Swiss National Science Foundation

Australian Government
National Health and Medical Research Council

NHMRC

Australian - Swiss Joint Research Programme

Call for Proposals 2026

Opening date:
17 March 2026

Closing date:
17 June 2026, 17:00 CET (Swiss side)
18 June 2026, 17:00 AEST (Australian side)
28 May 2026, 17:00 AEST (Australian side minimum data deadline)

A maximum of 10 joint projects will be funded.

1 Introduction

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) have agreed to launch a call for Australian - Swiss Joint Research Projects (JRPs), organise the evaluation of the submitted proposals and monitor the funded projects. To this effect, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed on 17 September 2025.

2 Joint Research Projects

Grants for Joint Research Projects (JRPs) are aimed at promoting collaborative projects with clearly defined goals, involving at least one partner based in Switzerland and one based in Australia. Proposals should describe ambitious research and propose innovative approaches. The research is to be carried out at the research facilities involved; reciprocal visits and short stays in Switzerland for researchers from Australia and vice versa are also possible within the scope of a JRP.

Project duration: The duration of a JRP is exactly 48 months.

3 Research Fields

Title: AI in healthcare for populations of diverse sex, gender or sexual orientations or other underrepresented population groups

The application of artificial intelligence (AI) in healthcare has the potential to revolutionise healthcare by improving efficiency, accuracy, accessibility and outcomes [1]. By analysing large datasets to identify patterns and trends, AI can enhance diagnostics and design personalised treatment plans as well as leverage telemedicine and real-time remote monitoring. However, despite decades of research, the use and adoption of AI in clinical practice and delivery of healthcare remains limited, with many AI research outcomes for healthcare still in a development stage while concerns have been raised regarding safety, privacy and ethics-related risks. Moreover, biases embedded in AI algorithms, or the data used for training [2] can perpetuate existing health inequalities by providing inaccurate results for underrepresented population groups, especially due to the disproportional representation of specific population groups (e.g. white male patients) in classical clinical research and trials. Lack of diversity at the onset of AI algorithms development tends to result in technologies that do not fully respond to the needs of diverse populations and can ultimately lead to medical mistakes.

This joint NHMRC – SNSF call invites research proposals addressing key challenges related to the use of AI in healthcare for populations of diverse sex, gender, sexual orientations or other underrepresented population groups of relevance to both countries. Proposals must develop effective and innovative solutions and approaches to mitigate biases in the use of AI in healthcare for underrepresented population groups by enhancing the diversity of training datasets, establishing comprehensive evaluation mechanisms, developing inclusive data governance structures and policies, and creating protocols that help clinicians and patients to understand AI decisions for healthcare in a culturally informed way. In addition,

the developed healthcare solutions must show that they are effective as well as equitable in their development, deployment and impact particularly for populations of diverse sex, gender, sexual orientations or other underrepresented population groups.

Proposals should advance knowledge, develop innovative solutions and support decision-making to transform the practice of medicine and delivery of healthcare for populations of diverse sex, gender, sexual orientations or other underrepresented population groups using AI. Proposals must assess practical implementation needs and challenges, such as barriers concerning resources and datasets, adoption of AI tools in health and care ecosystems, qualification of benefits and utility, sustainability questions, geographical limitations, equity of access, transparency and inequalities. Interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral approaches are encouraged, including but not limited to collaboration between health experts, clinicians, AI scientists and engineers, policymakers, ethics experts and impacted populations groups. Accordingly, researchers from all disciplines are invited to apply. A co-design of the solutions with the population groups the most impacted is encouraged to prevent inaccuracy and misuse of critical resources. Proposals should acknowledge appropriate legislation and policy frameworks at national and international levels that are relevant for the call.

For the purposes of this funding opportunity, 'underrepresented populations' refers to populations in model datasets that inadequately reflect the diversity of the individuals or groups contained in the population they are intended to represent.[3] [4]

Reasons for underrepresentation in datasets broadly fall into two categories: factors that cause individuals or groups to be absent from datasets and factors that cause individuals to be incorrectly or inappropriately categorized into groups despite being present. Demographic elements of the population such as age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location may be relevant to consider. These populations may include, but are not limited to:

- people with diverse sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and sexual orientation
- people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- people with mental health conditions
- people in low socioeconomic groups
- people with disability
- people living in rural, regional and remote areas.

Applicants are required to justify how their target population is considered underrepresented in the context of this funding opportunity.

