



Allied Health Research Careers Development Framework



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Acknowledgement of Country

The Office of the Chief Allied Health Officer acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work. We pay our respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging.

Acknowledgements

Project Team:

Dr Caitlin Brandenburg, Centre for Functioning & Health Research, MSHHS, Queensland Health

Professor Liz Ward, Centre for Functioning & Health Research, MSHHS, Queensland Health

Dr Susan Stoikov, Centre for Functioning & Health Research, MSHHS, Queensland Health

Dr Rachelle Pitt, Office of the Chief Allied Health Office, Queensland Health

Liza-Jane McBride, Office of the Chief Allied Health Office, Queensland Health

Project Reference Group (PRG):

Dr Clare Burns, Metro North HHS, Queensland Health

Peter Buttrum, Metro North HHS, Queensland Health

Dr Angela Chang, Metro North HHS, Queensland Health

Dr Ruth Cox, Metro South HHS, Queensland Health

Dr Katrina Dunn, West Moreton HHS, Queensland Health

Dr Gail Kingston, Townsville HHS, Queensland Health

Dr Elizabeth McCourt Metro North HHS, Queensland Health

A/Prof Shaun O'Leary Metro North HHS, Queensland Health

Dr Tilly Pain, Townsville HHS, Queensland Health

Dr Rachel Phillips, Metro South HHS, Queensland Health

Trudy Teasdale, Gold Coast HHS, Queensland Health

Dr Anna Tynan, Darling Downs HHS, Queensland Health

Dr Rachel Wenke, Gold Coast HHS, Queensland Health

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For more information contact:

Office of the Chief Allied Health Officer,
PO Box 2368, Fortitude Valley BC, Qld, 4006
email allied_health_advisory@health.qld.gov.au, phone (07) 3328 9298.

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Introduction

The Queensland Health allied health workforce is diverse, innovative, and highly skilled. It is well placed to shape healthcare delivery improvements, develop new interventions, and drive efficient evidence-based health care for Queenslanders through research and the translation of research into practice. Positioning allied health as leaders in research requires investment in workforce development including:

- Strengthening research capability of the allied health workforce in research and the translation of research into practice.
- Establishing visible and embedded research career pathways for allied health in Queensland Health.
- Recognising and valuing the unique and critical contribution that embedded allied health clinician-researchers and research leaders make to improving Queensland's health system.

Research is recognised as a key enabler in [Optimising the allied health workforce for best care and best value: A-10 year Strategy 2019-2029](#) with the development of research career structures and pathways for allied health professionals identified as a key strategic priority for allied health. This is further described in the [Allied Health Research Plan 2020-2029 Priority 3: Career structures and pathways with a focus on implementing career pathways that promote the integration of clinical and research skills and growing the allied health research workforce](#).

Achieving these objectives requires a consistent approach to recognising and describing the unique skills and contributions of allied health embedded researchers across the diversity of roles already established within Queensland Health and those required in the future. This Queensland Health Allied Health Research Careers Development Framework (“the Framework”) provides the foundations for a shared understanding of knowledge, skills and capabilities required of the research workforce. Further, the self-assessment and workforce planning tools (*in development*) aim to support individual and workforce capability assessment and development, and the establishment of research roles and career structures.

Successfully applying the Framework requires an ongoing commitment to building research capacity within the allied health workforce, investment in workforce capacity building and career pathways, and strong allied health leadership.

Purpose

The Queensland Health Allied Health Research Careers Development Framework aims to describe the unique capabilities of allied health clinicians engaged in research, translation of research into practice, and research leadership across the diverse and developing roles of the Queensland Health clinical and research environment.

The Framework enables the identification of the knowledge, skills and competencies that facilitate delivery of high-quality research and research translation across different practice settings, different roles, and for clinician at different practice levels. The Framework identifies the capabilities needed to fulfil allied health research roles and functions, and can be used to support the development of career pathways for staff interested in pursuing an embedded research career that integrates both clinical and research skills.

Development of the Framework

The Allied Health Research Careers Framework was developed specifically to consider the Queensland Health allied health workforce, the diverse nature of clinical-research roles that exist, the existing service delivery structures and functions, and the current policy context. This framework evolved from identified need in prior research conducted within the Australian context.^{1,2} Studies have shown that the career pathways for allied health clinician-researchers are diverse and varied, with no clear pathway for career development.¹ Qualitative interviews with 56 participants, holding a range of clinician-researcher roles within health services around Australia, found that there are many challenges for clinician-researchers and their career journey – including a lack of a guidance regarding clinician-researcher career development.² Hence strategies were needed to address this.

