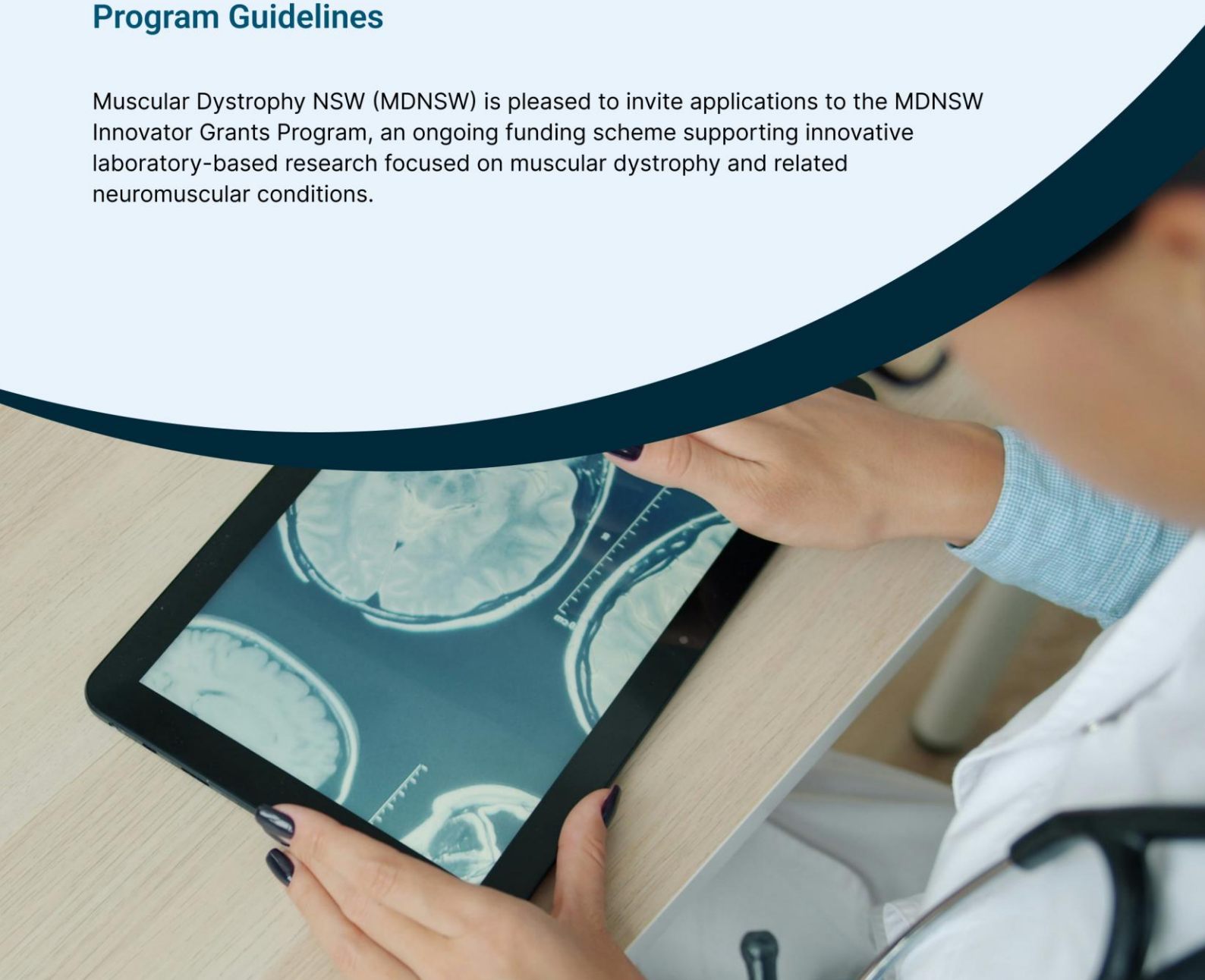
MDNSW Innovator Grants Program 2026

Neuromuscular Laboratory Research Scheme Supported by Hearts & Minds Investments

Program Guidelines

Muscular Dystrophy NSW (MDNSW) is pleased to invite applications to the MDNSW Innovator Grants Program, an ongoing funding scheme supporting innovative laboratory-based research focused on muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions.



Executive Summary

The Muscular Dystrophy NSW (MDNSW) Innovator Grants Program is an ongoing (standing) funding scheme supporting high-quality, innovative dry and/or wet laboratory research focused on muscular dystrophy and other neuromuscular conditions. Grants are valued at up to AUD $100,000 for projects of up to 12 months. Smaller budgets and shorter durations are permitted where feasible.

1. About MDNSW

Muscular Dystrophy NSW (MDNSW) supports people living with muscular dystrophy and other neuromuscular conditions through services, advocacy and investment in research that accelerates meaningful impact.

