

This email is intended for anyone who undertakes, manages or supports research across our campus.



Research & Innovation COVID-19 Edition

Issue 2 | 30 March 2020

The situation is changing rapidly as the growth in COVID-19 cases accelerates. The decision has been made for all ANU staff and students to move to remote work and study. ANU will limit itself to essential activities for which there is no alternative and that cannot be done remotely, and to activities that support the national response to COVID-19. The desire to maintain business as usual operations has been superseded by the need to protect the health and wellbeing of our community.

The challenge of this situation is beyond what we had ever imagined that we would face. Despite these difficult times, we should all continue to be proud of how ANU has risen to this huge global challenge, by taking the necessary lead amongst our institutional peers. This is what it means to be the national university. All research leaders now need to focus on the needs of their staff, especially early career researchers and HDR candidates. Considerable adjustment and re-phasing of research will be required, and this will take careful thought and consideration.

The information and advice below will be published on the [COVID-19 Research information page](#).

Keep well,
Professor Keith Nugent
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

1. Research support

It is important that you take time to consider your portfolio of activities, in particular the options for the continuation of these activities. It is critical that you now consider a business disruption plan, based on the present closure period to 27 June 2020 that addresses issues such as: What will be the impact of remote working? Can your work be re-phased or reshaped? Questions such as these need to be considered in full consultation with your team, including HDR candidates under your supervision. It is important to ensure we make considered decisions at this time.

- **Supporting critical research:** The University has made the difficult decision to limit the activity on-campus to only critical work to reduce interactions and the risk of COVID-19 transmission (you can read the [message from the VC here](#)). In respect to research, critical work includes:
 - campus-based work supporting the COVID-19 response
 - maintenance of required on-site infrastructure
 - access to online library resources and support

A review of critical research activities has been undertaken and outcomes finalised; there will be no other access to laboratories or facilities unless your activity has been approved.

- **Checklist for research leaders and HDR supervisors:** As research leaders and supervisors, now more than ever, it is critical to consider the issues and impact of COVID-19 on your team, your research and your operations. This [checklist](#) should act as a prompt for your considerations, outlining questions that should be considered and actions that should be taken. I strongly encourage you to consult this checklist, discuss it with your team and implement necessary measures now.
- **Communicating with external funders:** For the benefit of your projects and teams, please do not contact your funding organisations without first considering the checklist (mentioned above), developing your business disruption plan and then speaking with your College Research Office, or the Research Services Division. A clear strategy needs to be agreed before contact is made with your external funders. These teams are functioning remotely and are still available to support you; they are receiving information directly as it comes to hand. Should any significant announcements be made regarding decisions from the major funding bodies, we will be sure to communicate this to you (please see below).
- **Research ethics committees:** Researchers have been contacted by the respective ethics committees outlining the current working arrangements relating to ethics applications and variations. In general, until

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14 April 2020, the ANU Human Research Committee (and delegated committees), the ANU Animal Experimentation Ethics Committee and the ANU rDNA Committee will only consider ethics applications or variations that are:

- required for research directly related to the COVID-19 response
- essential variations to existing protocols that will minimize risk/distress to participants/animals/storage of genetically modified material.

No other matters will be considered at this time.

2. ARC and NHMRC update

ARC

The closing date for applications to the following schemes have been extended. The new closing dates are:

- **2021 Linkage Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities (LIEF)** 29 April 2020.
- **2020 Linkage Projects Assessment Round 1** 22 April 2020.
- **Special Research Initiative (SRI) for Australian Society, History and Culture** 6 May 2020.

Please note—these new dates apply to all applications, administering institutions do not need to submit extension requests.

NHMRC

- **2021 Clinical Trials and Cohort Studies** scheme has been delayed by several months. The new closing date will be 25 November 2020.
- **2021 Ideas Grant** scheme has been delayed by five weeks. The new closing date will be 10 June 2020. The applications will be assessed with a streamlined peer review process. NHMRC has asked that if your Ideas Grant application is already close to being finalised, wherever possible please don't wait until the extended deadline to submit.
- **2021 Synergy Grants** scheme has been cancelled.
- **2021 Investigator Grants** scheme outcomes are expected soon.
- **2021 Targeted Call for Research into End of Life** research and translation is delayed until further notice.
- **2020 Partnership Projects** scheme Peer Review Cycle 1 has been delayed. The scheme will now open on 1 April 2020.
- A **new Special Initiative in Mental Health** scheme will open next week and close 15 July 2020.

3. Animal research

All research at The Australian National University is undertaken to the highest of ethical standards. This includes any research involving animals. ANU cares for a range of animal species that contribute to important research in the fields of conservation biology and biomedical science.

COVID-19 presents a distinct and complex challenge for all research and ANU is closely monitoring the situation and its potential impacts. The University is committed to ensuring the welfare of its research animals during this uncertain time.

In consultation with its Veterinarians and Animal Ethics Committee, ANU is reducing the critical resources required for maintaining animal care. The ongoing contribution of animals to research is essential to the future development of treatments for many diseases, including viral infections such as COVID-19. Should your research rely on animal colonies, these will be maintained, however, no new experiments will commence. Animal care arrangements for existing experiments will be discussed directly with CIs.

4. Indigenous research

Undoubtedly, Indigenous communities are likely to be feeling the effects of the current crisis to a higher degree. Indigenous communities are under resourced, marginalised and in view of COVID-19, highly vulnerable. To limit

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the spread of the virus, the University is advising researchers who are conducting engagement or approved research on-country and in remote communities that these activities must be suspended. From an ethical perspective the immediate needs of participants is paramount. In terms of ongoing engagement or research that can be conducted remotely, the present situation pushes the research priority down for most participants and the University needs to anticipate, acknowledge and respect this.

Researchers should consider a range of risk management processes for all research applications that have direct contact with Indigenous peoples, in particular, interviews, fieldwork and the like. Indigenous communities and individuals may not have conference call facilities to support remote research arrangements. We must respect the sensitivity of these communities and ensure we mitigate risk of transmission.

5. HDR Update

So much about COVID-19 is outside our control; not just the virus itself, but all other aspects of your life that are being impacted, including HDR candidature at ANU. I understand and acknowledge that these must be especially fraught times for HDR candidates.

HDR candidates have received a message from the Vice Chancellor directly advising of the known, and unavoidable, impact on their research. Research supervisors and HDR candidates can watch this video message on the [COVID-19 Research information page](#). Also on the Research information page, HDR candidates and their supervisors will find advice on administration, research program, financial support and wellbeing.

HDR administrators will shortly have access to a resource that will support them in answering questions around the implications of the COVID-19 situation on HDR candidates. This scenario-based advice sheet will offer suggested responses for enquiries received from HDR candidates, and will be updated as appropriate. Should further advice be needed, administrators and supervisors can contact the Office of the Dean, HDR on ODHDR@anu.edu.au.

6. Useful links and resources

- [ANU Research Information](#)
- [ANU Community Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Working from home](#)
- [Looking after your wellbeing when working from home](#)
- [Australian Department of Health](#)
- [ACT Health](#)
- [World Health Organisation](#)
- [Coronavirus Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Ten misconceptions about coronavirus](#)

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Contact eo.dvcr@anu.edu.au