

Terms of Reference

Research Advisory Committee

December 2025

Background

The National Heart Foundation of Australia (Heart Foundation) is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1959. The Heart Foundation's mission is to reduce heart disease and improve the heart health and quality of life of all people living in Australia through our work in risk reduction, support, care and research.

Role

The Research Advisory Committee (RAC) is established as a sub-committee of the Board to provide strategic and expert advice on strategic research approaches and the Heart Foundation's research funding program.

Responsibilities

The RAC is responsible for:

- Advising the Heart Foundation Board and management on strategic research matters, including framework, policy, and research trends, issues, and priorities.
- Advising on strategic research grant calls/schemes and ensuring alignment with Heart Foundation priorities.
- Advising, as required, on the establishment of review committees and working groups to ensure strategic alignment and appropriate representation of expertise and experience.
- Reviewing the annual research funding allocation, ensuring research funding is awarded based on merit, potential impact, equity of distribution, relevance, and strategic alignment where and as appropriate.
- Exploring, advising on, and facilitating collaborations, including joint funding or special initiatives with national and international key research stakeholders, such as relevant peak bodies and research and health professionals.
- Advising on the monitoring and evaluation of the research funding program and portfolio, including the impact and evaluation framework.
- Advising the Heart Foundation Board and management on advocacy of cardiovascular research.
- Advising Heart Foundation management on effective communication to the public and potential corporate donors of Heart Foundation-supported research.
- Advising on the activities and policies of other national research funding agencies.
- Endorsing a nominee for a named research grant

Reporting

The RAC will report to the Heart Foundation Board on:

- Recommendations on research funding allocations.
- Updates on strategic research and research funding program progress.
- Any significant issues or changes to the research landscape relevant to the Heart Foundation.

Membership

- Chair: The Chair is a member of the Heart Foundation Board and is appointed by the Heart Foundation Board.
- Deputy Chair: The Deputy Chair is the Chief Medical Advisor of the Heart Foundation in light of the direct relationship of this role as an advisor to the Heart Foundation Board
- Board Members: The Committee will have at least two Directors from the Heart Foundation Board (which may include the Chair).
- Other RAC Members:
- There will be an additional 4-10 members with a range of expertise as outlined in the skills matrix ([Appendix A](#))
 - Members are selected against the skills matrix ([Appendix A](#)) to ensure representation of an appropriate mix of skills and experience.
- Other RAC Members are appointed via an expression of interest (EOI) process ([Appendix B](#)).
- Ex officio members include:
 - Heart Foundation CEO or a representative
 - National Manager, Research
 - Manager, Research Grants Program
 - Research Strategy & Impact Lead

Other Heart Foundation staff will attend meetings as needed at the request of the CEO, National Manager, Research, Manager, Research Grants Program, or RAC Chair.

Tenure

- The Chair will be appointed for a three-year term and may be reappointed for one additional term (i.e. a total of two terms equalling six years).
- Members will be appointed for a three-year term and may be reappointed for a maximum of one additional term (i.e. total of two terms equalling six years).
- Half of the membership will change every three years.

Meetings & Decisions

- The RAC will meet four times per year, or more frequently as deemed necessary.
- Meetings will be by video/teleconference.
- Meeting agendas and related documents will be circulated approximately one week prior.
- Attendance at each meeting is expected, with attendance of members being reported in the Annual Report. Apologies are required at least one week prior to a meeting.
- A quorum is defined as 50% of members plus one, (a quorum must include at least one Board Director) (excluding any *ex officio* members).
- Meeting minutes will be drafted by Heart Foundation secretariate and provided to the Heart Foundation Board.

Specific roles

Chair

- Provides leadership to the committee and ensures the integrity of the committee's processes and governance.
- Is responsible for the work of the RAC with the assistance of the Deputy Chair, National Manager, Research and Manager, Research Grants Program
- Presides over meetings and facilitates input and discussion by all members.
- Reports to the Heart Foundation Board, represents the RAC in Heart Foundation Board discussions and informs the committee at each meeting of Board decisions and relevant actions.

