



RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM

INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

for research into macular disease

commencing in 2021

Applications open:	8th October 2020
Applications close:	5pm AEDT, 31st January 2021
Grant recipient announced:	May 2021

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SECTION A: INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

The Macular Disease Foundation Australia (MDFA), a registered charity, is the only organisation in Australia specifically devoted to supporting and representing people with macular disease. MDFA's mission is to reduce the incidence and impact of macular disease in Australia. This is achieved through the pursuit of five major areas of activity: *education, awareness, support services, representation and research.*

MDFA is offering substantial research grants for researchers with expertise in macular disease to commence major projects in 2021.

The 2021 Macular Disease Foundation Australia Research Grant ("the MDFA grant") will be offered to conduct **research related to macular disease.**

For the MDFA grant, collaboration with other institutions (including those from overseas) is permissible but the Primary Investigator must be based in Australia. Grant payments will be made to the institution of the Primary Investigator (the 'administering institution').

AMOUNT OF FUNDING

A total grant pool of up to \$AU 1,000,000 plus GST will be available. It is anticipated that between 3 to 5 grants of \$AU 200-300,000 for between 1 and 3 years duration will be awarded.

The grant is an agreement between MDFA and the administering institution that specifies financial support for specific researchers to undertake a defined research project.

The 2021 Grant funding commitment may be drawn down on a basis to be agreed between MDFA and the administering institution and will be contingent upon the applicant meeting certain agreed research deliverables.

AREAS OF RESEARCH

Bio-medical: e.g. genetics, risk factors, treatment outcomes, early intervention and prevention, pathogenesis, epigenetics.

Low vision: e.g. incidence/prevalence data, accessibility and affordability of services and support, referral pathways, daily living, independence and psychological wellbeing, national guidelines and accreditation for the delivery of low vision services in Australia, models of care, evaluating and supporting early referral services and adherence/compliance with rehabilitation.

Nutrition, supplements and/or lifestyle: e.g. risk reduction, preventing or attenuating disease progression, impact of diet, supplements and lifestyle interventions, utilisation/adherence to diet/lifestyle recommendations, epigenetics.

Practices and protocols: e.g. best practice for eye health professionals, referral pathways, optimising communication with patients, family and carers.

The Foundation recognises that there is a critical need for macular disease research, with the fundamental goal of reducing the burden of care on patients and the health system. All eligible research grant applications in the area of macular disease are welcome and will be considered by the Grant Review Panel based on merit. Applications focused on the identified areas of strategic importance to MDFA are encouraged by the Panel:

- Dry age-related macular degeneration (pathogenesis; biomarkers/predictors of clinical course; treatments)
- Patient-oriented technological solutions for early detection and home monitoring and management of macular disease (using currently available devices and innovative technologies)
- Models of care and novel strategies to improve access to treatment and care, including strategies for Closing the Gap in macular health.

ELIGIBILITY

- Researchers working in any field of research relevant to macular disease are eligible to apply.
- The Primary Investigator must be based in an Australian institution.
- Co-Investigators may be based in overseas institutions, but are not eligible to draw funds from the grant.
- Primary Investigators must be Australian citizens, permanent residents or, if relevant, be eligible for permanent residency on completion of their studies being undertaken in an Australian university. If the latter, research cannot begin until evidence of permanent residency has been supplied.

