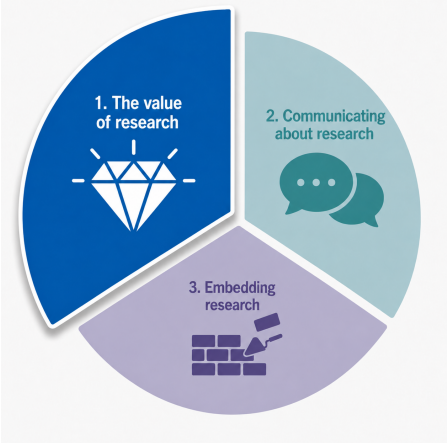
EnableR | Leaders Enable Research

Research to impact

The value of research



This document provides support for leaders to understand the impact of research and potential benefits to health services.

What is research impact?

Research impact refers to “the effect of research after it has been adopted, adapted for use, or used to inform further research. Research impact also includes research that leads to a decision not to use a particular diagnostic, treatment or health policy” (National Health and Medical research Council, NHMRC, no date).

The NHMRC recognises four categories of research impact:

- Knowledge (contribution to new knowledge),
- Health (outcomes that improve health and healthcare delivery),
- Economic (identification of cost savings and improved resource use), and
- Social (improvements in the health of society, including wellbeing).

For more detailed information about the four categories, please refer to: https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/research-translation-and-impact/research-impact.

Why consider impact when planning research?

Research impact is increasingly recognised as an important outcome of research projects. Health leaders can support their team and leverage the benefits of research by aligning research activities with service priorities.

How can research impact health services?

Service Impact Category	Impact definition, alignment to impact types and example
Service Efficiency and Resource Optimisation	Research outcomes can identify how to streamline operational workflows, reduce inefficiencies, and maximise the use of existing resources. This can lower operational costs whilst maintaining or improving service output, capacity and patient flow. Economic: Reduces healthcare expenditure, optimises staff or resource allocation. Health: Improves health outcomes through reduced waitlist times and/or improved service capacity to see and treat patients. Knowledge: Generates insights and benchmarks for health service management and optimisation. *Example*: A health service research project evaluates a new triaging and early-discharge pathway, demonstrating that a novel change in workflow reduces hospital length of stay without increasing readmission rates. This improves bed capacity and reduces operational burdens associated with longer length of stay.
Improved Quality of Care	Research outcomes are focused on improving models of care and elevated care standards. This results in improved patient outcomes, fewer adverse events and readmissions, and higher rates of health recovery. Health: Improves health outcomes for patients. Knowledge: Advances clinical science knowledge through evaluating the efficacy of health model interventions. Social: Improves patient satisfaction, confidence in the public health system, and quality of life. *Example*: A health service evaluates a health screening tool which finds a subsequent reduction in hospital readmissions, and improved patient health outcomes and clinical recovery.
Enhanced Patient Experience and Shared Decision-Making	Research focused on patient-reported measures ensures service delivery is patient-centric, culturally safe, and aligned with consumer values, leading to higher patient engagement. Social: Empowers consumers (patients), improves patient health literacy, aligns public services with community needs. Health: Higher patient engagement and adherence to care and treatments, correlating with improved long-term health management. Knowledge: New qualitative data regarding patient-centred care models. *Example*: A service undertakes research to understand why patients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are less likely to attend follow-up appointments. The research outcomes lead to co-design of multilingual, culturally responsive care models, improving follow-up attendance and patient-reported confidence in the service.

Equity of Access	Research outcomes identify systemic barriers to care, ensuring equitable access to health services. Social: Enables health equity by identifying and dismantling barriers for underserved groups. Health: Reduces disease prevalence or progression in underserved groups. Economic: Reduces or removes preventable hospital presentations and admissions through proactive, accessible community care. *Example*: A research project evaluates a hybrid telehealth / standard in-person clinic model for rural communities, proving that the hybrid model is as effective as the in-person model; the hybrid model also reduces waitlists and improves attendance by patients who live further away from clinic location.
System-Wide Scalability	Local research provides data to influence state or national health policies through the scaling a particular health model. Knowledge: Research findings provide evidence to influence state or national guidelines. Economic: Findings identify disinvestment in ineffective practices and investment in a higher health model reduces organisational costs and improves patient outcomes. Social and Health: Policy change enables large patient populations to benefit from an improved model of care. *Example*: A health service conducts a multi-year study on the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of a novel model of care. The research outcomes demonstrate improvements in service efficiency, reduction in costs, and improved associated health outcomes. The findings are acknowledged at the health system level and considered for scale and spread to all relevant services within the system.

Reference

National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (no date). Research impact position statement. https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/research-translation-and-impact/research-impact (Accessed 26 May 2026).