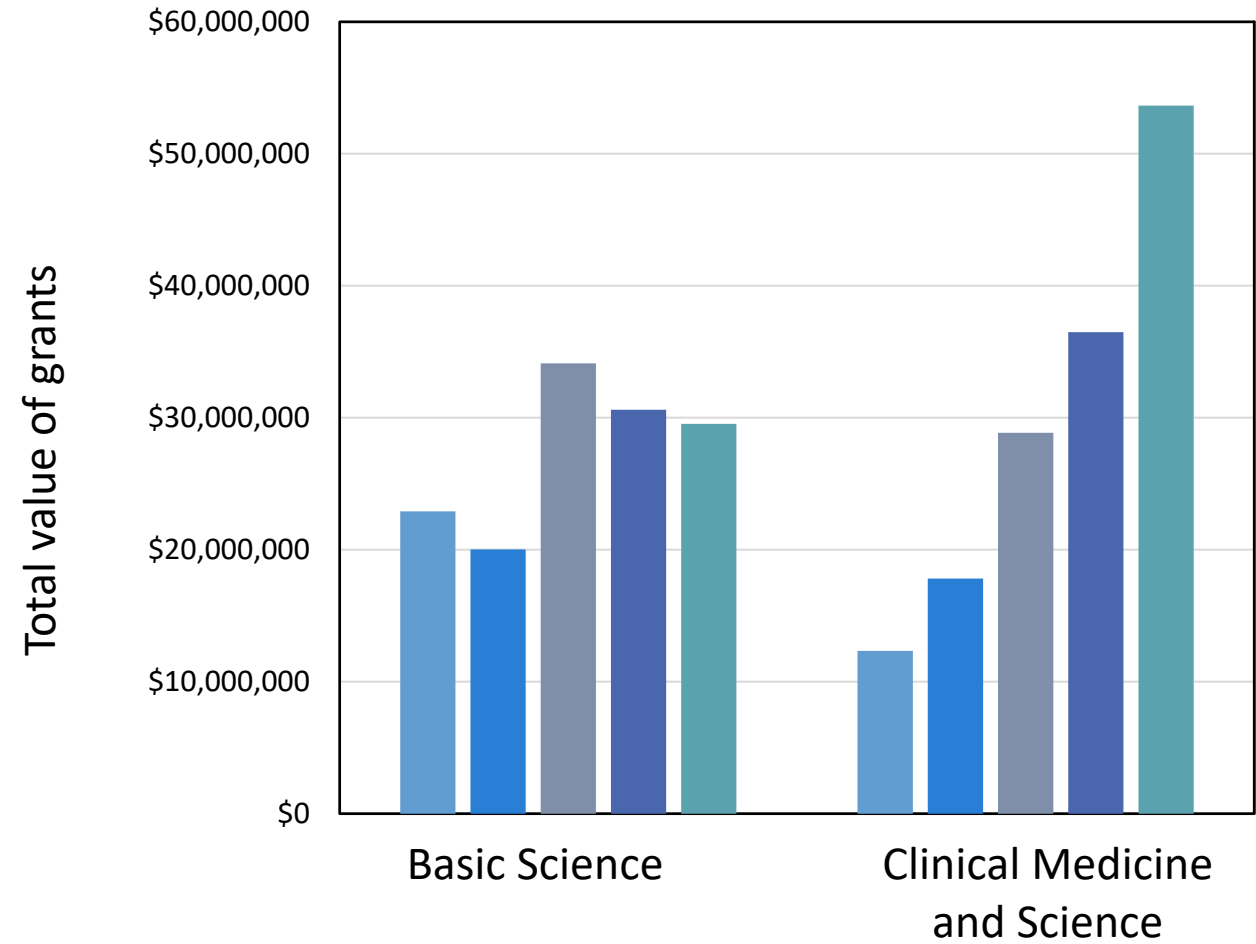
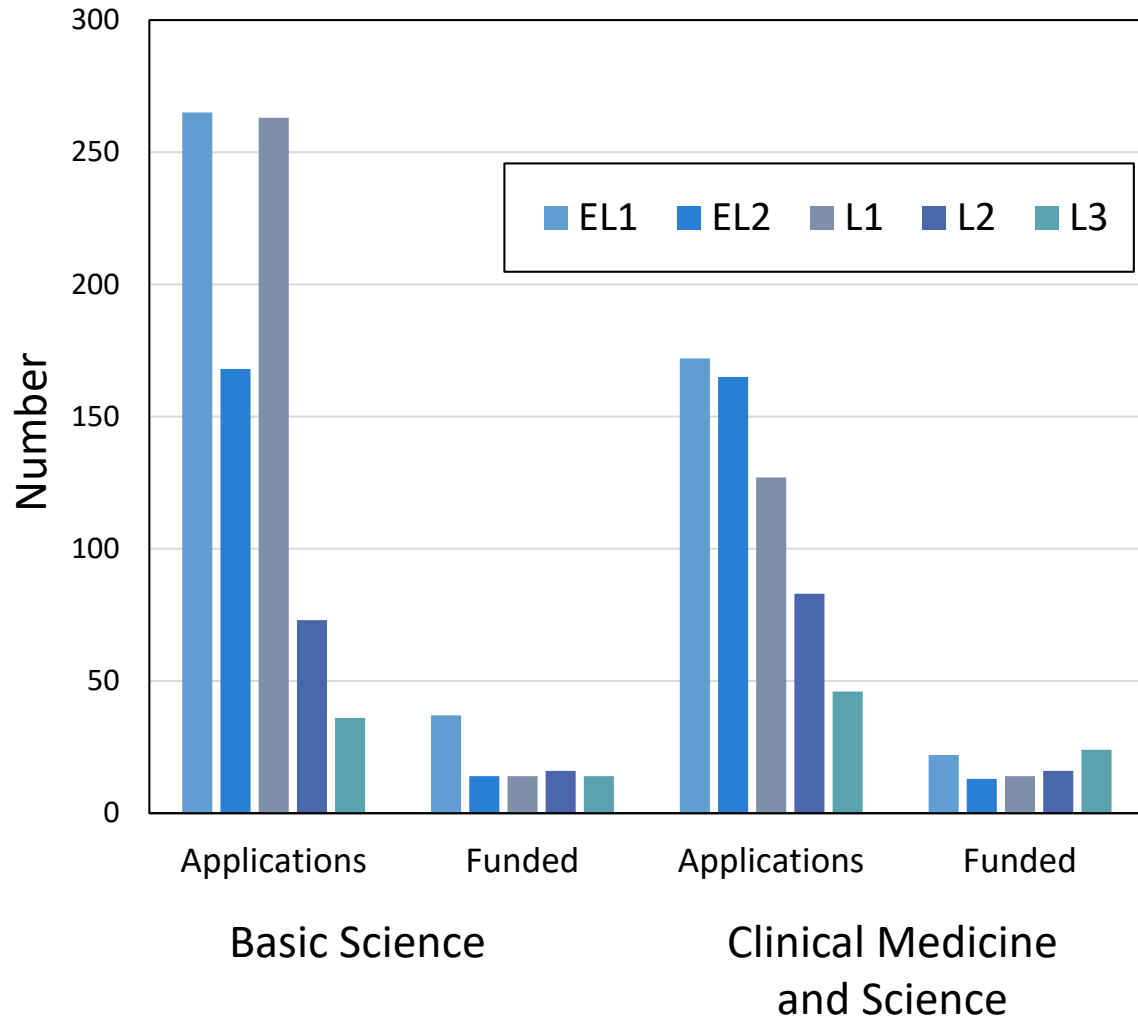


