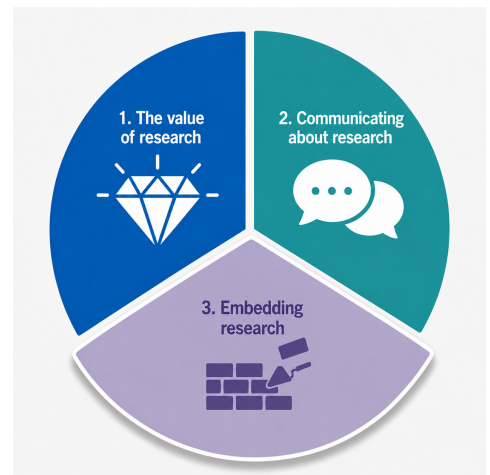


Professional Development Plans (PDPs)

Embedding research



Embedding research into clinical roles strengthens service quality, workforce capability, and staff engagement. Supporting research engagement with a Professional Development Plan (PDP) is one of the simplest, most effective strategies to move research from an optional extra to 'business as usual'.

A Personal Development Plan (PDP) that supports the clinician-researcher will balance clinical duties with research, allowing career growth without relinquishing patient care. The PDP can:

- Normalise research as part of clinical practice
- Identify staff interest and readiness for research
- Set realistic, role-aligned research goals
- Link staff with supports, training, and opportunities
- Track progress and celebrate contributions.

Key elements of an effective PDP research discussion include interest and motivation, research experience, career development goals, mentorship and support needs, opportunities for protected time, and development of research-related skills and knowledge.

Steps to embed research into a PDP

1. Start with curiosity

Open the conversation to explore interest and confidence. Treat research broadly, e.g.: *Have you ever been involved in research, audit, or quality improvement?*

2. Assess readiness

Recognise where your staff member is on their research journey and align goals to their level (see Appendix 1 for research stages and related aims).

3. Set SMART, role-aligned goals

Specific	Clearly state the expectation
Measurable	Define outputs
Achievable	Fits within service, workload and capability
Relevant	Linked to clinical priorities
Time-bound	Include clear milestones

(see Appendix 2 for SMART goal examples relevant to each stage of the journey.)

4. Identify supports and enablers

Use the PDP to explicitly document:

- Mentorship or supervision
- Administration support
- Training (e.g. short courses, journal clubs)
- Quarantined time
- Data collection and analysis
- Access to research or implementation teams

5. Link to service priorities

Connecting goals to strategic priorities reinforces that research is core business rather than an optional extra. Connect individual goals to organisational impact:

- Safety and quality priorities
- Accreditation standards
- Service improvement initiatives
- Strategic and operational plans

6. Review

Include check-ins in routine performance conversations to explore progress made, barriers that have emerged, and support needed. Adjust goals if necessary – flexibility improves follow-through.

7. Showcase success

Celebrate your team's success – recognition motivates and shapes culture.

Reinforce engagement by acknowledging:

- Participation in projects
- Presentations or posters
- Improvements to patient care
- Publications or reports

Common barriers – and how to address them

Barrier	What you can do as a leader
No time	• Support small, realistic goals • Advocate for protected time • Support staff to apply for grant funding for offline research time
Lack of confidence	• Encourage team-based participation • Normalise the learning journey
Unclear pathways	• Connect staff with research leads or existing projects
Competing priorities	• Align research goals with service needs
Limited skills	• Direct staff to targeted, practical training

Takeaway Tips

- Anchor goals to real projects, not hypothetical ones
- Keep scope small and achievable (especially early)
- Pair every goal with named support
- Ensure goals fit within existing workload realities
- Revisit and refine at regular check-ins

Not every clinician needs to be a researcher, but you do need a workforce that can engage with, apply, and contribute to evidence. The PDP is one of the most practical levers to make that happen.