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- AI for medical decision support for diagnosis and treatment planning, with a focus of underrepresented population groups
- Addressing bias in medical training data

- Enhancing trust and trustworthiness in AI-based decision support
- Interpretability of AI applications in gender medicine

The following topics are excluded:

- Theoretical AI approaches that do not tackle any relevant problem of gender medicine or for underrepresented population groups
- AI not including any underrepresented population groups or data bias
- Studies focusing on underrepresented population groups that are only relevant in Australia or Switzerland.

References:

[1] Davenport, Thomas, and Ravi, Kalakota. "The potential for artificial intelligence in healthcare." *Future healthcare journal* 6.2 (2019): 94-98.

[2] Cross, James L., Michael A. Choma, and John A. Onofrey. "Bias in medical AI: Implications for clinical decision-making." *PLOS Digital Health* 3.11 (2024): e0000651.

[3] Arora, Anmol, et al. "The value of standards for health datasets in artificial intelligence-based applications." *Nature medicine* 29.11 (2023): 2929-2938.

[4] Australian Government Digital.gov.au. “Technical standard for government’s use of artificial intelligence: Data statements” https://www.digital.gov.au/policy/ai/AI-technical-standard/ai-technical-standard-statement-19

4 Eligibility

Each proposal for a JRP must have at least one applicant based in Switzerland and one applicant (Chief Investigator) based in Australia; they are the contact persons on the Swiss and the Australian side respectively. They bear the responsibility for the technical and administrative coordination as well as the timely delivery of scientific and financial reports. Each applicant can only submit one proposal. The call is open to researchers from all eligible research institutions in Switzerland and Australia.

The project duration is **exactly 48 months**. Proposals for projects shorter or longer than 48 months are not eligible and will not be considered for evaluation.

If the proposal does not meet the eligibility criteria of either the NHMRC or the SNSF, the proposal will not be considered for evaluation.

Eligibility criteria in Switzerland

Only applicants based in Switzerland are eligible and must meet the eligibility criteria of the SNSF. The SNSF Funding Regulations, the General implementation regulations and the Regulations on Project Funding are applicable mutatis mutandis where not stated otherwise.

Applicants can submit a proposal to the joint bilateral call even if they hold another SNSF grant or have applied for one. Moreover, grantees may submit proposals to all SNSF funding schemes during the funding period of a JRP, provided that there is no substantial thematic overlap. Please note that the present call is not in conflict with the restrictions applicable to the SNSF's national project funding in accordance with Article 13 of the Regulations on Project Funding. Ambizione grantees can contact the SNSF office to check their eligibility.

Project partners as described in Article 11.2 of the SNSF Funding Regulations are not entitled to receive funds from the SNSF if their affiliated institution is located in Australia.

Eligibility criteria in Australia

Eligibility for NHMRC funding support for the Australian component of the application is defined in the *2026 NHMRC-SNSF Grant Opportunity Guidelines*.

- Chief Investigators (CIs) (CIA-CIJ) can submit a maximum of one application in the 2026 NHMRC-SNSF grant opportunity.
- The Australia-based CIA must be listed on the SNSF Joint Research Project proposal as Applicant. On the SNSF Portal, they must be selected as the contact person in Australia.
- The Swiss-based applicant on the Joint Research Project must be listed in the research team as the CIB in the application to NHMRC.
- Other Australia-based researchers named on the SNSF Joint Research Project application may be listed as CIs (CIC-CIJ) or Associate Investigators (AIs) in the application to NHMRC.
- Other Australia-based researchers may be listed on the SNSF Joint Research Project proposal as Applicants (for Chief Investigators (CIC-CIJ) and Project partners (for Associate Investigators).
- The CIA and the Administering Institution must ensure applications and grants meet all eligibility requirements as set out in the 2026 NHMRC-SNSF Grant Opportunity Guidelines.
- NHMRC applications will only be accepted from NHMRC Administering Institutions. A list of NHMRC Administering Institutions is available on the NHMRC website.

Applications to NHMRC-SNSF are not capped relative to NHMRC's Investigator and Ideas Grants and will not affect a CI's eligibility to apply to the latter schemes (refer to the respective NHMRC scheme grant opportunity guidelines for eligibility requirements).

NHMRC may compare the research proposed in grant applications with current applications across NHMRC-funded and administered grant opportunities, grants previously funded, currently funded and funded by other agencies (e.g., Australian Research Council or Department of Health, Disability and Ageing) and published research. NHMRC will not fund research that it considers duplicates research previously or currently being funded.

