

How do we set national health research priorities for New Zealand?

Have your say

Summary

The Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC), Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Business, Science and Innovation (MBIE) are seeking your **input into the process** to establish health research priorities for New Zealand. Everyone in the broader health, and science, technology and innovation sectors will be involved in setting and implementing the priorities. Over the course of 2018 and 2019, input will be sought on the process used, what the priorities might look like, and the final priorities proposed in three separate consultation processes. You may get involved at any or all stages.

Why are we going through this process?

The country's first health research strategy was published in 2017. The New Zealand Health Research Strategy 2017–2027 (NZHRS) draws together the Ministry of Health, MBIE, and HRC to implement actions that will enhance the funding, conduct and uptake of health research. The aim of these changes is to increase the impact of health research in New Zealand and improve the health and wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

There are ten actions that the three government agencies have been tasked with:



All ten actions link together; however, one underpins and will inform work in all other areas – **Action 1: Prioritise investment through an inclusive priority-setting process**, the first action to be implemented. As the title suggests, the process used to determine these priorities is pivotal to ensuring that the government gets the health research priorities right and achieves buy-in from the sectors, funders, agencies, NGOs,

research providers, and end-users that will then be asked to work together and implement them.

This document is about ensuring that the process for determining the priorities is the best one. Your input on the priorities themselves, will be sought later in 2018 and 2019 (see 'At what points in the process can I have my say?').

Why set health research priorities?

New Zealand health researchers are already focusing on the issues and areas where they can make the biggest difference. The purpose of setting priorities is to gain a shared understanding of where to focus effort and resources to get the greatest benefit and the best value for New Zealanders' investment in health research. This requires input from everyone involved and a concerted effort to come together and realise the vision set by the NZHRS. This is as much about co-ordinating what funders and policy-makers are doing, as co-ordinating the health research community. Once the government has established the priorities, the next step is to ensure that the infrastructure, resources, capacity, and capability exist to address them.

This is not just about what the HRC does

The priorities identified need to serve the interests of all New Zealanders – as well as Government, funders, researchers, those responsible for healthcare delivery, communities, end-users, consumers, industry and the health, science, technology and innovation systems.

Who are the health research priorities for?

The priorities are being set for all those involved in health research in New Zealand to respond to. Everyone involved in the health research, science, technology, and innovation sectors will be asked to think about how they can deliver to them in what they do – including government agencies, tertiary institutions, Crown Research Institutes, NGOs, independent research organisations, and contract researchers. These are priorities for New Zealand.

The priorities will be published in 2019 and that is when all stakeholders will decide how and when they will implement them. Funders can make their own decisions about how much of the government's investment should be guided by the priorities, what special initiatives may need to be introduced if more rapid progress is needed, and what changes to funding mechanisms might be necessary.

How should the priorities be set?

In developing the draft process, standard models that have been used to set health research priorities overseas were examined. Each model was classified against 28 different criteria to see how suitable they were for our New Zealand context.

It was found that no one model met the needs of New Zealand, so a fit-for-purpose process has been developed. The process draws on the strengths of each model and includes elements that are specific to our unique New Zealand context, such as the use of recent, extensive consultation processes to develop the National Science Challenges and the New Zealand Health Research Strategy itself.

