



RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM 2027

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (STAGE 1)

INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

Applications open:	7 th September 2026
Applications close:	11 th October 2026 – 11:59pm AEDT
Successful applicants notified:	30 th November 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section A: MDFA’s RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM	3
Background.....	3
MDFA’s Research Grants Program	3
Aims of MDFA’s Research Grant Program.....	3
Objectives of MDFA’s Research Grants Program.....	3
Areas of research.....	4
MDFA’s grant types.....	5
MDFA Research Grant.....	5
Grant Family Fund award	5
Eligibility for MDFA grants	5
Applying for an MDFA grant	6
EOI application review process	7
EOI grant assessment criteria	7
Further information about the application process	8
Section B: EOI APPLICATION FORM.....	9
Part 1: Applicant and Institution information	9
Part 2: Applicant’s capacity to conduct the research	9
Part 3: Project summary and research plan.....	10

Section A: MDFA's RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM

Background

Macular Disease Foundation Australia (MDFA), a registered charity, is the national peak body dedicated to supporting and representing the estimated 1.9 million Australians who live with a macular disease.

MDFA's mission is to reduce the impact of macular disease in Australia through our pillars of work:

- Community awareness and early detection
- Support and care for people living with macular disease and their families
- Advocacy – representing the voice of the community
- Research – growing the knowledge and evidence base to improve outcomes for people with macular disease.

MDFA's Research Grants Program

MDFA is currently the largest funder of macular and retinal disease research outside of Government.

Since 2011, MDFA has invested \$7.2 million in world-leading Australian research, with the aim of reducing the impact of macular and retinal diseases, finding new treatments and ultimately, cures.

Thanks to the generous support of the macular disease community through donations, gifts and bequests, MDFA is again offering grants for researchers with expertise in macular and retinal diseases to commence major projects in 2027.

Aims of MDFA's Research Grant Program

MDFA's Research Grant Program aims to:

- Support research projects that maximise outcomes that further MDFA's mission to reduce the impact of macular disease for people living with a macular or retinal condition.
- Establish MDFA as a centre of excellence and a respected leader in research involving macular and retinal disease – nationally and globally.
- Understand the medical and social impacts of macular disease on the community.
- Fund research projects in an ethical, responsible and sustainable manner which is collaborative, and keeps people impacted by a macular or retinal condition at the heart of the research.

Objectives of MDFA's Research Grants Program

The MDFA Research Grants Program's core objective is to deepen the understanding of macular and retinal diseases, including but not limited to their causes and management.

This is achieved via funding rigorous high-quality research that withstands professional and scientific scrutiny.

To ensure sustainability of the program, other objectives include funding:

- an appropriate spread of high quality, rigorous research across both medical and social impact-focused projects
- early career as well as more experienced researchers
- short-term initiatives (1 year) and longer-term projects (up to 3 years)
- projects or initiatives that can be leveraged to enhance MDFA's reputation, and broaden the level of awareness of macular and retinal diseases and related issues
- applications that will challenge thinking, advance knowledge and help bring hope to the macular and retinal disease community.

Areas of research

Macular and retinal diseases are a leading cause of vision loss, with profound impacts on individuals, families, communities, and the health system across Australia.

MDFA is therefore committed to funding research that can help prevent vision loss, improve quality of life, and ultimately reduce the burden both on people living with a macular or retinal disease and on the health, disability and aged care systems.

We invest in innovative, high-impact research across all macular and retinal diseases, spanning prevention, early detection, diagnosis, treatment, and new and/or collaborative models of care.

MDFA is particularly interested in research with the potential to deliver meaningful and measurable benefits for people living with a macular or retinal disease, and to drive lasting improvements in eye health care and vision outcomes.

We welcome applications across a broad range of research disciplines, including but not limited to:

Biomedical and epidemiological research

Research that advances understanding of macular and retinal disease causes, pathogenic mechanisms, genetics, risk factors, prevalence, prevention, and the discovery, development and testing of new therapies.

Low vision research

Research that develops and tests new technologies, or low vision devices and supports for people living with vision loss due to a macular or retinal disease, to enhance everyday functioning, and increase independence and wellbeing to achieve the best possible quality of life.

Clinical practice and models of care

Research that transforms and improves patient outcomes by advancing diagnostic techniques, early intervention, improving best-practice referral and treatment pathways, and developing effective, collaborative, person-centred models of care that support individuals, families and carers living with a macular or retinal disease.