5 Funding

JRP proposals include two separate budgets: one budget in CHF for the Swiss part of the project (paid by the SNSF according to the SNSF's rules) and one budget in AUD for the Australian part of the project (paid by the NHMRC according to the NHMRC Funding Agreement). The two countries have agreed to fund up to 10 projects if a sufficient number of proposals of high quality are submitted.

- The total budget available in **Switzerland** is CHF 4,000,000. The maximum budget available for the Swiss side of a project is CHF 400,000 for a 4-year project.

- The total budget available in **Australia** is AUD 5,000,000. The maximum budget available for the Australian side of a project is AUD 500,000.

Both, the Swiss and the Australian budget will be submitted in the SNSF Portal (Australian to be uploaded using this template). Additionally, the Australian budget will be detailed in the application submitted through NHMRC's online grant management system, Sapphire. The budget entered into Sapphire must match the budget submitted to SNSF. Minor differences due to fluctuations in conversion rates are permitted.

Eligible costs in Switzerland

- Personnel costs (salaries within the salary ranges and rates set by the SNSF and social security contributions of scientific and technical employees); please note that the salaries of applicants are not eligible costs;

- Material costs that are directly related to the research work, namely material of enduring value, expendable items, field expenses, travel expenses, third-party charges or computing time;

- Direct costs incurred through the use of research infrastructure linked to the research work;

- Costs for granting access to research data (Open Research Data, max. CHF 10,000 per project);

- Costs for the organisation of conferences and workshops in connection with the funded research;

- Costs for national and international cooperation and networking activities carried out in connection with the funded research.

The SNSF regulations apply to the Swiss budget (see also the guidelines). Due to the topic of the call, costs specific to running AI-algorithms will be accepted (e.g. AI license, computing time on supercomputers, etc). Standard costs (e.g. laptops) will be rejected. Overhead costs are not admissible. Please note that costs for open access publications can be requested separately via the OA platform of the SNSF. However, costs for Open Research Data (ORD) must be taken into account at the time of submission of the proposal. They cannot be covered by a supplementary grant.

Eligible costs in Australia
Funding provided by NHMRC for a grant activity must be spent on costs directly incurred in that grant activity that satisfy the principles and requirements outlined in the *Direct Research Costs Guidelines*.

6 Submission

Proposals are to be jointly prepared by Switzerland and Australia-based applicants. They must be submitted via the SNF Portal.
The Australia-based main applicant (CIA) must submit the same research plan through NHMRC's online grant management system Sapphire)
Proposals that are only submitted to one of the two funding agencies are ineligible.

Hardcopies will not be accepted. Neither the SNSF nor the NHMRC will be held responsible for non-submission of a proposal.

Submission on the SNF Portal: After login into the SNF Portal, the correct call must be chosen. See also the guidelines for submitting a proposal in the SNF Portal. Please note that all participating researchers, including the Australia-based research team, need an account to fill in and submit the proposal.

For more details on creating a user account, see "How do I register for the SNSF Portal?". To access the SNF Portal, please note that creating the required SWITCH edu-ID and mySNF user accounts might take some additional time.

Please note that the SNSF uses the SNSF CV format. You can find all relevant information here. Please note that filling in the information might take some additional time.

Submission via NHMRC's Sapphire: Applicants should refer to Appendix B of the *2026 NHMRC-SNSF Grant Opportunity Guidelines* for detailed instructions on how to apply via Sapphire.

Applicants should note that NHMRC has a 'minimum data' deadline, where minimum data must be entered in Sapphire by 28 May 2026, 17:00 AEST. Applicants must complete the required fields (indicated in Sapphire by a flag (🚩)) with correct information.

Data Management Plan (DMP): A Data Management Plan (DMP) is requested for approved grants according to the requirements issued by the SNSF. Missing or inaccurate statements in the DMP need

to be added/revised within the first project year. A definitive and updated version of the DMP must be provided by the end of the project grant. For more details on the DMP format requirements and procedure see: Data Management Plan (DMP) - Guidelines for researchers.

The submitted information must comply with the **principles of scientific integrity**. All applicants take responsibility for the correctness of their contributions. If the project plan is not written in accordance with the rules of good scientific practice, all applicants are accountable and may be asked to provide a statement; ultimately the project may not be considered. Reference is made to internationally recognised standards on good scientific practice as well as to the SNSF's Research Integrity Regulations.