The key stages in the proposed process

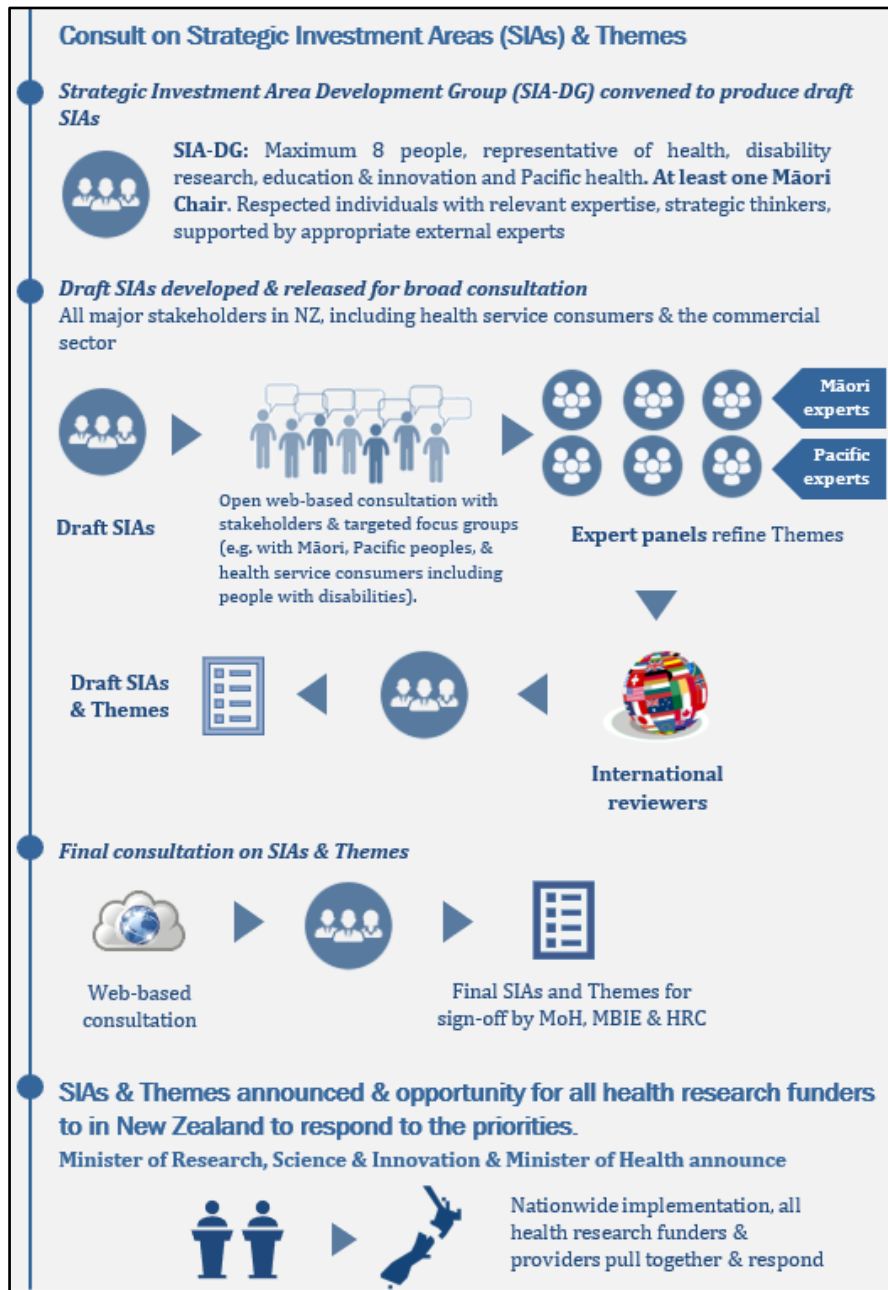
The draft process involves the development of broad research areas – provisionally termed ‘Strategic Investment Areas’ (SIAs) and specific knowledge gaps that sit underneath them – termed ‘Themes’ for research.

The proposed process for setting health research priorities for New Zealand is shown over page. It involves a group of respected and knowledgeable individuals overseeing the process – the SIA Development Group. The SIA Development Group will identify draft SIAs from the wealth of existing data, including feedback given during consultations toward the New Zealand Health Research Strategy. These SIAs will be a **starting point for a new national consultation process**. Anyone who is interested in participating can suggest new SIAs, or the deletion or merging of those suggested by the Development Group. People will be asked to propose more specific questions and Themes for research, under the broad SIAs. This will be a primarily online consultation, with provision for focus groups with Māori and Pacific peoples and the disability sector. All the information gathered during this broad and inclusive consultation will then go to committees of experts who have specialist knowledge in the Themes identified, to be refined. The Themes will then be sent to global experts in each field of research – to provide international and impartial review.

