

17 August 2021

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Tēnā koe Anna

Official Information Act request

Further to our acknowledgement letter dated 29 July 2021 regarding your request for official information on 27 July 2021, please find below our responses (your requests are indicated in italics and highlighted in blue for easy reference):

Health Minister Andrew Little announced today that your organization has appropriated \$42 million NZD to fund 36 projects directed at addressing "misinformation" related to the Covid-19 jab resulting in "vaccine hesitancy" by the NZ public.

On 27 July 2021 the Health Minister, Hon Andrew Little, announced funding of \$42.55 million for 36 research projects, made up of 31 general projects and five Rangahau Hauora Māori projects. He also announced funding for four programme grants (\$19.99 million) and five Pacific Health project grants (\$5.79 million), bringing the total funding announced to **\$68.3 million**. These projects and programmes address a broad range of health issues, spanning biomedical, clinical, and public health research.

Only one of these funded projects is investigating vaccine hesitancy and its main focus is childhood vaccinations. This project was awarded \$896,195. There is more information about this project, and others, on the HRC's website: <https://hrc.govt.nz/news-and-events>

Please provide the following information for the sake of the public interest and government transparency:

- 1. What is the definition of "Covid-19 misinformation" for the purposes of the allotment of funding to address this problem? Are there uniform criteria being applied between and among the 36 separate projects designed to end this problem?*

The Health Research Council has not referred to "COVID-19 misinformation" and none of the funded projects announced on 27 July 2021 used this term, hence we do not have a definition for it.

All research projects are funded using the same assessment criteria as indicated in Section 4.3 (Assessment of full applications) of the 2020 Peer Review Manual for research applications in the annual contestable funding round:

https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/funding/downloads/2020_Peer_Review_Manual.pdf.

2. *What is the source of the \$42 million NZD? If this has come from the NZ government, please provide proceedings and discuss any opportunities for public discourse related to the appropriation of these funds.*

Parliament appropriates funding for the HRC through *Vote Business, Science and Innovation*, which is administered by the Minister of Science, Research and Innovation. This funding includes the \$42.55 million allocated for the research projects announced by the Minister of Health on 27 July 2021.

The following link details how appropriations work, including who approves the spending of public money and how.

<https://oag.parliament.nz/2020/central-government/appendix.htm>

3. *The names of each of the 36 individual projects, titles, or organizations and the specific amount of funding granted to each entity.*

Details of the 2021 Project recipients can be found on the HRC's website and in the HRC's Research Repository:

<https://mailchi.mp/hrc/hon-minister-little-announces-683-million-in-hrc-grants?e=69b9329363>

[HRC Research Repository | Health Research Council of New Zealand](#)

4. *Procedures followed by the funded entities to obtain this funding, any public notice put forth for the equal opportunity for organizations to apply for this funding, and the total number of applications put forth for this specific funding.*

Procedures followed by the funded entities to obtain the funding are available in the following guidelines:

https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/funding/downloads/2021_Project_Full_Application_Guidelines.pdf

https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/funding/downloads/2021_Rangahau_Hauora_Maori_Project_Full_Application_Guidelines.pdf

https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/funding/downloads/2021_Pacific_Health_Project_Full_Application_Guidelines.pdf

The HRC notifies the health research sector in advance of its funding rounds opening so that applicants have a reasonable amount of time to prepare their applications. All the HRC's funding opportunities are advertised through the following platforms:

- Gateway (<https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/>) – this is the HRC's online portal for funding applications, current research contracts' reporting, and peer reviews from invited experts.
- HRC Update (<https://www.hrc.govt.nz/news-and-events/newsletters>) – this is a fortnightly e-newsletter about the health research sector, compiled and distributed by the HRC. *Update* includes short, topical items about health research funding, policy, activities, consultations.
- HRC website (<https://www.hrc.govt.nz>)

A total of 124 project proposals were invited to submit a full application. Due to a rigorous assessment process, only the top-ranked projects among all the applications received could be funded.

5. Selection criteria employed for determining who would be granted funding by the HRC for these projects.

Details about the assessment process for full research applications in this annual contestable funding round can be found in Section 4.3 of the 2020 Peer Review Manual:

https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/funding/downloads/2020_Peer_Review_Manual.pdf

6. Names of the individuals and any declarations of interest of those serving as decision makers related to the allocation of the \$42 million for these 36 individual projects.

The names of the individual external reviewers and science assessing committee (SAC) members are withheld under the following clauses in the OIA 1982:

- 9(2)(a) protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons; or
- 9(2)(ba) protect information which is subject to an obligation of confidence or which any person has been or could be compelled to provide under the authority of any enactment, where the making available of the information—
 - (i) would be likely to prejudice the supply of similar information, or information from the same source, and it is in the public interest that such information should continue to be supplied; or
- 9(2)(g) maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through—
 - (i) the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any public service agency or organisation in the course of their duty.

The HRC provides external reviewers and SAC members with guidelines regarding conflicts of interest management, to assist in the identification and declaration of potential conflicts of interest and to help evaluate the potential impact of the conflict on the peer review process. More information about this can be found in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the 2020 Peer Review Manual:

https://gateway.hrc.govt.nz/funding/downloads/2020_Peer_Review_Manual.pdf

If you are not satisfied with our response, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi

Professor Sunny Collings
Chief Executive