

Victorian allied health research framework

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Allied health research in Victoria

Research is an essential component of allied health practice, and part of the core business of allied health departments in Victoria. Research underpins evidence-based, consumer-centred practice, and it drives quality and safety improvements to deliver world-class health and social care.

Research builds our understanding of the factors that affect the health and wellbeing of individuals and the community. Allied health professionals are highly motivated to develop, analyse, understand and use research to deliver improvements in care for their consumers. An organised and strategic approach to allied health research will help allied health to be more effective and efficient in pursuing, informing and delivering improvement in areas of greatest need for innovation and change.

The *Victorian allied health research framework* (the framework) aims to support and embed a sustainable and vibrant research culture within routine allied health practice. The framework provides a platform from which research capacity-building strategies can be developed, evaluated and sustained, and it identifies the elements necessary for strong allied health research engagement.

Organisations are encouraged to foster deeper engagement in allied health research, recognising the key role that research plays in local quality improvements and safety for consumers, and delivering world class health and social care.

The framework supports strategic decision making and workforce management by policy makers, executives and employees of health and human services, higher education providers and industry partners to ensure integration of research and practice.

The development of the framework has been informed through a systematic review of the literature (Slade, Morris and Philip 2018), qualitative research and expert stakeholder consultation.

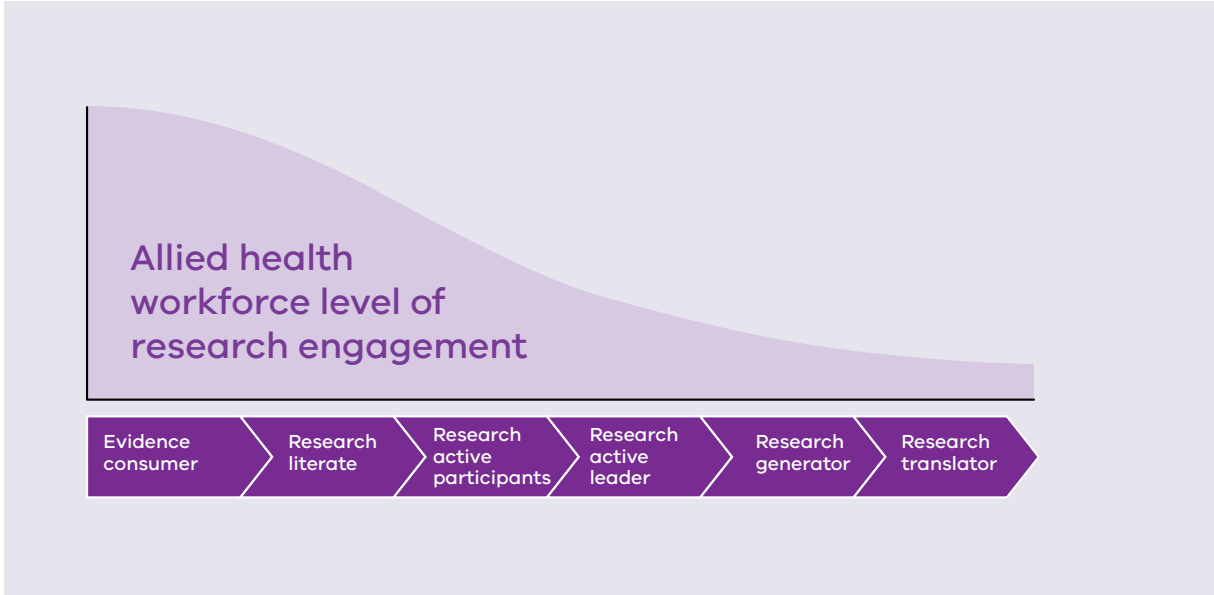


Towards an allied health research culture

The generation and translation of allied health research into practice is the foundation for driving improvements in evidence-based care and clinical and service delivery.