Note: Whilst the MDFA Research Grants Program does not fund research directly or indirectly undertaken by medical or pharmaceutical companies, research into potential treatments discovered and/or tested by academic researchers in a research environment that may in future go on to be developed by a medical or pharmaceutical company would be considered.

MDFA's grant types

In 2027, MDFA will be awarding two grant types: MDFA Research Grants, and Grant Family Fund awards.

MDFA Research Grant

The MDFA Research Grants provide up to **\$200,000** for macular and retinal disease research projects that fall into the research areas listed above, over a total duration of up to **3 years**.

Grants that will foster cross-disciplinary and/or inter-institutional collaborations are particularly encouraged.

All eligible EOI applications will be assessed by MDFA's Research Grants Committee, made up of macular and retinal disease experts and researchers.

Based on the merits of submitted applications, and the available funds, MDFA may choose to award multiple research grants in Stage 2 of the funding round.

Grant Family Fund award

With the generous support of the Grant Family Fund, eligible early-career researchers, who have not yet secured a substantial grant NHMRC grant or equivalent, may apply for up to **\$50,000** for macular disease research projects of up to **1 year** in duration.

The Grant Family Fund awards provide a unique opportunity for early-career researchers to explore imaginative "blue-sky" research that may otherwise struggle to attract conventional funding, and test potentially transformative concepts to generate discoveries that could open entirely new avenues in macular and retinal disease research.

All eligible EOI applications will be assessed by MDFA's Research Grants Committee, comprising macular disease experts and researchers.

Based on the merit of applications received and the funds available, MDFA may choose to give multiple Grant Family Fund awards in Stage 2 of the funding round.

Eligibility for MDFA grants

All proposed Expression of Interest (EOI) research projects, regardless of which grant type is being applied for, must meet the following eligibility criteria in order to be assessed:

- The Primary Investigator:
 - must be an Australian citizen or Australian permanent resident at the time of submission.
 - must be based in Australia at an Australian institution. Co-Investigators may be based in overseas institutions but are not eligible to draw funds from the grant.
- Research applicants can only be named as the Primary Investigator on a single application for an MDFA Research Grant or Grant Family Fund award, but not both.
- **Primary Investigators must not currently hold another active MDFA grant of any type.**
- Research institutions may submit more than one application.

- The administering institution must be registered as an Administering Institution with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and/or the Australian Research Council (ARC).
- The application must be complete and adhere to all eligibility criteria, instructions and guidelines, including word limits and formatting.
- If the applicant (or members of the investigator team) is in receipt of funding from other sources or intends to submit grant applications to other funding entities for the same or very similar research, this must be disclosed to MDFA at the time of application. In the event funding is secured from another source, MDFA reserves the right to withdraw the application for funding.

If applicants are unsure of any eligibility requirements, please contact MDFA for clarification **prior to** applying by emailing: research@mdfoundation.com.au

Applying for an MDFA grant

Stage 1: Submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) application

Expression of Interest applications open on **7 September 2026**.

Applications close at **11:59 pm on 11 October 2026**.

Late applications will not be accepted.

Please note that in order to progress to Stage 2 – submitting a full grant application, an EOI application must be submitted to MDFA in Stage 1 AND be successful.

Applicants are encouraged to contact MDFA to seek clarification on any questions relating to the application process **BEFORE** applying.

1. Applicants must use the Expression of Interest application form available at: [Apply for an MDFA Research Grant](#)
2. 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.
3. Applications must be submitted as a **Word document** via email to: research@mdfoundation.com.au

The total file size of the application and attachments should not exceed 5MB.

4. Electronic files should be named with the lead applicant's last name, followed by their first name, type of grant, Stage i.e. EOI, and year of application. See examples below:

MDFA Research Grant (MDFARG): e.g. Smith_Jane_MDFARG_EOI_2027

Grant Family Fund award (GFF): e.g. Smith_John_GFF_EOI_2027

5. Once submitted, the application will be considered final, and no further changes will be accepted after the closing date, unless this is specifically requested by MDFA.
6. MDFA reserves the right to reject incomplete applications.
7. MDFA will email an acknowledgment of receipt of an application within two working days. If acknowledgement of receipt is not received within five working days, the applicant should contact MDFA.
8. EOI applicants may be contacted for further information if any clarifications are required by MDFA or the Research Grants Committee.