- Funding cannot commence until all relevant ethical and other approvals have been obtained and evidence provided to MDFA. If these approvals have not been obtained by 31 January 2022, MDFA reserves the right to withdraw the offer of funding.
- The successful applicant must commence the research no later than 31 January 2022.
- Institutions can submit more than one application, however each applicant should only be named as an investigator on a single grant.
- The administering institution must be registered as an Administering Institution with the NHMRC and/or the ARC.
- The application must be complete and adhere to all eligibility criteria, instructions and guidelines including word limits and formatting. If applicants are unsure of any requirements, they should contact MDFA for clarification.
- Receipt of research grant funding from other sources for the proposed research: If the applicant (or members of the investigator team) intends to submit grant applications to other funding entities for the same or similar research this needs to be disclosed to MDFA at the time of application. In the event that funding is secured from another source, MDFA reserves the right to withdraw funding for the research.
- **The administering institution accepts responsibility for indirect costs of the research and for grant administration. MDFA will not fund indirect research costs, institutional overheads or any institutional administrative charges.**
- Applicants must be willing to enter into the Research Funding Agreement, a reference copy of which can be obtained by contacting research@mdfoundation.com.au.
- Half-yearly progress reports must be completed by the Primary Investigator upon commencement of funding. The final report will be due two months after the project concludes. A report pro forma, provided by MDFA, should be used for the written report. MDFA reserves the right to withhold funding if progress reports are not received by the due date or if progress or research activities deviate significantly from those set out in the funding agreement.
- At six monthly intervals, the Primary Investigator may be asked to make an informal presentation (either in person or via teleconference) to representatives of MDFA.
- Any public dissemination of the research, including publications and conference presentations, requires the written permission of MDFA. Permission will not be unreasonably withheld. Furthermore, presentation of the research in any form or medium is to include acknowledgement of the Macular Disease Foundation Australia.

- MDFA reserves the right to withhold all or part of the 2021 grant (as described in the funding contract).
- All attachments listed in this document (Part 6: Required Attachments) are to be submitted along with the completed application form.
- MDFA may, from time to time and where appropriate, request the recipient to assist with publicity, advocacy or to provide other assistance at special events. The recipient should make all reasonable efforts to assist.
- The recipient must comply with the regulations and requirements of their host institution in relation to leave entitlements, work arrangements, discipline, supervision, equipment, security or other work-related matters. It is not the responsibility of MDFA to provide materials, equipment, supervision, overhead recovery, or any other resources needed to conduct the research.
- The research must conform to relevant standards of ethics, safety and privacy. Applicants must provide evidence of adherence to these standards when requested to do so by the MDFA.

REVIEW PROCESS

Grant applications will be subject to a peer review process. This assessment will be undertaken by suitably qualified reviewers who are independent of MDFA.

Final approval of Grant funding rests with the MDFA Board upon recommendation of MDFA's Research Committee.

Assessment Criteria

✓ Scientific quality of the research proposal (60% weighting)

- The clarity and strength of the research hypotheses, research questions, aims and objectives.
- The strengths and weaknesses of the project's design.
- The clarity and feasibility of the research plan.

✓ Significance of proposed research (10% weighting)

- Potential impact on MDFA's objectives of reducing the incidence and impact of macular disease.
- Potential to increase knowledge about macular disease.
- Potential to be extended into further research of significance.
- Alignment with the research priority areas identified by the MDFA.

✓ Innovation of proposed research (10% weighting)

- The extent to which the proposed work uses an innovative research approach.

✓ Applicant's track record, relative to opportunity (20% weighting)

- Evidence that the investigator/s have the skills and experience to achieve the aims of the research.
- Record of achievement.
- Contribution to their research field.

Additional contributions to the project (financial and in-kind) from the administering institution or other sources will be favourably regarded.

HOW TO APPLY

Applicants are encouraged to contact MDFA prior to submission of an application to register their interest in applying and to seek clarification of questions relating to the application process.

- Applicants are to use the forms which are available at <http://www.mdfoundation.com.au>. As the application form may be updated periodically, it is important for the applicant to ensure that they have downloaded the current version of the application form (finalised at the time of opening of the grant round).

The application form must be completed in accordance with the instructions provided in Section B of this document. Applicants must adhere to the specified formatting guidelines as well as word and page limits. Responses required in the application form should be entered directly into the Microsoft Word document using regular Arial or Helvetica 12 point font (except for references which can be in 10 point font), 2 cm margins and A4 paper. If inserting scanned pages into the Word document, ensure that the font size is equivalent 12 point in the final document.