IT-support in Switzerland (SNF Portal): For specific questions related to the SNF Portal, please contact the support team via SNF Service Portal - Jira Service Management (atlassian.net) or telephone (+41 31 308 22 00). Please note that all participating researchers need an account in order to fill in and submit the proposal.

IT-support in Australia (Sapphire): Australia-based applicants should refer to the *Sapphire Learning and Training Resources* for detailed user instructions or contact their Research Administration Officer or NHMRC's Research Help Centre for further assistance.

Deadline for submission of proposals
Switzerland: 17 June 2026, 17:00 CET
Australia: 18 June 2026, 17:00 AEST. **Important note**: Applications must be commenced in NHMRC's grants management system (Sapphire) and meet minimum data requirements by 28 May 2026, 17:00 AEST.

Proposals need to be submitted to both funding agencies. Late or incomplete proposals will not be considered.

7 Evaluation

The joint call will be evaluated jointly by the SNSF and the NHMRC and follows the SNSF's unified evaluation procedure. For more details on the SNSF's unified evaluation procedure, please see: Evaluation procedure – this is how we select.

The evaluation process is highly competitive and only highly rated proposals will be considered for funding. Peer reviewers and members of the evaluation panel must meet SNSF's and NHMRC's requirements to be evaluating experts. The process consists of the following steps:

Peer review: Proposals for JRPs will be reviewed according to standard international peer review procedures, jointly organised by the SNSF and the NHMRC, including international as well as Australian reviews. External experts conduct a peer review of the proposals, evaluating the scientific quality of JRPs. At least 2 reviews (1 nominated by each funding agency) should be obtained per proposal.

Evaluation panel: An evaluation panel will be set up, composed of experts proposed by the SNSF and the NHMRC. The evaluation panel will rate and rank the proposals based on the peer reviews and the panel members' own assessment. The panel members' recommendations will include a rationale for the rating. An optional preselection for rejection may be applied for proposals that are classified as significantly weaker and/or uncompetitive (up to 50% of the total number of proposals). If applied, preselected proposals for rejection will not be discussed in detail during the panel meeting.

Decision: The outcome of the joint evaluation panel should be a list of all proposals ranked from highest to lowest priority for funding based on the SNSF Bayesian Ranking procedure to take into account random fluctuations and other uncertain factors. Based on the ranking list of the joint evaluation panel and available budget, the SNSF and NHMRC shall decide on the final list of proposals to be funded. The 10 highest-ranked proposals will be recommended for funding. If there is any budget remaining after funding the 10 highest ranked projects, additional proposals may be funded until the budget is exhausted.

If the funding line (i.e., the cut-off point for funding) runs through a group of proposals that are of exactly the same scientific quality, a lottery procedure will be applied. To do so, a random selection by drawing lots will be made for this group of proposals. Proposal(s) that are drawn will be funded.

At the SNSF, the ranking list and the projects proposed for funding must be approved by the Programme Committee International Cooperation. At NHMRC, funding decisions must be approved by the Minister with portfolio responsibility for NHMRC.

The criteria used to evaluate the proposals are:

- Scientific relevance, originality and topicality
- Suitability of methods and feasibility
- Applicants' scientific track record and expertise
- Collaborative research

The evaluation results will be communicated to the applicants in March 2027. The contact person based in Switzerland will receive a decision letter from the SNSF. In case of rejection, the main reasons leading to the decision will be given. In case of approval, the Swiss budget and the conditions will be listed. If applicable, the Swiss-based main applicant will be responsible for transmitting the decision to the other Swiss-based applicants. The decisions are not subject to appeal. The Australian contact person will be informed by the NHMRC.

Earliest starting date for the JRPs: 1 May 2027

8 Reporting

Swiss and Australia-based grantees will report separately to the SNSF and the NHMRC.

In Switzerland:
The Swiss-based contact person will be responsible for reporting to the SNSF. Standard SNSF regulations apply both for the financial and the scientific reports.

In Australia:
The CIA's Administering Institution is required to report to NHMRC on the progress of the grant and the use of grant funds.

9 Payment

In Switzerland:
Standard SNSF rules apply. In principle, the budgets for JRPs are transferred in annual instalments to the Swiss-based main applicant at the beginning of a project year.

In Australia:
Australian researchers will be funded from the NHMRC Medical Research Endowment Account (MREA), which is underpinned by section 51 of the NHMRC Act, in accordance to the NHMRC Funding Agreement.