9. Successful EOI applicants will be contacted directly by MDFA in late November 2026 and invited to enter Stage 2 of the grant application process and submit a full grant application for a Macular Disease Foundation Research Grant or a Grant Family Fund award, as applicable.
10. Unsuccessful applicants at Stage 1 will be notified by MDFA of the outcome of their application via email, but will not receive feedback from the MDFA Research Grant Committee.

EOI application review process

All eligible Stage 1 Expression of Interest applications will be subject to scientific peer review by MDFA's Research Grants Committee, made up of macular disease experts and researchers.

Successful applicants will be invited to enter stage 2, to complete and submit a full grant application.

Applications undergoing Stage 2 will undergo rigorous full peer review by Australian and/or international experts, in addition to MDFA's Research Grants Committee.

Applications at Stage 2 will also be assessed by trained members of the macular disease community including people with macular disease, their family members, carers and others with lived experience of vision loss.

Final approval of MDFA Research Grant funding after Stage 2 rests with the MDFA Board upon recommendation by MDFA's Research Grants Committee.

EOI grant assessment criteria

MDFA Research Grants and Grant Family Fund awards

Scientific quality of the research proposal

All applications will be assessed in terms of, but not limited to, the following:

- The clarity, strength and relevance of the research hypothesis, and project aims.
- Is the research plan informed and supported by the existing literature/evidence-base?
- The strengths, weaknesses and appropriateness of the proposed methods to deliver on the aims of the research.
- The relevance and significance of the proposed outcome measures.
- The clarity and feasibility of the research plan.
- The appropriateness of the researchers to successfully support and deliver the research project.

Significance of proposed research

Applications may be assessed in terms of, but not limited to, the following

- Potential of the outcomes/findings of this research to increase knowledge about macular or retinal disease.
- Potential of this research to benefit people with a macular or retinal disease.
- Potential of the outcomes/findings to contribute to MDFA's objectives of reducing the impact of the macular or retinal disease being investigated.
- Potential for this research to be extended into further research projects or translated into clinical and/or public health practice or policy.
- Alignment with the research areas identified by MDFA.

Innovation of proposed research

All applications, but particularly Grant Family Fund award applications, will be assessed in terms of, but not limited to, the following criteria:

- Is the proposed research truly new/novel or creative?
- Will the research contribute to current knowledge, or transform practices in this field of research?
- How well does the proposal describe the new ideas, procedures, and/or technologies?

Consumer involvement

Applications may be assessed in terms of, but not limited to, the following aspects:

- How the macular disease community have been either considered or consulted with in the design of the research project.
- How consumers will be involved throughout the project.

Note: we expect the level of consumer involvement to vary depending on the nature of the research.

Successful grant applications – Stage 2

If a grant is awarded to a successful applicant **after the completion of Stage 2**:

1. The administering institution must accept 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.
2. The grant holder, or Authorised Representative, must enter into, and comply with, a formal legal Research Agreement with MDFA.
3. Progress reports (half yearly and a final report on completion) must be completed by the Primary Investigator upon commencement of funding.
4. The Primary Investigator may be asked to present their research to representatives of MDFA, the MDFA Research Grants Committee, and/or the MDFA community.
5. Grant recipients must advise MDFA in advance of any public dissemination of the research, including publications and conference presentations, or any other form or medium. All presentations and publications must acknowledge the funding provided by MDFA in accordance with ethical publication practices.
6. MDFA may, from time to time and when appropriate, request that the grant recipient assist with publicity, advocacy or to attend or present their work at special MDFA events. The recipient should make all reasonable efforts to assist.
7. The grant recipient must comply with the regulations and requirements of their host institution. It is not the responsibility of MDFA to provide materials, equipment, supervision, overhead recovery, or any other resources needed to conduct the research.
8. The research must conform to relevant standards of ethics, safety and privacy. Applicants must provide evidence of adherence to these standards if requested to do so by MDFA.

Further information about the application process

For further information, please email: research@mdfoundation.com.au

Section B: EOI APPLICATION FORM

Notes for applicants:

1. Please provide sufficient information and justification in your application to enable the MDFA Research Grant Committee to make a competitive assessment.
2. When completing the application, applicants should use language that is accessible to a non-expert in the field.
3. Where possible, please avoid using acronyms or abbreviations, and provide succinct and clear definitions or explanations of any technical terms throughout the application.