- Applications open on 8th October 2020 and close at **5pm (AEDT) on 31st January 2021**. Applications are to be submitted electronically via email to research@mdfoundation.com.au. Electronic files should be named with the lead applicant's last name, followed by their first name and the year of application (e.g. Smith_John_MDFA_application_2021). All attachments with the exception of Attachment F ('nomination of possible assessors form') (detailed in Part 6 of this document) should be included along with the completed application form in a single file. Attachment F should be saved as a separate file using the same file naming convention (e.g. Smith_John_MDFA_assessors_2021) and sent in the same email as the remainder of the application. **The total file size of the application and attachments should not exceed 5MB.**
- Once submitted electronically, the application will be considered final and no changes will be accepted.
- Late applications will not be accepted.
- MDFA will email an acknowledgment of receipt of application within two working days. If acknowledgement of receipt is not received within two working days, the applicant should contact MDFA.
- The successful applicant(s) will be contacted directly and also announced on the MDFA website in May 2021. Decisions of the MDFA Board are final and will not be subject to appeal. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing via email. Please note that unsuccessful applicants will not be provided with feedback from the peer review process, grant review panel assessment, MDFA Research Committee or MDFA Board.

- Successful applicants may be contacted for an interview.

Further information

For further information, please contact:

Research Grants Program

Macular Disease Foundation Australia

Ph: (02) 9261 8900

Email: research@mdfoundation.com.au

SECTION B: INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE APPLICATION FORM

PART 1: APPLICANT AND INSTITUTION INFORMATION

This part requests information on the current and former appointments for the primary investigator and co-investigators, as well as details of the proposed host Institution. If the proposed host Institution is not registered as an Administering Institution with the NHMRC and/or the ARC, please contact MDFA to discuss eligibility.

Citizenship status: For the primary investigator, if born in Australia, supply a copy of passport or birth certificate. If born outside Australia, please provide a copy of Australian citizenship certificate, Australian passport or permanent resident certificate. If permanent residency certificate is pending, please provide evidence (Attachment B). Evidence of change of name is required if the name on the documents provided is different from the applicant's name on this application.

Research Environment: The applicant is to describe the host Institution's research environment, and how it will support their research. A description of the facilities available for the project should be included. Address how the research environment will improve the applicant's capacity to conduct macular disease-related research.

PART 2: APPLICANT'S CAPACITY TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH

In reverse chronological order (i.e., most recent first), list publications (peer reviewed only), patents and commercialisation activity, if appropriate, for the primary investigator and up to two co-investigators since 2015. For the list of grants, ensure that full details are provided, including years and amounts.

This part also asks about the applicant's contribution to the field, and contributions to people with macular disease.

Career disruptions: provide details of any career interruptions that may have affected the primary investigator's track record. The MDFA appraises track records in light of opportunity, broadly in accordance with the principles of the NHMRC.

PART 3: PROJECT DETAILS

- This section includes the project title and project summaries. The 'media summary' should be appropriate for the general public and/or the media, using language appropriate for non-experts.
- Copies of human, animal or bio-safety ethics clearances should be attached, if available (Attachment C). Funds will be released to the successful administering Institution when copies of appropriate ethics approvals have been provided to MDFA.
- Conflict of interest: Any actual or potential conflict of interest that the applicant may have in relation to this research must be disclosed in the application. For example, declaration of any support received from, or being sought from, the tobacco industry, any of its agencies or subsidiaries.

PART 4: RESEARCH PLAN

Include a research plan of no more than 8 pages by inserting text into the appropriate boxes in the Microsoft Word application form, in regular 12 point Arial or Helvetica.

References are to be included in the 8 pages, and can be in 10 point font. Applications with Research Plans exceeding 8 pages will not be accepted.

Project Title

Insert the title of the project.

Aims and Background

Provide a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the proposed research, research question and/or hypotheses to be tested. Provide the context and background to the proposed research project. Indicate how the primary research subject and approach fit with existing knowledge and other research currently being undertaken.

Milestones

Milestones for the research should be identified with dates so that progress of the project can be measured. Presentation in the form of a table or Gantt chart is preferred.

Approach

Referring to milestones, please describe the approach to the research, including its design, sampling, techniques, protocols, data analysis procedures (including statistical tests and power calculations, if appropriate). Also describe the procedural checks/auditing that will be used to ensure compliance with the study protocol.

Outcomes and Significance

Describe the ways in which the proposed research is innovative and/or significant. Describe the expected outcomes of the research, including expected outcomes for people with macular disease. Is the project likely to lead to the development of patents and/or the commercialisation of any technology? How will the results of the research be disseminated?

Impact of Research on Aims of MDFA

The Macular Disease Foundation Australia aims to reduce the incidence and impact of macular disease in Australia. Describe how the proposed research project impacts on these aims.