All allied health practitioners have a professional responsibility to engage with research as part of their practice. Engagement may range from understanding and applying the evidence as an evidence consumer, through to actively participating in or leading evidence generation or research translation. The type of engagement will depend on the individual's role, interest and career goals. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The allied health research continuum



Vibrant research cultures are driven by research-focused interactions between allied health practitioners and researchers at different points along the continuum. Implementing the framework is an exciting opportunity for allied health professions to collaborate in building a culture that fosters professional growth, values high-quality care, and builds the capacity of systems and individuals to respond to changing health and social needs

Allied health directors, department heads and senior managers in health and community services have a key role in driving and leading research within their departments. This includes supporting the development of skills, knowledge and attributes necessary for allied health professionals to fully engage in, and meet the professional challenge of, truly embedding and supporting research throughout their organisations.

Principles of the Victorian allied health research framework

The framework is underpinned by four principles:

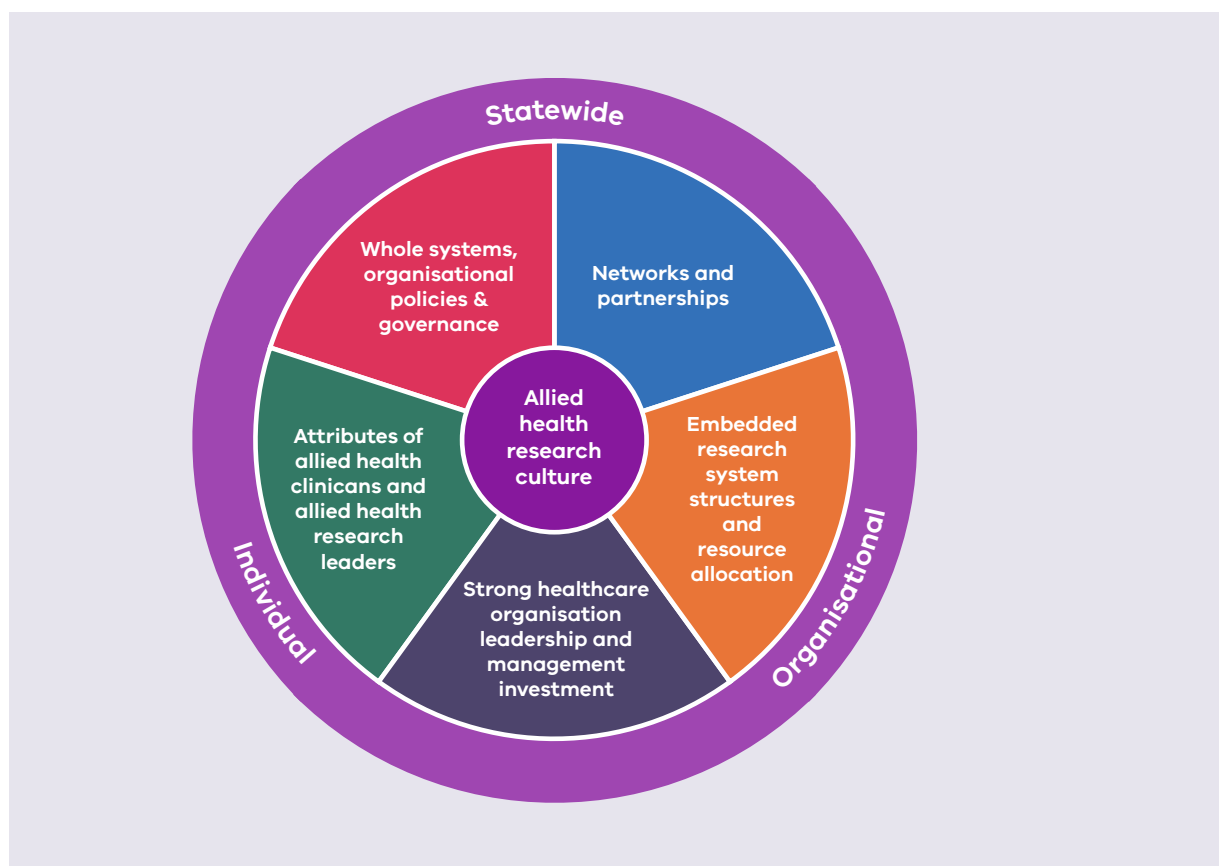
- Research-informed and evidence-based decision making is an essential component of allied health practice, and core business of allied health professions.
- All Victorian allied health professionals participate at different stages of the research continuum to facilitate safe, effective interventions and high-quality consumer outcomes.
- A systems approach will embed an effective and vibrant allied health research culture into health and community services across Victoria.
- Strong relationships and partnerships within and between health and human service organisations and academic institutions build research capacity within organisations and across sectors.