Years post-PhD are not adjusted for career disruption.

# Investigator Grant outcomes by Broad Research Area

Broad Research Area	Number of applications	Number funded	Funded rate	Total value
Basic Science	805	95	11.8%	\$137,175,847
Clinical Medicine and Science	593	89	15.0%	\$149,136,432
Health Services Research	194	20	10.3%	\$23,962,685
Public Health	265	42	15.8%	\$55,598,493
<b>Total</b>	<b>1857</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>\$365,873,457</b>

# Investigator Grant outcomes by Broad Research Area



# Investigator Grants – what next?

- Evolution, not revolution – refinements in response to feedback and data
- Minimal changes to grant guidelines for next round because of timing
- Data analysis; project on impact case studies; formal evaluation
- Application open/close dates brought forward

# Timing of opening/closing of funding schemes in 2018

Scheme	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
CREs		█	█											█	█
Development		█	█	█	█										
Research F'p			█	█	█										
Practitioner F'p			█	█	█										
EarlyCareer F'p				█	█	█									
Career Dev F'p				█	█	█									
Project				█	█	█	█								
Partnership				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

# Timing of opening/closing of funding schemes in 2019

Scheme	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
CREs		█													
Development		█	█	█	█										
Investigator			█	█	█										
Synergy						█	█	█							
Ideas						█	█	█							
Clinical trials						█	█	█							
Partnership				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█



# Timing of opening/closing of funding schemes in 2020

Scheme	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
CREs		█													
Development		█													
Investigator	█														
Synergy						█									
Ideas						█									
Clinical trials						█									
Partnership				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

- Summer holiday freed up
- Progress towards separation of Investigator Grant and Ideas Grant schemes

# Investigator Grants – what next?

- Evolution, not revolution – refinements in response to feedback and data
- Minimal changes to grant guidelines for next round because of timing
- Data analysis; project on impact case studies; formal evaluation
- Application open/close dates brought forward
- Peer review training and feedback to applicants
- Watch out for new information on NHMRC website

# Investigator Grants – the first round

- 246 Investigator Grants have been awarded to outstanding researchers:
  - across diverse fields of health and medical research
  - across all career stages, including early postdocs
  - including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and researchers
  - achieving gender equity at most levels.
- The first round of the scheme was extremely popular:
  - magnificent response from peer reviewers
  - many excellent applications were unable to be funded.
- Sector feedback and data analysis will drive continued refinement of guidelines and processes.



**Australian Government**

**National Health and Medical Research Council**

Thank you