The Framework development commenced in 2023, led by the Project Team and a representative Project Reference Group (PRG) of allied health clinician-researchers, research leaders, allied health leaders and policy experts - bringing together expertise and experience in research, allied health research careers, workforce development and research capacity building. The development process began with a literature review, using a “rapid review” methodology, to identify an initial list of potential capability statements for the Framework (n=2,125), which was synthesized into a set of statements (n=79) for consideration by the PRG. The PRG then further refined this list prior to the commencement of an e-Delphi with the items for rating (n=73). For the e-Delphi, Queensland Health allied health staff with knowledge of, or interest in, research careers were invited to participate, including clinician researchers, Directors of Research, Professors of Research, Health Practitioner Research Fellows, conjoint researchers, Directors of Allied Health, Executive Directors of Allied Health, and Research Workforce Development Officers. Eligible staff were purposively sampled to represent a range of sites, professions and roles. Consenting individuals responded to two online e-Delphi rounds to reach a consensus on items to be included and provide other feedback on items. Following the e-Delphi, the PRG undertook the final merging of redundant items and minor word changes. Complementary elements of the Framework were also developed by the project team and reviewed by the PRG, including categorization of the items into five domains, development of domain descriptors, and creation of a scale to rate proficiency on the items. The final version of the Framework was approved by the PRG, consisting of 61 competencies, five domains, and a 5-point Likert scale.

It is recognized that this Framework has been developed to support the allied health workforce in Queensland Health, but it may be relevant to other professional groups or healthcare contexts.

Overview of the Framework

The Framework is intended to be used by both individuals, leaders, organisations and partners to identify the research capabilities of the allied health workforce and develop mutually beneficial career opportunities that optimise the contribution of these capabilities to services. The Framework includes three key components:

- **Allied Health Research Careers Development Framework:** Describes the purpose, development, structure and uses of the Allied Health Research Careers Framework and tools for different stakeholder groups.
- **Allied Health Research Careers Development Individual Assessment Pack and Tools:** Enables individual self-assessment of current research capabilities, and planning for further career development. The pack describes how to assess current career growth against the key capability statements for the five core domains the Framework. Case studies of how individuals have used the tools provide examples of applying the Framework in the Queensland Health context.
- **Allied Health Research Careers Workforce Development Pack and Tools:** Enables allied health leaders and teams to identify the contribution of specific research capabilities to services and identify opportunities for the development of research career pathways that are mutually beneficial. **in development*

Key Principles

The following key principles underpin the Queensland Health Allied Health Research Careers Development Framework and tools:

- **Research capability development enhances Queensland Health service delivery**
Supporting the development of research capability within the allied health workforce will strengthen the ability of Queensland Health to deliver evidence-based services, innovate and adapt in response to changing health needs, improve the efficiency of service delivery and improve patient outcomes.
- **Allied health research capabilities are diverse and individualised**
Allied health professionals, holding different types of clinical, clinician-researcher and research positions within Queensland Health, may demonstrate a variety of capabilities across the domains of the Framework at different skill levels, from emerging to advanced. Development of capabilities in each domain and development rate will depend on base skill levels, the role/context in which the professional works, the training and development opportunities available as well as personal interests. Differences in capability profiles and/or role requirements do not imply that any particular role or profile is less capable or valuable than another. Rather that some capabilities or advanced skill levels are not required for some role types. Where gaps in capability may exist, the Framework aims to provide a common language for identifying and understanding these gaps.
- **Research career pathways promote attraction, retention and growth of a highly-skilled allied health workforce for Queensland**
Creating and embedding improved opportunities for allied health professionals to progress their careers and fill a range of different roles that make meaningful and creative contributions to Queensland Health promotes attraction and retention across all allied health professions and locations.

The Framework Capabilities

The Queensland Health Allied Health Research Careers Development Framework is built upon key capability statements that describe the knowledge, behaviours and applied skills that allied health professionals may develop and demonstrate across five core domains of practice (see Figure 1):

1. **Research knowledge and skills:** The technical knowledge and skills required to do research across all stages of the study lifecycle, from planning to dissemination.
2. **Research impact and translation:** The capabilities related to ensuring research is translated into practice and has an impact on society. This may be through evidence-based practice, knowledge translation, and embedding impact in the design and conduct of clinical research.
3. **Clinical and healthcare research context:** The unique capabilities required to conduct research in a clinical or healthcare context, including ensuring research projects are embedded appropriately in the context.
4. **Research leadership and strategy:** This domain includes those capabilities required to lead research strategy, research projects and programs, or teams which include research staff.
5. **Research capacity building and mentorship:** This domain includes capabilities related to building research capacity in researchers and healthcare staff, including one-on-one mentorship, education and contributing to the structure of research.