References

References are included within the page count (8 pages). References can be in 10 point font.

PART 5: BUDGET AND BUDGET JUSTIFICATION

Budget

For this application, the budget does not form part of the research plan; hence it is not included in the eight page limit.

Provide a budget for each year of the project (up to three years in total).

The combined cash and in-kind contribution to the project from the administering Institution must be included.

The Grant is exclusive of GST. In the budget table, show the cost of individual items excluding GST. Include GST in the final row of the table as indicated.

Only include items that are essential to the proposed project.

MDFA will not fund indirect research costs, institutional overheads, institutional infrastructure or any institutional administrative charges.

Cash contributions from the Institution are those that are incurred directly to contribute to the proposed project.

In-kind contributions are made without the direct expenditure of cash on the project; they include goods, services, materials or time. Examples include time of existing staff and facilities access.

Ensure that all figures are calculated accurately.

Use the headings provided in the budget tables in the application form. Add or delete rows as required.

Provide a detailed project budget, covering:

- Personnel: (for each personnel request, include details of employment level, hourly rate/salary and percentage of time on project),
- Consumables; itemise consumables into categories such as laboratory reagents, antibodies, postage, printing, survey production costs, software etc.
- Equipment: that is unique to the proposed research project and is essential for the project to succeed. The grant will not fund the purchase of computers unless they are of a specialised nature required for the operation of laboratory equipment.
- Travel: (specify whether for data collection, collaboration and/or dissemination). Please note that travel cost are only funded in exceptional circumstances and when required as part of the project activities.
- Other research costs including research materials.

Budget justification

The budget justification should not exceed one page. Please indicate why a budget item is necessary and what it costs. For travel budget items, explain the necessity for, and timing of, travel, as well as the location.

Other information about budget

Provide details of any other funding sources that have been, or are currently being pursued for this or a similar project. If this project or a similar project has any additional source of funding, explain how it will relate to this Grant. Duplicate funding for research is not permissible and MDFA reserves the right to withdraw funding in the event that other funding is secured for the research.

Provide details of procedures to ensure financial accountability.

PART 6: ATTACHMENTS REQUIRED

Attachment	Requirement	Filename
Attachment A	Coversheet	MDFA Grant 2021 Attachment A (Coversheet).doc to be downloaded from MDFA's website. Please attach this to the FRONT of your application.
Attachment B	Evidence of Australian citizenship or permanent residency (of Primary Investigator)	(Provided by applicant) Australian citizen: If born in Australia, supply a copy of passport or birth certificate. If born outside Australia, please provide a copy of Australian citizenship certificate, Australian passport or permanent resident certificate. If permanent residency certificate is pending, please provide evidence.
Attachment C	Ethics clearances	(Provided by applicant) Please attach copies of human, animal or bio-safety ethics clearances, if available.
Attachment D	Host institution letter	(Provided by applicant) A letter from the proposed host Institution is required to confirm that the institutional support described in this application will be provided if the Grant is awarded.
Attachment E	Certifications	Please ensure that all relevant signatures have been obtained, as required in the Certification form. MDFA Grant 2021 Attachment E (Certifications).doc

Attachment F	Nomination of possible assessors & 'request not to assess' form	<p>This information will be removed from the application before it is given to assessors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p>MDFA Grant 2021 Attachment F (Nomination of Possible Assessors Form).doc</p> <p>At least two potential assessors for the application should be nominated. These assessors will not necessarily be asked to assess the application. Possible assessors must not have a conflict of interest with the Grant applicant or the proposed research. Possible conflicts of interest include collaborations (past or current), working in the same institution and having a close personal relationship.</p> <p>Requests to exclude individuals as potential assessors can also be made on this form. Possible reasons for requesting that an individual not assess the application include: concern that the person may be unreasonably biased, personal conflict or hostility, they are a direct competitor or have a potential conflict of interest.</p> <p>Information about nominated assessors and requests not to assess will be removed from the application before it is given to external assessors, and only individuals involved in the selection of assessors will be made aware of these requests. Confidentiality will be maintained.</p>
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Templates for Attachments A, E and F, mentioned in the above table can be downloaded from MDFA's website at: <http://www.mdfoundation.com.au>