



Australasian Virology Society Inc.
Incorporated in Victoria, registered number A0053589F

13th August 2018

Professor Anne Kelso AO
NHMRC CEO
GPO Box 1421
Canberra ACT 2601

Re: NHMRC Investigator grants

Dear Professor Kelso

The Australasian Virology Society (AVS) aims to promote, encourage, support, and advocate for the discipline of virology in the Australasian region. AVS represents almost 200 financial members and 700 virologists in Australasia. Gender equity and diversity is a core value that underpins all of our activities.

While the AVS Executive congratulates the NHMRC for pushing back submission deadlines for the majority of new NHMRC funding schemes to May 2019, we are extremely concerned with the timing of the New Investigators Grants scheme submission deadline on the 6th of February 2019. Unfortunately this deadline does not uphold the principles of gender equity by seriously disadvantaging women as well as male caregivers.

To specify, most institutions require draft applications to be submitted a full month before the external deadline. This places the actual deadline in the middle of school holidays, significantly disadvantaging parents and caregivers. In addition most institutions shutdown for almost 2 weeks over the Christmas and New Year break leaving little time between the applications opening on RGMS and shutdown over the Christmas break. The research community has long been advising the NHMRC to move these dates clear of school holidays. Some of the statements received from our members voicing their concerns are as follows:

“I was going to submit an application for the next round but wasn't sure how this was possible with 2 kids on school holidays...”

“This directly affects me as I am finishing a NHMRC CDF and will be applying for the Investigator system and I have 3 little kids, one school age.”

“I've got two school age kids and writing a grant application during school holidays makes me very unpopular with the family”

We understand that there will be a soft opening well before the holiday period and suggest that it would be helpful if a template with the required fields that will appear online as well as the guidelines for the



Investigator grant scheme are made available well ahead of the 5th of December 2018 to assist applicants with preparing their proposals.

We understand that NHMRC is unable to change the opening and closing dates for Investigator grants opening in 2019. However, we urge that in the interests of a level playing field that NHMRC considers alternative submission dates for the Investigator Grants that are well clear of the December/January break e.g. either in March (instead of early February) or in November the previous year.

Other concerns raised by our members regarding the new grant scheme are outlined below for your consideration:

1. We understand that those applicants who have applied for both an Investigator and an Ideas grant can be triaged such that Ideas grant applicants who are successful in their Investigator grant will be removed from further consideration. It would be preferable if successful Investigators are notified before the opening of the Ideas grant scheme so that they can redirect valuable time towards research rather than writing an Ideas grant that may/may not be assessed. *We suggest that the Ideas grant scheme open AFTER Investigator grants outcomes are communicated to applicants.*
2. The Early leadership investigator grants have an eligibility cap of 10 years post PhD for both EL1 and EL2 levels. We are concerned that this will disadvantage early career researchers who have recently completed their PhD who will be competing against individuals e.g. who are 9 years post-PhD applying for an EL1. Although this will be judged relative to opportunity, it will very likely place a significant downward pressure on the system making it extremely difficult for early career researchers to be competitive. *We suggest further consideration be given to revising the time-limits for EL1 at less than five years, and EL2 less than 10 years post PhD.*
3. The rule that “Applicants who hold the following positions may apply for an Investigator Grant but are not eligible for salary support if they hold a full-time academic teaching and research role” requires further consideration. There are likely a significant number of investigators who hold minor teaching appointments (20% FTE) with major research positions (>80% FTE) and contribute significantly to academic life within Universities. Such individuals will be excluded from receiving salary through the Investigator scheme. It should be noted that NHMRC have never provided the full cost of salaries and so recipients of salary from NHMRC (through PSPs or fellowships) are faced with a significant salary shortfall, usually in the order of 20%. *We suggest that some refinement is required in the definition of “full-time academic teaching and research role.”*

Thank you for considering our request

With kind regards

Professor Gilda Tachedjian,
AVS President