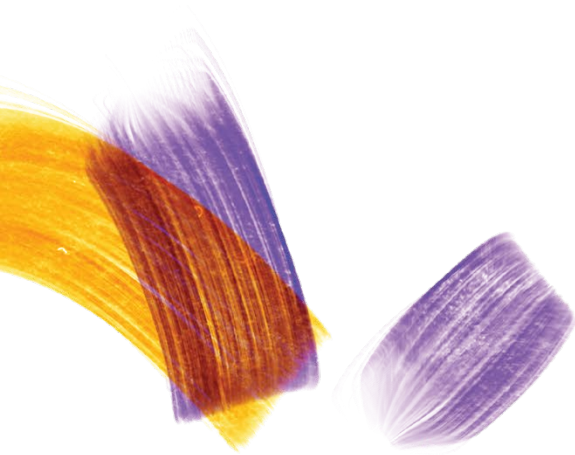
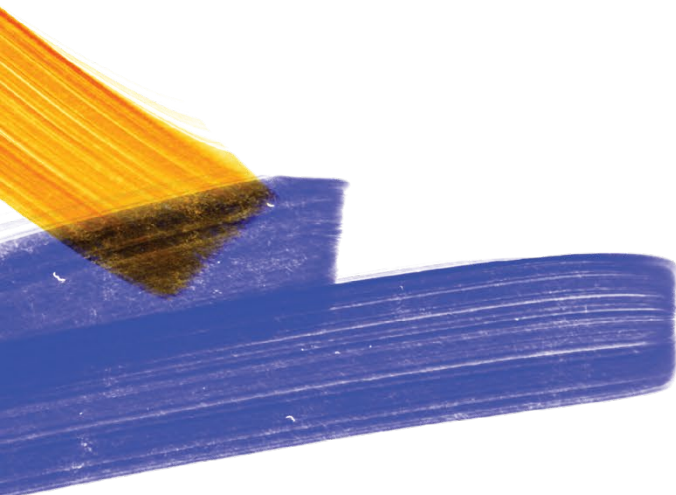




MS MCLEOD EARLY CAREER RESEARCHER AWARD 2026

Guidelines for applicants



The MS McLeod Research Fund was established by Murdoch Stanley McLeod, a South Australian businessman and philanthropist, who passed away in 1981. The MS McLeod Research Fund was established to support the furtherance of research in the field of paediatrics and the health of children. The Women's & Children's Hospital Foundation manages and administers the MS McLeod Research Fund on behalf of the Trustees, who include prominent South Australian researchers and clinicians.

Eligible Activities

Each year, the MS McLeod Research Fund supports an outstanding Early-Career Researcher (ECR) to lead a program of research relevant to paediatrics or children's health. This may include periconception, pregnancy, and perinatal related research where the focus is on healthy foetal development and child health outcomes. The MS McLeod ECR Award (the 'Award') is designed to support emerging health and medical research talent in South Australia, enabling them to undertake impactful research and advance their track record toward securing independent research funding.

The Award may be used to support the costs associated with undertaking a research project, including salary and direct research costs, to the value of **\$220,000 over a maximum of 2 years**. One Award will be offered each year, unless otherwise determined by the Trustees.

Award funds may be used to cover:

- Salary and on-costs, including those of the Project Lead and/or other supporting research personnel (such as a lab assistant, clinical research nurse, or project coordinator).
- costs that are directly related to the conduct of the proposed research activity, such as consumables, minor equipment and/or computer programs
- publication costs, for no more than **one** publication directly relating to the research activity over the life of the Fellowship, and
- travel for the purpose of the research activity, **or** to present the outcomes of the research activity at a relevant conference, to a maximum value of \$5000 over the life of the Award.

Salaries should be paid at the appropriate rate as set out in the enterprise agreement of the employing institution. Salaries for project team members other than the Project Lead may not be covered by the award. Funds may not be used to support organisational indirect costs, infrastructure levies or relocation costs.