Deputy Chair

- Provides leadership to the committee and ensures the integrity of the committee's processes and governance.
- Presides over meetings and facilitates input and discussion by all members in the absence of the Chair

Members

- Commit to attending the scheduled RAC meetings
- Actively provide focused contributions to enable the RAC to meet its responsibilities.
- Review and advise on strategic research priorities within the context of the Strategic Research Framework and Heart Foundation vision and strategy as required.
- Offer expert advice on research-related matters and any other matters brought before the committee.
- Advocate for the Heart Foundation's research agenda in the broader community.
- Recommend and connect other relevant and appropriate experts as needed.

Secretariat (provided by Heart Foundation)

- Organise meetings and communications, and distribute supporting materials.
- Facilitate committee's governance processes and provide general governance advice to the committee.
- Record minutes and maintain RAC documentation, including the committee member's declaration of interest register.
- Provide general logistical and administrative support as required.

National Manager, Research (or appointed representative)

- Undertake tasks associated with the management of the RAC, including overseeing secretariat functions.
- Act as prime conduit for communication with the Chair, RAC members, and other Heart Foundation committees and staff.

As required, working groups may be established and dissolved as needed. Such working groups will consist of members from the RAC as well as Heart Foundation staff and/or non-members and external persons with particular expertise. Furthermore, the RAC will liaise and work closely with other Heart Foundation sub-committees/advisory panels where appropriate or necessary.

Conflicts of interest

- Members must declare any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest related to the proposals under review, matters discussed, or the overall purpose and responsibilities of the RAC. These declarations of interest should be disclosed by members as soon as they become aware and will be recorded in a register.
- The Chair will also ask members to raise any conflicts of interest at the commencement of each meeting regarding any agenda items being discussed at the meeting. Conflicts will be recorded in the minutes and members will withdraw from discussion or remove themselves from the meeting as appropriate.
- The declaration of interest register may be regularly reviewed by the Heart Foundation Board to determine if continued RAC membership is appropriate (see [Termination of Member](#)).

Confidentiality and Policy Compliance

- The member will not reveal any confidential or proprietary information entrusted in the course of their duties and may not use or attempt to use any such information, documents, or data, other than for the fulfilment of their duties as a member.
- Upon cessation of membership, and thereafter, the member shall not reveal any confidential or proprietary information, which they obtained while a member and may not use or retain, or attempt to use or retain, any such information, documents, or data.
- All members must adhere to the Heart Foundation's Code of Conduct and any other appropriate policies as provided.

Intellectual property

- In accordance with the Heart Foundation's IP Policy, all IP developed by the RAC will be owned by the Heart Foundation unless otherwise specified in a duly executed contract. The member will be requested to sign an agreement that covers recognition of this IP ownership, moral rights waiver, and disclosure of any potential conflict of interest.
- All members will respect the copyright of any information and resources developed under the auspices of the Heart Foundation and/or its collaborators, which they have access to while a member and may not use or attempt to use any such information, documents or data in a manner which may breach copyright.

Payment

- Appointment to the RAC is on an honorary basis.
- The Heart Foundation will (at its complete discretion) fund additional travel or accommodation required for face-to-face meetings based on Heart Foundation travel policies.

Termination of member

- Should a member wish to terminate their membership prior to the expiry of their current Term, the member is required to provide written notice of termination of not less than two months to the Chair. Appointment of a new member will follow the process outlined below.

- The RAC and Heart Foundation Board reserves the right to terminate a member's appointment immediately, subject to rules of natural justice, before the term is completed if deemed in the best interests of the Heart Foundation. Reasons for termination may include (but not limited to) notification of a conflict of interest, inability to implement the philosophy of the Heart Foundation or breaches of confidentiality. The RAC or Heart Foundation Board is required to provide written notice of termination.

Review and Amendment of the Terms of Reference (ToR)

- The ToR will be reviewed annually or as deemed necessary by the Heart Foundation Board.
- Changes to the ToR can be proposed by the RAC but must be approved by the Heart Foundation Board.

Approval and Review

- This ToR was approved by the Heart Foundation Board on 08/12/2025. The next review is scheduled for 8/12/2026.
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Appendix A

Skills Matrix for Research Advisory Committee Membership

Recruiting RAC members using a skills matrix ensures a balanced composition of expertise, enhancing the Committee's functionality and its ability to address a broad range of considerations relevant to the Heart Foundation's mission and the overall purpose of the RAC. It should be noted that not all skills identified below will necessarily be represented on RAC at any one time, but that membership will reflect Heart Foundation strategic priorities as they evolve over time.