Victorian allied health research framework

The framework is an evidence-based, systems approach that aligns five domains of actions at three levels – statewide, organisational and individual – to embed a vibrant allied health research culture across Victoria.

The framework sets out the key elements necessary to successfully develop, support and sustain effective research engagement and utilisation by allied health professionals as part of their professional responsibility.

Figure 2: The framework



The success of the framework will be evaluated using the research capacity and culture (RCC) tool (Holden et al. 2012) and research performance measures as appropriate.

Domains of action

Networks and partnerships

Research networks and partnerships between health organisations and tertiary and research institutes are important enablers that embed a research culture within allied health (Slade, Morris and Philip 2018).

Networks and partnerships are essential to driving and supporting evidence generation, knowledge exchange, implementation of research outcomes and a sustainable approach to research across Victoria. These relationships align activities and purpose across the state, organisations or professions, improving efficiency, efficacy and innovation in research as researchers collaboratively address critical issues.

Establishing and optimising formal and informal relationships and collaborations between research leaders, allied health directors, senior managers and clinical educators are critical to building a vibrant and sustainable research culture.

Partnerships and collaboration are particularly important in rural areas to enable professional support and resources to foster engagement across the research continuum.

System structures and resource allocation

Research infrastructure and processes are necessary to establish and embed a culture of enquiry and evidence (Slade, Morris and Philip 2018).

Investment of time, resources, and organisational and social supports are necessary to enable a focus on research activities and sustain research engagement, generation and translation.

A sustainable approach ensures organisations and individuals are well placed to reap the benefits of active research engagement, including timely improvements in quality of care for consumers.

Leadership and management

Demonstration and support of research literacy at all organisational levels are essential (Slade, Morris and Philip 2018).

Organisational leadership by those in formal leadership and management roles provides an endorsing environment, enabling and driving research engagement by all allied health professionals.

Organisational executives and allied health leaders must take active steps to ensure research-related activities are supported and endorsed by their organisations, and that the workforce is empowered to build their research capacity through a range of actions. Embedding research as core business into mission statements and strategic plans that align with broad organisation goals encourage and enhance research curiosity and culture.



Systems, policies and governance

Sustainable change requires an environment that supports and values the development, and continuation, of research and evaluation processes (Slade, Morris and Philip 2018).

Policies and organisational procedures that explicitly support and value allied health research are essential to building and sustaining an effective allied health research culture across Victoria. Governance systems and processes should be reviewed ensure they align with the notion of research engagement as part of allied health core business.

Allied health clinician and researcher attributes

All allied health clinicians have a professional responsibility to engage along the research continuum. Active and deliberate support from leaders, organisations and policies enable individual allied health clinicians to progress from non-participation in research to actively engaging along the research continuum (Slade, Morris and Philip 2018).

The point of engagement depends on clinicians' individual factors, including attributes, interest, capability and desired career pathways.

Implementing the framework

The framework is an evidence-based, whole-of-systems approach. Successful implementation requires corresponding actions and support across all five domains at statewide, organisational and individual levels.

Statewide actions

In Victoria, formal networks and partnerships have been established to build allied health research capacity across the state (see Box 1).

Box 1: Networks and partnerships supporting implementation of the framework

Allied Health Research Network

The Allied Health Research Network comprises leading health organisation and academic researchers, providing strategic direction for Victorian allied health research. The network plans and coordinates key research activities, including the biennial Victorian Allied Health Research Conference. Under the framework, the network will be expanded to include the research translation program director and additional members including allied health science professions.

Allied Health Clinical Educators Network

The Allied Health Clinical Educators Network comprises senior clinical educators from across Victoria. Members collaborate to develop and build educational activities to support the professional development needs of allied health clinicians.