The number of capability statements varies for each domain of research practice within the health context. The full set of research capabilities are described on pages 9-13.

Figure 1. The 5 domains of the Allied Health Careers Development Framework



Domain 1: Research knowledge and skills

This domain reflects the technical knowledge and skills required to do research across all stages of the research study lifecycle, from planning to dissemination.

1. Understands general scientific principles of the research cycle and recognises different types of research methodologies and study types and designs
2. Understands the value of consumer/community involvement including co-design of research with consumers, and applies to appropriate research studies
3. Conducts literature searches and critically evaluates the literature to inform own research
4. Develops and implements research protocols, including articulating clear research questions/aims and selecting appropriate research methods and outcome measures
5. Understands and applies key concepts relating to research ethics, completing ethics applications, and research integrity
6. Understands and complies with local/international governance and regulatory requirements
7. Undertakes participant screening, recruitment, and consent procedures in an ethical manner according to the protocol
8. Accurately and safely collects, manages, stores, and disposes of research data
9. Plans, selects, and conducts appropriate data analysis and critically interprets results
10. Applies project management skills to coordinate study activities
11. Understands research funding landscape (including knowledge of a variety of funding sources), writes and applies for grants
12. Establishes revenue streams to support research through competitive grant funding or industry partnerships
13. Effectively disseminates research findings to scientific and non-scientific communities through presentations, publications and other mediums

Domain 2: Research impact and translation

This domain focuses on competencies related to ensuring research is translated into practice and has an impact on society. This may be through evidence-based practice, knowledge translation, and embedding impact in the design and conduct of clinical research.

1. Uses and promotes evidence-based practice in own setting
2. Promotes translation of research findings by engaging relevant stakeholders, including consumers, in the project lifecycle
3. Engages in dialogue and understands working with stakeholders including policymakers, professional organisations, consumer representatives, industry partners and government representatives
4. Understands different types of research impact and how research impact can be measured or reported
5. Engages in multidisciplinary knowledge exchange to enhance research impact
6. Participates in research that is close to practice with the potential for translation
7. Understands and applies knowledge translation methodology
8. Communicates research findings in an accessible way to diverse health system stakeholders
9. Produces research which informs the development of health policy



Domain 3: Clinical and healthcare research context

This domain includes the unique competencies required to conduct research in a clinical or healthcare context, including ensuring research projects are embedded appropriately in the context.

1. Maintains up-to-date knowledge of research and practice in their clinical area
2. Conducts research in the area of specialty practice
3. Applies healthcare and clinical knowledge to designing and conducting research, including developing practice-relevant research questions
4. Understands and interfaces research with other health service improvement processes (e.g., Quality improvement, healthcare innovation, evaluation, service, and workforce development)
5. Maintains a high level understanding of health systems at a local, national and/or international level
6. Brokers clinical and research expertise at a local, statewide, national and/or international level
7. Influences patient care by combining expert clinical and research skills
8. Generates innovative research-related ideas and puts them into action within clinical/healthcare area or organisation
9. Consults and collaborates with healthcare professionals, consumers, and other relevant health service staff to develop and conduct practice-relevant research appropriate to the healthcare setting
10. Navigates the interaction between healthcare and research roles including ethical complexities and governance requirements

Domain 4: Research leadership and strategy

This domain includes those competencies required to lead research strategy, research projects, or teams, including research staff.

1. Challenges traditional ways of thinking within area of research and/or clinical expertise
2. Understands the strategic landscape across research and healthcare and anticipates future directions and promising ideas
3. Contributes to or leads the development of research strategies and communicates strategy to the relevant stakeholders
4. Shapes and contributes to local policy and procedures
5. Promotes and supports good research practices and governance in line with relevant standards and legislation
6. Creates opportunities for and promotes the skills and research careers of others
7. Initiates, leads, and sustains research projects and/or a program of research
8. Establishes a reputation as a leader and drives agenda in research field
9. Serves on key research committees within their organisation and beyond (e.g., strategic advisory committees, grant review panels)
10. Promotes a culture of equity and opportunity for all staff engaged in research
11. Forms research teams that are fit for purpose (including consumers as appropriate), appropriately navigates team dynamics and creates a positive team culture
12. Establishes partnerships that enable the development of a clinical research workforce
13. Engages in effective research workforce planning and research budget management
14. Establishes, manages, and sustains research networks and collaborations across organisations to enhance the quality of research

Domain 5: Research capacity building and mentorship

This domain includes competencies related to building research capacity in researchers and healthcare staff, including one-on-one mentorship, education, and contributing to the structure of research.