Eligibility

The Project Lead must hold an appointment at or have an affiliation (including adjunct or affiliate titles) with one of the following institutions:

- Women's and Children's Health Network
- Adelaide University
- Flinders University
- South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI)

The Project Lead must also:

- Be an Australian citizen, New Zealand citizen or have permanent residency in Australia at the time of application.
- Work in a field of paediatrics or children's health. This may include research on periconception, pregnancy, and the perinatal period where the focus is on promoting healthy foetal development and improving child health outcomes. This includes those working in research, teaching and/or clinical roles.
- Have no more than 5 years research experience since the conferral of their PhD (NHMRC relative to opportunity and career disruption considerations apply) at the time of submitting the application.
- Be considered to have a strong track record, according to career stage, and are gaining recognition in their field
- Conduct the research in South Australia

- Be based in South Australia for at least 80% of the funding period.

Applicants may only apply as Project Lead on one application in any given MS McLeod ECR Award round, and may not apply again as a current or past recipient of an MS McLeod ECR Award.

Other team members may be included, who will, along with the Project Lead, be responsible for the delivery and financial management of the project, if funded. Team members may be of any career stage, however should include at least one individual with experience in leading grant-funded research, and who can provide direct mentoring and support to the Project Lead as they develop their skills as an independent researcher. All team members roles on the project must be well justified.

Application

Applications will be via a two-stage online process, including an Expression of Interest (EOI), followed by Full Application.

EOI's should be submitted via **SmartyGrants**. At EOI stage, a short summary of the proposed project, team members, simple budget and timeline, along with Administering Institution EOI endorsement will be required.

At full application, requirements include:

- Project lead information, including research experience, track record and evidence of leadership in their field, commensurate to career stage,
- Project team information,
- Administering Institution full application endorsement,
- Letters of support from participating institutions/organisations where voluntary and/or in-kind contributions are being made,
- Project details, including title, lay summary, background, significance, a project plan (including pathway to translation and consumer engagement strategy), and a supporting document including timeline, tables and figures, and a reference list,
- Budget details, including budget item justification and any voluntary and/or in-kind contributions.

Applications must:

- follow all instructions provided,
- be written clearly and concisely, in language suitable for non-specialist review,
- include all supporting documentation (where required),
- be submitted by the specified closing date – late and/or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

Assessment and Selection

The Trustees of the MS McLeod Research Fund will shortlist EOI applications for inviting to the full application stage. The ranking and selection of full applications will be undertaken by the independent WCH Foundation Research Grants Committee (RGC). Eligible applications will be assessed according to the following criteria (and weighted):

- **Capability (30%):** Project lead demonstrates strong leadership potential and ability to guide the team to achieve the project aims. The CI team overall demonstrates strong capability and alignment to the proposed research, with access to excellent resources, complementary expertise, and appropriate support for an ECR-led project.
- **Quality of the proposed project (35%):** The project is underpinned by a well-justified rationale/hypothesis, features a focused and coherent research plan with robust design, and includes management of scientific and technical risks.
- **Significance and impact on children's health (25%):** The proposed research addresses a critical issue in children's health, with the potential to generate significant scientific, practical, and policy-relevant outcomes, and deliver high-impact outputs.

- **Innovation / novelty (10%):** The research presents innovative aims with the potential to shift current paradigms and deliver major breakthroughs in promoting healthy foetal development and improving child health outcomes.

All criteria will be assessed relative to opportunity.

Following assessment of applications, the RGC will make a funding recommendation to the Trustees of the MS McLeod Research Fund. Allocation of funds will be entirely at the discretion of the Trustees of the MS McLeod Research Fund. In the case that none of the applications are considered worthy of funding, the Trustees may decide to close the round without awarding funding.

The funding decision is final, and no further negotiations will be entered into. General feedback will be provided to unsuccessful applicants, describing the qualities of successful applications.

CLOSING DATE FOR EOI: 5pm (ACST) Friday 4 September 2026
INVITATIONS TO SUBMIT A FULL APPLICATION: Monday 28 September 2026

Conditions

Where an application is awarded funding, the WCH Foundation (as the appointed Funding Administrator) will enter into a funding agreement with the nominated Administering Institution detailing appropriate management and administration requirements for the approved project (a copy of which is available upon request).

Any participating institutions will be required to enter into a multi-institutional agreement in accordance with, and under the leadership of, the Administering Institution.

Unless otherwise agreed, the Award must commence within six months of receiving notification of the Award.

The Project Lead will be responsible for reporting: the timing, frequency and contents of which will be set out in the funding agreement.

Appropriate acknowledgment of the MS McLeod Research Fund will be made on all presentations, publications and reports arising from the research, as set out in the funding agreement.