Victorian Allied Health Leaders Council and the Directors of Allied Health

These groups work with the Chief Allied Health Advisor to provide statewide allied health strategic leadership and professional development opportunities to existing and emerging allied health leaders.

Allied Health Research Community of Practice

Under the framework, a research community of practice will be established, bringing together research and translation roles to enable effective collaboration. Supported by the research and translation program director, the community of practice will foster research knowledge and activity, provide and share advice on clinical research matters, and support the implementation of evidence-based approaches to capacity building in allied health research.

The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services has invested in building allied health research systems capacity and culture through the *Allied health workforce enhancement plan*. The plan establishes dedicated allied health research and clinical education positions and allied health leadership development programs to build the capability and capacity of the allied health workforce more broadly (see Box 2).



Box 2: The Allied health workforce enhancement plan

Ten Victorian allied health research and translation positions have been established, and are responsible for supporting research and evidence-based practice through building research capacity within or across organisations.

A research and translation program director will be a member of the research network and provide mentoring for the newly created research roles, supporting allied health researchers to establish research careers.

Ten allied health clinical educator positions have been established to support the integration of research outcomes into clinical education programs.

The **enhancement plan steering group** was established to oversee successful implementation of the research and educator positions and ensure they benefit the whole allied health sector. These roles aim to strengthen links and collaborations between health services and universities. They are an exciting opportunity to increase the profile of allied health research, and demonstrate the value of allied health research as core business.

These positions are critical enablers to embedding allied health research within healthcare settings, and will build on Victoria's investments in furthering the productivity and career pathways in research and education roles across diverse allied health professions.

The formal allied health networks across Victoria, together with the positions and entities established through the enhancement plan, aim to facilitate collaboration and build a research culture across and within organisations and professions. This alignment of intent provides the foundation to implement the core aims of the framework.

The following mechanisms (see Box 3) are in place to support implementation of the framework, with key relationships supporting implementation illustrated in Figure 3.

Box 3: Network linkages to support system-wide implementation of the framework

- The research director creates and maintains linkages between the research network, health services, universities and the allied health workforce.
- Relationships between the research network and allied health leaders facilitate knowledge sharing to build research capacity across organisations, and provide a mechanism for the research network to connect with organisation executives and senior management to promote the value of allied health research.
- The research network has strong linkages with academic institutes, health organisations and research centres facilitating promotion of cross-sectoral opportunities for allied health research.
- The research community of practice communicates with the educator's network through the enhancement plan steering committee to share information and align strategic priorities for knowledge translation strategies.

Figure 3: Relationships supporting implementation of the framework





Organisational actions

A truly effective allied health research culture across Victoria requires action and engagement by organisations employing allied health professionals. Support from executive staff to drive and endorse the development, understanding and engagement in research within their area of influence is necessary.

Organisational leaders should understand that building research capacity relies on a research-literate workforce that understands and applies research evidence.

Executive staff and senior managers should consider practical steps across all five domains of the framework to enable organisations to grow their research capacity in cost effective, practical, and sustainable ways, while also maximising their capacity to deliver research and research translation activities. Practical steps may include:

Networks and partnerships

- Establish and strengthen relationships with the research program director and/or allied health research leaders and allied health researchers.
- Ensure communication pathways can support the research engagement.
- Encourage integrated approaches between clinical researchers and clinical educators.
- Build organisational capacity to optimise data and informatics to integrate research and practice and ensure application of locally relevant evidence.
- Collaborate with academic institutes through clinical research positions
- Consider opportunities for partnerships with remote, rural or smaller health services, social care organisations and larger organisations, academic institutes or industry partners, with a view towards building integrated and more effective research and research translation activities.

Structures and resources

- Explicitly include responsibility for engaging in research activities in role descriptions for allied health professionals.
- Articulate research career pathways available within the organisation, and identify strategies to support the development of relevant skills and qualifications.
- Facilitate and leverage relationships between research positions and clinical educators to support the translation of relevant research into practice.
- Use workforce management processes such as quality improvement, documentation and dissemination methodologies to maximise the reach of local research findings.
- Foster research committees or communities of practice.
- Review infrastructure, including access to ethics committees, data and informatics systems, and specialised and academic libraries.