Part 1: Applicant and Institution information

This part requests information about the Primary Investigator and Co-Investigators applying for the grant, including their qualifications, current and previous appointments, and details of the proposed host Institution.

If the proposed host Institution is not registered as an Administering Institution with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and/or the Australian Research Council (ARC), please contact MDFA to discuss eligibility.

Australian citizenship or permanent residency

The primary investigator must be an Australian citizen or permanent resident at the time of the grant application. Evidence to support residency status must be provided on request and will be required from candidates who are successful in Stage 2 prior to any offer of funding.

Part 2: Applicant's capacity to conduct the research

Principal Investigator experience and contributions to the field

This part asks about the applicant's relevant experience and contribution to the macular disease and/or retinal disease field.

Current and previous grant awards

Please provide full details of current and previous research grant awards, including any MDFA grants for the Principal Investigator, in the last 3 years.

Please list year of award, source of funding, project title, amount awarded, and duration of funding. Please list most recent grant awards first.

Conflict of Interest

Please provide details of any actual or potential conflict of interest that any of the grant applicants may have that are related to this research project.

For example, please declare any working or personal relationships with MDFA Research Committee or Board members, representation on Pharmaceutical company boards or committees, or possession of any shares or financial interests related to the research. Further information on examples of conflicts of interest can be found here: [Policy on the Disclosure of Interests Requirements for Prospective and Appointed NHMRC Committee Members](#)

Part 3: Project summary and research plan

This section includes the project title and project summary and research plan.

Type of grant being applied for

Please indicate the type of grant you are applying for (i.e. MDFA Research Grant, or Grant Family Fund award), by checking the relevant box on the application form.

Total grant amount being requested

Please include the **total grant amount (excluding GST) being requested**.

This total amount should include the following as relevant:

1. Personnel: total cost of the personnel involved (based on hourly rate/salary and percentage of time on project).
2. Consumables: including laboratory reagents, software, etc if relevant.
3. Equipment: 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 for this specific project.
4. Travel: (specify whether for data collection, collaboration and/or dissemination). Please note that travel costs are funded only in exceptional circumstances and when required as part of the research project activities.

Please refer to Section A – MDFA Research Grants Program for details on grant amounts and duration.

Note 1: Research funds provided by MDFA must be expended within Australia, unless otherwise approved (in exceptional circumstances) in writing by MDFA.

Note 2: MDFA will not fund indirect research costs, institutional overheads, institutional infrastructure or any institutional administrative charges.

Project title

Insert the title of the project (25 words maximum).

Background and magnitude of the problem being addressed

Provide the context and background to the proposed research project (200 words maximum). Indicate how the primary research subject and approach fit with existing knowledge and other research currently being undertaken.

Provide a clear statement of the magnitude of the problem (e.g. incidence/prevalence, impact on people with macular disease, their family, carers, community) to be addressed by the research. Include references, and any relevant images, or figures as a separate page (max total 3 images/figures/tables, excluded from word count).

Hypothesis and aims

Provide a clear statement of the research question and/or hypotheses to be tested, and the aims of the proposed research, (200 words maximum).

Brief Research Plan, including relevant methodology and outcomes

Please describe the approach to the research, including a brief description of the study design, including relevant techniques, how/how many patients will be involved or samples collected, and how data will be analysed (including statistical tests and power calculations, if appropriate). (200 words maximum).

Potential significance of the research findings

Describe the expected outcomes of the research, why they were chosen and how they will be measured. If relevant, please also provide a clear statement of how the research will be applied in the real world over the short-, medium- and/or long-term, including any barriers that need to be addressed. Is there potential for the project to lead to the development of patents and/or the commercialisation of any technology? How will the results of the research be disseminated? (200 words maximum).

Benefit for people with a macular or retinal disease

Describe how the proposed research is relevant to and may benefit people with a macular or retinal disease, and the potential significance of the project and the expected outcomes. (200 words maximum).

Consumer involvement

Please describe how you have considered or consulted with people with a macular or retinal disease in the design of your project, and how consumers will be involved throughout the project. (200 words maximum).

Note: we expect the level of consumer involvement to vary depending on the nature of the research.

References, images, figures and tables

References, images, figures and tables related to the background and other sections of the application may be included as one separate A4 page. References can be in 10-point font.