1. Engages less experienced researchers with potential mentors and collaborators
2. Mentors and guides less experienced researchers
3. Seeks opportunities to engage staff in research and embed researchers into departments
4. Assists staff in identifying appropriate funding schemes and developing/writing targeted funding proposals
5. Supports staff through the research project lifecycle (e.g., literature search, data collection, data analysis)
6. Encourages and inspires staff in their research journey
7. Provides formal supervision associated with a research degree (e.g., honours, PhD)
8. Supports staff to develop their research careers and track record
9. Understands research training requirements and needs of the organisation
10. Supports and organises research learning opportunities for staff and other relevant stakeholders, such as consumers
11. Designs and delivers research training and development sessions and/or programs
12. Contribute to the strategy and structure of research mentoring/supervision in the organisation
13. Knows and uses different research-informed research development practices (e.g., teaching, education strategies, supervision, mentoring)
14. Undertakes evaluation and research on own research development activities (e.g., teaching, education strategies, supervision, mentoring)
15. Contribute to the promotion of research in the health service

Capability Proficiency Levels

There are five proficiency levels used to describe increasing experience and expertise in relation to each specific capability statement:

- 1. No proficiency** – May have some awareness or knowledge of a particular area but no experience or skill and no ability to demonstrate capability.
- 2. Emerging proficiency** - Gaining experience in the described knowledge and skills and starting to apply that knowledge to research activities and tasks. Requires support or mentoring to achieve outcomes.
- 3. Consolidating proficiency** - Furthering skills and knowledge and can complete research activities or tasks independently. Requires guidance to deliver complex or advanced levels of activity or tasks.
- 4. Advanced proficiency** - Becoming an expert in skill and knowledge required to demonstrate behaviour or activity. Able to apply skills and knowledge across a range of contexts and integrate expertise across domains. Able to support others in learning and applying knowledge, skills, and behaviour.
- 5. Expert proficiency** - Acknowledged leader with in-depth knowledge and demonstrated strategic leadership in the area of knowledge, skill, or behaviour. Integrates, evaluates, and adapts knowledge, skills, or behaviour at an advanced level.

The proficiency levels do not relate to a specific health practitioner level (i.e., HP3, HP4, etc.) or role type. Each individual may demonstrate different capabilities and proficiency levels across all domains. Similarly, different roles may require different capability and proficiency levels across all domains.

Using the Framework

The Framework can be used in multiple different ways by different groups and for different contexts. Examples of the different user groups and how to use the Framework are outlined below. Please note, this is not an exhaustive list, and other applications of the Framework may also be indicated and beneficial.

For Allied Health Clinicians and Researchers

Use the **Allied Health Research Careers Development Individual Assessment Pack and Tools** to:

- Self-assess current capabilities and skills to identify areas of strength and opportunities for development.
- Enable the development of personalised career development plans, focusing on enhancing specific research knowledge, skills, and capabilities.
- Describe and communicate the spectrum of capabilities developed through applying research knowledge and skills capabilities to highlight areas of expertise and growth.

For Allied Health Leaders & Teams

Use the **Allied Health Research Careers Development Individual Assessment Pack and Tools** to:

- Support collaborative performance development and career planning within individuals in allied health teams.
- Inform targeted training and capacity building planning based on identified development areas.
- Provide opportunities for individuals to demonstrate and contribute their research capabilities in ways that make a meaningful contribution to organisational needs, goals and strategies.
- Monitor the progress of team, department, or organisational research capacity building strategies.

Use the **Allied Health Research Careers Workforce Development Pack and Tools** to:

- Develop role descriptions for allied health research roles including identification of position knowledge, skill, and capability requirements.
- Support strategic allied health workforce planning, including identifying gaps in the existing workforce and future needs, as well as the development of diversity in career structures and pathways.

For Academic Partners

Use the **Allied Health Research Careers Development Framework** including the Framework Capabilities to:

- Guide curriculum development that incorporates evidence-based practice, research, and translation of research into practice in the pre-qualification training of allied health professions to support a capability pipeline.
- Support collaborative partnerships by recognising existing strengths in the Queensland Health workforce and identifying opportunities for shared capability development strategies.
- Provide guidance on career pathways in allied health research, highlighting advancement opportunities and required competencies at each level.



References

1. Brandenburg, C & Ward, E.C. (2022). One career, many pathways, no direction: The challenge facing allied health clinician researchers. (Perspective Paper). *Australian Health Review*, 46(5), 639-641. <https://doi.org/10.1071/AH22102>
2. Brandenburg, C. & Ward, E.C. (2022) "There hasn't been a career structure to step into": a qualitative study on perceptions of allied health clinician researcher careers. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 20(1), 6. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-021-00801-2> [Open Access]