At the end of the process, all information will go back to the SIA Development Group, who will make further recommendations on the SIAs and Themes. There will be a final, web-based consultation process to provide people with another opportunity to have their say on the SIAs and Themes that have been developed. The SIA Development Group will then finalise the SIAs and Themes, which will go through the following approval process:

1. The HRC Council
2. The NZHRS Implementation Steering Group (with representation from the Ministry of Health, MBIE, HRC, and health and innovation and tertiary sectors. The Steering Group has the ability to call on advice from an External Advisory Group comprising national and international experts); and
3. The Minister for Research, Science, and Technology and Minister of Health.

Proposed process for setting priorities for health research in New Zealand



What does a SIA look like?

The HRC, Ministry of Health, and MBIE envisage **five to ten broad areas** of investment that will endure for the life of the NZHRS (to 2027) and encompass a range of key knowledge needs that are:

- focused on addressing the **current and future needs** of New Zealanders, including future generations
- **amenable to research**

The breadth of the SIAs means that they will require **multi-disciplinary approaches**, with collaboration across the health, science, technology, and innovation sectors. Contributions will be needed from **all health research disciplines**.

What does a Theme look like?

Themes may be areas of research or focus on parts of the health research system that will enhance research capacity, such as workforce development.

Draft criteria have been developed to guide the identification of Themes that will:

- advance **Māori health** outcomes and research capacity;
- reduce health **inequity** (both in access to services and outcomes);
- reduce **burden of disease** in New Zealand and meet identified needs for improving health and wellbeing;
- improve **cost-effectiveness** for the New Zealand health system;
- respond to unique **opportunities** for New Zealand (e.g. research that cannot be done elsewhere, or innovations with commercial potential);
- address a confirmed **knowledge gap that matters**;
- builds the **health research workforce** New Zealand needs, and
- be **feasible**, in terms of research capability, capacity, and strengths.

Themes must also uphold the principles of the NZHRS: **Research excellence, transparency, partnership with Māori, and collaboration**.

Themes would be refreshed on a three- to five-year cycle.

International examples of health research priorities

What an SIA with Themes *might* look like....

International examples of funding frameworks

SIA level

Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Institute: Aboriginal peoples' health



Medical Research Council (UK)
Science Area: Infection & immunity



Theme level

Priorities:

- Suicide prevention
- Tuberculosis
- Diabetes/obesity
- Oral health

Priorities:

- Antimicrobial resistance
- Fungal disease
- Vaccines against bacteria
- Immunisation in mothers & infants

How will the national health research priorities be funded?

The NZHRS gives the direction that the national health research priorities will 'form the basis of the HRC's three-yearly investment plan and guide other areas of government-funded mission-led health research such as the National Science Challenges (NSCs), health sector agency research and health research commissioned by government agencies.'

When published in 2019, each government and health sector agency will decide how to implement the priorities. Funders may potentially choose to implement all health research priorities or select only those which fit with their organisational goals. Similarly, funders may allocate more funding to certain SIAs or Themes, than others. The SIA-DG as part of their final recommendations may advise on the funding of SIAs and Themes but will not be responsible for their implementation.

Other funding mechanisms in New Zealand's health research and innovation system, such as academic institutional funding, the Centres of Research Excellence and the Marsden Fund, will continue to support curiosity-driven health research that may or may not fit with the health research priorities.

How could we improve the proposed process?

If you have any comment on the process, or any points that you think should be given consideration, we would be grateful if you could fill in a short survey that you can access [here](#).

At what points in the process can I have my say?

You can provide input at any or all of the stages below. You can also email Dr Patricia Anderson (Chief Advisor, Policy and Strategy, HRC) at any time:

panderson@hrc.govt.nz.

- ▶ 1. Consultation on the process for priority setting 5 – 16 March 2018
- ▶ 2. Consultation on draft SIAs
Opportunity to suggest Themes for research under each SIA Date in 2018, to be confirmed
- ▶ 3. Consultation on the final draft SIAs and Themes Date in 2019, to be confirmed