APPENDIX 1: Stages of Research Readiness and Aims

Level	Example aim
Beginner	• Undertake introductory training in research or evidence-based practice relevant to your clinical area or interests (e.g. short course, graduate certificate). • Join a journal club related to your clinical area and/or interests. • Align research capacity-building activities (e.g. journal clubs, workshops) with your clinical area or service priorities. • Attend local or discipline-specific research forums or events. • Learn about different types of research impact and how research impact is measured or reported locally.
Emerging proficiency	• Undertake training in research design, research translation or research impact. • Engage in literature review or critical appraisal activities linked to your clinical area with help from a librarian or research expert. • Find a research mentor or supervisor within your service or professional discipline to discuss ideas for practice improvement or research. • Attend health service led research forums to see how local clinicians establish practice-relevant research projects and programs. • Support or co-lead a small-scale Quality Improvement (QI) project or translating research into practice (TRIP) project in your local setting.
Consolidating to establishing proficiency	• Pursue training in advanced research methodologies, such as complex statistical analyses or specialised qualitative frameworks. • Actively and regularly participate in established research groups, collaborative networks, or committees. • Mentor early-career clinicians in developing their own research skills and balancing clinical and research roles. • Lead multidisciplinary teams through TRIP processes in response to new and relevant evidence. • Lead larger-scale evaluations of clinical services to demonstrate the value of research in a healthcare business context. • Contribute to the development and review of local research policy / procedures.
Advanced to expert proficiency	• Undertake advanced training in implementation science or research translation to strengthen skills in leading system-wide change. • Lead or contribute to advisory committees that support the translation of research evidence into health service policy or practice. • Facilitate and secure funding to support research programs. • Present research findings at organisational, national, or international forums. • Support colleagues to engage in research activities to build research capacity. • Facilitate workshops, mentoring, or forums that support the translation of research evidence into local policy and practice. • Promote a positive research culture by advocating for the role of research in improving health service performance, quality, and patient outcomes.

APPENDIX 2: SMART Goals Examples for Clinicians Engaging in Research

Beginner (Exposure and Participation)

For clinicians new to research

Goal: Join a project	<i>By 30 June, join an existing clinical audit or research project within the service and attend at least 2 project meetings, with documented contribution to one agreed task (e.g. data collection or recruitment).</i>
Goal: Complete foundational training	<i>By 31 May, complete a recognised introductory research training (e.g. Good Clinical Practice or local research fundamentals module) and summarise 3 key learnings with my manager.</i>
Goal: Identify a clinical question	<i>By 30 April, identify and document one clinical question from my practice and discuss its feasibility as a research, audit, or quality improvement project with a senior clinician or research lead.</i>

Emerging Proficiency (Active Contribution)

For clinicians with some exposure

Goal: Data collection and management	<i>Between May–August, collect and accurately enter data for a minimum of 15 patients/records for an approved project, meeting all governance and data quality requirements.</i>
Goal: Literature engagement	<i>By 31 July, complete a focused literature search on an agreed topic and provide a 1-page summary of findings to the project team.</i>
Goal: Present locally	<i>By 30 September, deliver a 10-minute presentation at a team meeting on the project's aim, methods, and preliminary findings.</i>

Consolidating to Establishing Proficiency (Project Ownership Elements)

For clinicians ready to lead components

Goal: Lead a small audit or QI project	<i>By 31 October, design and complete a small-scale clinical audit (including aim, method, data collection, and summary of findings) aligned with a service priority, with support from a supervisor.</i>
Goal: Ethics/governance contribution	<i>By 31 August, contribute to the preparation of a research governance or ethics application (e.g. draft one section such as methodology or data management plan) under supervision.</i>
Goal: Implement a change based on findings	<i>By 30 November, work with the team to implement at least one practice change informed by project findings and evaluate its impact over a 4-week period.</i>

Advanced to Expert Proficiency (Leadership and Dissemination)

For clinicians building research leadership

Goal: Develop a research proposal	<i>By 30 September, develop a written research or evaluation proposal (including background, aims, and methods) suitable for internal review or submission.</i>
Goal: Disseminate findings	<i>By 30 November, submit an abstract to a local/state conference or prepare a manuscript draft for publication with the project team.</i>
Goal: Mentor others	<i>Between July–December, provide guidance to at least one junior staff member participating in a research or audit project, with monthly check-ins documented.</i>

APPENDIX 3: PDP Goals Relevant to the Clinician-Researcher Journey

Core Objectives

Bridge Clinical and Research Roles:	Act as a "bridge" to translate clinical problems into research questions and implement evidence-based practices.
Protected Time:	Secure dedicated time (e.g., 0.2–0.4 FTE) for research activities.
Capacity Building:	Develop research skills, including grant writing, ethics applications, and methodology.
Mentorship:	Establish connections with established senior researchers to guide career development.

Key Development Areas

Research Skills:	Attend workshops on study design, statistical analysis, or health service research methods.
Governance & Ethics:	Gain proficiency in navigating ethical regulatory processes, identified as a key barrier to research engagement.
Grant Funding:	Apply for fellowship programs or research grants to support protected time.
Dissemination:	Present research findings at national conferences or publish in peer-reviewed journals to increase visibility.

Support Structure

Supervision:	Receive guidance from senior researchers, particularly in early career stages.
Mentoring and Leadership:	Develop leadership capabilities within the clinical-research interface.

Review and Evaluation

Appraisal:	Regularly discuss progress with an appraiser to set realistic, actionable targets.
Research Ready Audits:	Use tools to measure research capacity and progress.