Leadership and management

- Ensure the benefits of dedicated research positions are maximised through establishing partnerships, collaboratively identify research priorities, and develop processes for research outcomes to be translated and used locally.
- Provide or facilitate training and professional development opportunities to develop research-related skills to support the career goals of allied health professionals.
- Embed research as core business into mission statements and strategic plans that align with broad organisational goals.
- Facilitate networks and communities of practice to encourage cross-professional networks, peer support and shared learnings within and across organisations.
- Allocate dedicated time and support to integrate research activities across the research continuum into allied health core duties.
- Implement reward and recognition systems targeted at maximising research and research translation activities.

Systems, policy and governance

- Articulate the research continuum in mission statements and strategic plans at every level of the organisation.
- Appropriately resource organisational research priorities.
- Consider implications of research undertaken and how findings are effectively integrated.
- Analyse research and outcomes with consideration of statewide policy and organisational strategies and priorities.

Clinician and researcher attributes

- Recognise and support attributes including motivation, research orientation and capabilities.
- Develop mentoring capabilities of professionals and increase access to mentoring opportunities and programs in order to sustain the motivation and momentum of individual clinicians.
- Identify and develop research champions, research collaborations and networks, and professional development opportunities that enable the development of individual research capabilities.
- Allied health directors and senior managers are responsible for actions to explicitly support engagement in the allied health research continuum.



Individual

Embedding a research culture requires allied health professionals to embrace research as part of routine practice, and to recognise their professional responsibility to engage with the research continuum throughout their careers.

The point of engagement will vary according to individual role, interest and career goals. Allied health professionals may support, actively participate or lead the research process at different points along the research continuum . This may be as an evidence consumer through to research generator or translator.

To support the framework implementation, individual allied health professionals should:

- engage with a culture of life-long learning and professional development placing value on research activity
- recognise and support colleague’s attributes including motivation, research orientation and capabilities
- generate a culture of knowledge sharing and enquiry.

Attributes of a developed research culture

Developing a vibrant, integrated, and effective research culture across Victorian allied health professionals, professions, and organisations requires investment and dedication from all parts of the allied health sector.

A successful Victorian allied health research culture will demonstrate the following attributes at the statewide, organisational and individual levels.

Statewide attributes and activities

- The Allied Health Research Network provides strategic direction for statewide allied health research, and facilitates engagement in research across Victoria.
- The Victorian allied health research conference is a mechanism to showcase developments and innovations in Victorian allied health research and research translation.
- Allied health research translation positions form vibrant statewide allied health research communities of practice.
- Strategic research partnerships with health organisations, universities and industry partners are established and sustained.
- Strategic partnerships between Victorian Allied Health Leaders Council and the Allied Health Research Network provide important linkages between research and practice.

Organisation-level attributes and activities

- Organisational leaders and managers value and support allied health research culture, and this is reflected in policies, procedures, and systems that embed research as core business.
 - Victorian healthcare organisations collaborate with universities and industry partners.
 - Local governance systems and research structures foster allied health research.
 - Allied health research is reflected in strategic plans, business plans and evaluations.
 - Organisational leadership supports strategies to build research capacity, in alignment with translational research positions.
 - Research responsibilities are explicitly defined in allied health job descriptions.
 - Researcher roles at all levels of seniority are supported as a key allied health career stream.
 - Consumers are engaged throughout the allied health research continuum.
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Individual attributes and activities

- Allied health professionals are research literate, and effectively use current and relevant research findings and activities in their routine work.
- Allied health professionals engage in the research continuum appropriately for their role and position, including translating evidence or collaborating with research translators to maintain evidence-based practice.
- Individuals participate in research networks to share and build knowledge and expertise.
- Individuals value research, and prioritise it when developing skills, expertise, collaborations and partnerships.

Engagement in the research continuum at all levels, by all parts of the allied health sector will deliver long term benefits to patients, clients, and the broader health and community services system by ensuring allied health professionals use the very best care, technologies and techniques.

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