Skill/Experience Area	Description
Cardiovascular research	Experience in cardiovascular research, with published works, leadership in research projects, and experience in cutting-edge cardiovascular research design, execution and evaluation in basic, clinical, public health and/or health services research studies.
Clinical cardiology	Experience in the practice of clinical cardiology, with an understanding of patient needs, treatment protocols, and current challenges in the field.
Research translation	Skills in bridging the gap between research findings and practical applications, ensuring that discoveries lead to tangible health outcomes or policy changes.
Patient advocacy/ representation	Direct experience or a deep understanding of patient needs, lived experience, and the patient journey through cardiovascular care.
First Nations	Expertise in, and respect for, First Nations cultures, traditions and cardiovascular health challenges and experience in collaborating with First Nations communities. Experience in culturally safe patient-centred care, preventive services, and/or chronic disease management with First Nations health care providers.
Primary care	Experience in the delivery of primary care, including patient-centred care, preventive services and chronic disease management.
Service delivery	Experience in the design, implementation, or evaluation of services, ideally related to healthcare or research contexts. Understanding of the principles of quality service delivery and patient-centred care.
Policy, government, and advocacy	Skills in influencing policy formation and decision-making within state and/or federal government.
Health economics	Understanding of the economic aspects of healthcare, including funding, cost-benefit analysis, and the economic impact of cardiovascular diseases.
Commercial translation of intellectual property	Expertise in identifying, valuing and transforming intellectual property developed during grant-funded research into market-ready products, services or licensing opportunities.

Philanthropy	Experience or understanding of philanthropic activities, including fundraising, donor relations, and the legal and ethical aspects of charitable giving.
Investment	Experience in financial investment, venture and/or seed capital funding, portfolio management, or finance strategy, preferably in non-profit or healthcare sectors.
Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning	Experience in the technical, strategic, and ethical competencies to ensure informed decision-making and responsible allocation of resources; understanding of emerging AI trends to ensure the RAC is informed and aware.
Data handling and sharing	Understanding of data sharing principles, data repositories

Appendix B

Committee Member Appointment Process for the Research Advisory Committee

Call for Expressions of Interest (EOI)

- The National Heart Foundation of Australia (Heart Foundation) Board will issue a public call for EOIs for positions on the Research Advisory Committee (RAC). This call will be published on the Heart Foundation website and communicated via other relevant platforms and channels.

Expression of Interest (EOI) Submission

Interested individuals are required to submit:

- A brief statement (max. 500 words) outlining their interest in joining the RAC.
- A CV highlighting professional background, academic qualifications, and key achievements (maximum 5 pages).
- A specific indication of experience with reference to the Skills Matrix, categorically mentioning which skills they possess (see [Appendix A](#)).

Shortlisting Process

- EOIs will be reviewed by a selection panel comprising members from the Heart Foundation Board, Heart Foundation CEO, and National Manager, Research and external experts, as deemed necessary.
- The panel will assess EOIs based on alignment with the Skills Matrix and potential contribution to the RAC's responsibilities and purpose.

Equitable representation

- As part of our commitment to ensuring a diverse and representative committee, the selection panel will give careful consideration to achieving an appropriate mix of gender, state and territory representation. This is in conjunction with evaluating the skills mix as outlined in our skills matrix.

Interview

- Shortlisted candidates may be invited for an interview (either in-person or via videoconference). This process will further evaluate the candidate's fit and alignment with the RAC's objectives.

Reference Check

- The Heart Foundation may contact referees to verify the authenticity of qualifications and to gather additional insights into the candidate's suitability.

Appointment

- Based on the EOI, interview, and reference check, the Heart Foundation Board will make the final decision on the appointment of members to the RAC.

Onboarding

Newly appointed members will

- Undergo an onboarding process that includes completing a volunteer agreement and associated documentation, and an introduction to the Heart Foundation's operations, the RAC's purpose, and current projects.
- Declare any conflicts of interest in accordance with the Conflict of Interests Policy and record any conflicts via the Heart Foundation conflicts register (and complete a conflict management plan as appropriate).

Announcement

- The Heart Foundation will formally announce the new RAC members on its website and through other relevant communication channels.

Note

The Heart Foundation Board reserves the right to directly approach and invite individuals with specific expertise to join the RAC if deemed appropriate. This is to ensure that the committee remains balanced and possesses key skills identified from the Skills Matrix.