Research framework principles

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) has been established to lead and coordinate national improvements in the safety and quality of health care. The Commission must use the best available information to support its programs and to develop new policies and programs that will drive improvements in the safety and quality of health care. It has developed a research framework which provides a systematic approach to how it will use research evidence to support its work. This document is a public statement of the principles outlined in the research framework.

The research framework has been developed to be cognisant of the Commission’s particular role and operating environment. The Commission:

- Is not a research organisation and does not have a specific research budget
- Has a modest operating budget and small number of staff, and must therefore harness existing knowledge in a strategic way so that it directly supports its work programs.
- Requires the capacity to access the best available evidence rapidly to feed into its decisions about policy and programs in a timely manner
- Must comply with the Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines and the procurement requirements of the Department of Health and Ageing.

As a small, knowledge-based organisation with a role primarily in influencing other agencies, the Commission must take a strategic approach to using research evidence. In all of its activities, the Commission will therefore:

- Use the best available evidence to plan, implement and evaluate its programs.
- Regularly identify and prioritise its needs for evidence.
- Develop strategies to make best use of existing research, including supporting reviews of research.
- Not support investigator initiated research outside of its priorities, but may support investigator-initiated proposals within its research priorities.
- Commission new research focused on its own identified priorities, as required.
- Seek to influence the allocation of additional funds for safety and quality research.
- Maximise the value of the Commission’s work by establishing close partnership with researchers
- Support or collaborate only in research of the highest scientific quality
- Support public reporting of research outcomes from the Commission’s work and disseminate research findings to maximise health system penetration.
- Ensure that its programs to identify and generate relevant research comply with principles of good governance, accountability and value for money.
The Commission’s research framework consists of four components:

1. A strategic approach to the Commission’s use of research evidence, including a goal, objectives and principles
2. A method for identifying and prioritising the Commission’s research needs
3. A set of strategies to achieve the Commission’s objectives for the use of research evidence to support its priorities and programs
4. Guidelines for the management of the Commission’s research activities.

This document focuses on the first and fourth components of the Commission’s research framework, so that researchers who are working or may work with the Commission can have a clear understanding of the Commission’s approach.

Goal and objectives

The goal of the Commission’s research framework is that:

The Commission uses evidence from research to ensure that its work is as effective as possible in improving the quality and safety of health care in Australia, within the resources available.

In achieving this goal, the Commission will address four strategic objectives:

**Objective 1:** To identify areas where research evidence could make the most difference

**Objective 2:** To ensure that existing research evidence is used optimally

**Objective 3:** To establish new research to contribute to program planning and evaluation

**Objective 4:** To assist in building national and international knowledge about quality and safety in healthcare

Management of the Commission’s research activities

In identifying existing evidence and commissioning new evidence the Commission will adhere to the following guidelines:

1. **Identifying priorities for research**
   The Commission will be proactive in determining its priorities for research, and will advertise the priorities through procurement processes or publication on the Commission website. The Commission will **not** accept investigator-initiated research proposals that fall outside of its research priorities.

2. **Defining the type of project**
   At the outset of the process, the Commission will determine whether a research project or review will be independent or collaborative research as follows:

   **(a) Independent research:** In an independent research program the involvement of the Commission is restricted to the development of the tender, contract establishment and management. This approach is likely to be appropriate when the work of the Commission is being evaluated and in areas in which Commission staff cannot add significant value.
(b) Collaborative research: In a collaborative research program, the Commission works closely with researchers in the design and implementation of the research. This approach is likely to be appropriate when the Commission staff can add considerable value and expertise to the project, where an iterative development of the research design and deliverables is necessary or where multiple research institutions are required to work together.

The Commission will describe the nature of the business arrangements in procurement documents and contracts. In the case of collaborative research this will include clear descriptions of the roles and involvement of Commission staff.

3. Refining the question
The Commission will seek to make the research question as specific as possible to focus the work and get the best possible outcome. An internal brokerage process, and in some cases an external broker or an independent technical expert, will be used to refine the research question. The Commission may also use consultative processes to seek input from researchers and stakeholders to ensure that the question is tightly framed and feasible.

4. Selection of researchers
The Commission adheres to the Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines in all its activities, including in obtaining research. This will often involve conducting tenders or approaching its panels of preferred suppliers. Sometimes selection and contract arrangements may be via another government body with which the Commission has a Memorandum of Understanding.

The procurement documents will specify whether the project is independent or collaborative research.

Proposals for Commission participation in NHMRC Partnerships, ARC Linkage Grants and other co-funded awards from researchers will be considered if they meet the Commission’s research needs. The Commission will publish a list of areas in which it is willing to examine proposals for partnership on its website.

5. Working with the researcher or reviewer
For all research, the contract for services will provide guidance on the scope, timelines and deliverables for the work. These details may cover: the in-kind support available; mechanisms for engagement through a steering group or commission investigator, interaction and reporting requirements during the research and arrangements for publication and the dissemination of results. In the case of collaborative research it will include clear descriptions of the roles and involvement of Commission staff.

6. Publishing and disseminating the research findings
The Commission considers that publishing in the scientific literature is an important means of disseminating research findings. While the Commission may at times commission research to inform its own internal work that will not be published, or may release information from work it has funded within timelines that suit its needs, the Commission believes these restrictions on publication will be the exception rather than the rule. The arrangements for publication and the dissemination of results will be clearly specified in the contract for services.