10 VAT

In Switzerland: The JRP grants are not subject to VAT or other taxes and charges. However, research expenses are not excluded from VAT. Therefore, all eligible costs occurred during a JRP (e.g. equipment, consumables, etc.) can be charged to the programme, including VAT, unless the research institution (e.g. universities, public research organisations, etc.) is able to recover VAT.

In Australia:
All amounts referred to in the 2026 NHMRC-SNSF Grant Opportunity Guidelines are exclusive of GST, unless stated otherwise. Administering Institutions are responsible for all financial and taxation matters associated with the grant.

11 Publications and Intellectual Property

The PIs are obliged to publish research results generated by the JRPs in appropriate form and according to SNSF and NHMRC standards. NHMRC-funded researchers are required to comply with the Funding Agreement (with any conditions specified in Schedules and these guidelines), which is a legal agreement between NHMRC and the Administering Institution.

Intellectual property rights belong to the respective researchers and/or their employing institutions. It is the responsibility of each research partner to ensure the efficient protection and proper distribution of any intellectual property arising from the accomplishments of the joint research projects.

12 Contact

In Switzerland:
Swiss National Science Foundation
Mr. Arthur Friedli & Ms. Clémence Le Cornec
International Cooperation
Wildhainweg 3, P.O. Box
CH-3001 Berne
Phone: +41 31 308 23 23
E-Mail: international@snf.ch
Website: www.snf.ch

In Australia:
National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
Research Collaboration
Research Partnerships NHMRC
16 Marcus Clarke St
Canberra ACT 2601
Phone: 1300 064 672 in Australia
+61 2 6217 9000 for international callers
E-Mail: international@nhmrc.gov.au
Website: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au

Annex 1: Guidelines for writing the research plan (scientific part of the proposal)

The research plan must not exceed **17 pages and 68,000 characters with spaces**. The first limit reached applies. This includes the title or front page, footnotes, illustrations, formulae, tables (and, if applicable, the table of contents), but not the bibliography. At least **font size 10 and line spacing 1.5** must be used. **The research plan may not contain any annexed documents**.

The page and character count in the SNSF Portal is binding. Applications with research plans that are too extensive cannot be submitted. Note that the number of characters may vary slightly depending on the document format / PDF coding.

The research plan submitted to the SNSF (and to NHMRC via Sapphire) must be written in English and be structured as follows:

1. Current state of research in the field

By citing the most important publications in the relevant field, please set out the scientific background and basis of the project, explain the need to perform research on the topic you propose and briefly describe important research currently being conducted internationally.

2.Current state of own research and partnership aspect

- Please describe briefly the work done by the different applicants in the relevant research field or in related fields and indicate the relevant publications.
- Explain how the different applicants complement each other for the proposed research project.
- Describe past collaborations that involved the Swiss and Australia-based partners (if applicable).

3. Detailed research plan

Against the background described in sections 1. and 2., state the aims that you plan to attain during the lifetime of the project. Please consider the following points:

- Which investigations and/or experiments do you plan to carry out/are necessary to attain the stated aims?
- What is the rationale for getting the project started and how do you intend to develop the work later on?
- What is the expected added value (synergistic benefit) of the collaboration?

Information concerning the methods necessary to attain the aims:

- Which are the methods available to you?
- To which other methods do you have access and how?

- Which methods need to be developed?

Data and data collection:

- Which data are available to you and from where?
- Which data need to be collected?
- Does the proposed project contain ethically sensitive or safety-related aspects or does it raise legal issues? If so, how will you deal with them?
- All images and figures within the research plan must be appropriately referenced. Applicants must ensure any images of people (particularly children) are appropriately de-identified and/or note that informed consent has been given to use the image.

4. Work division, schedule and milestones

- Please indicate how you plan to divide the work among the different partners.
- As far as possible, please give an approximate schedule for the work to be carried out within the project and indicate the most important milestones. In particular, please describe the major tasks of the staff to be employed within the project by the different partners.
- List the planned visits between the Swiss and Australia-based research groups (visiting scientist, hosting scientist, purpose of visit, date and duration of visit).

5. Importance, impact and results

Scientific importance and impact
Please describe briefly the importance of your research for the scientific community and the impact you expect from the project on research, training and teaching in your field/discipline. Please indicate how you will publish/communicate your results.

Expected results and dissemination plan
Describe in detail the project outcomes you envisage, including new theories, methods, materials, scientific significance and potential application. Explain how you will share these findings with stakeholders and the community. Address the potential for knowledge transfer to industry (if applicable).