2. Program Overview

2.1 Program name: MDNSW Innovator Grants Program – Neuromuscular Laboratory Research Scheme (the Program).

2.2 Purpose: To provide competitive grant funding for innovative dry and/or wet laboratory-based research that advances understanding, diagnosis and therapeutic development for muscular dystrophy.

2.3 Ongoing scheme (standing program): The Program is an ongoing funding scheme. MDNSW may offer one or more funding rounds periodically, subject to the availability of funds and MDNSW priorities. MDNSW does not guarantee that rounds will occur on a fixed schedule. MDNSW reserves the right to amend, suspend, or discontinue the Program at any time.

2.4 Funding and duration:

- Maximum grant value: up to AUD $100,000 per project
- Maximum duration: up to 12 months
- Projects may be shorter and/or smaller budgets, provided feasibility is demonstrated

2.5 Number of grants per round: The number of grants awarded will depend on funds available and the quality of applications received.

3. Research Scope and Priorities

3.1 Mandatory scope: Laboratory-based research only. Projects must be dry lab and/or wet lab research.

Wet lab research may include (examples):

- Molecular/cellular biology and pathophysiology relevant to muscular dystrophy
- Cell culture systems, organoids, iPSC-derived models
- Animal models and in vivo experimentation (subject to approvals)
- Biomarker discovery and validation using biological specimens
- Target identification/validation and mechanism-of-action studies
- Preclinical therapeutic development or screening (including gene-based approaches)

Dry lab research may include (examples):

- Bioinformatics and computational biology
- Analysis of genomics/transcriptomics/ proteomics/metabolomics datasets
- In silico modelling of disease mechanisms or therapy response
- AI/ML applied to laboratory/biological datasets (not consumer apps)
- Integrative analysis of experimental datasets (e.g., multi-omics)
- Wearable sensor-derived measures for home-based monitoring (e.g. digital technologies)
- Clinical trial readiness (e.g. natural history studies)
- Health Economic Modelling

3.2 Disease focus: Projects must have clear and direct relevance to types of muscular dystrophy (e.g., Duchenne/Becker, LGMD, FSHD, myotonic dystrophy, congenital muscular dystrophies). Broader neuromuscular conditions may be considered only where muscular dystrophy relevance is explicit and central.

3.3 Round-specific priorities: Each round may specify priority areas (published with the round announcement).

4. Eligibility

4.1 Eligible applicants: The Chief Investigator (CI) must be affiliated with an Australian administering institution (university, medical research institute, hospital/LHD, or other eligible research organisation) and demonstrate capacity to deliver the project within time and budget. Early- and mid-career researchers are encouraged to apply.

4.2 Location and collaboration: Projects may involve laboratory research conducted anywhere in Australia. Collaboration across institutions, states and territories is welcomed where the proposed approach strengthens the project and is well placed to deliver meaningful benefit to the neuromuscular community.

4.3 Co-funding: Co-funding is permitted and must be disclosed (current and pending support, overlapping aims).

4.4 Ineligible applications/activities include:

- Clinical trials involving direct participant interventions
- Non-laboratory research (service delivery, policy, education, psychosocial, qualitative studies)
- Pure epidemiology or survey-only studies
- Commercial product marketing, business development, or sales activity
- Major capital works or large equipment purchases inconsistent with the grant cap (minor essential equipment may be considered if justified)
- Retrospective funding for work already complete

5. Funding Use and Budget Rules

5.1 Eligible costs (examples):

- Project-specific personnel (e.g., research assistant/technician time; fractional salary support where justified)
- Consumables and laboratory reagents
- Core facility access fees (e.g., genomics, imaging, animal facilities)
- Minor essential equipment (with justification)
- Data storage/compute costs required for dry lab analyses
- Publication costs (reasonable and justified)
- Ethics and governance costs where applicable (reasonable and justified)

5.2 Ineligible costs (examples):

- General institutional overheads unless explicitly permitted in the round details
- General office equipment not directly related to laboratory work
- Entertainment, gifts, or hospitality
- Travel that is not essential to project delivery (conference travel typically not supported unless stated in round details)

6. Ethics, Safety, and Regulatory Requirements

Applicants are responsible for securing all required approvals and complying with relevant laws, regulations and institutional policies. Funding may be conditional on approvals being obtained by specified dates.

- Human samples/data: ethics and site governance as applicable
- Animal research: animal ethics approvals and welfare compliance
- Biosafety/gene technology: institutional biosafety approvals where relevant

7. How to Apply

MDNSW may use a two-stage process to reduce burden and improve fit.

Stage 1: Expression of Interest (EOI) – short-form proposal to confirm fit, feasibility and alignment.

Stage 2: Full Application – detailed proposal for invited EOIs, including methods, milestones, budget and risks. Applicants are encouraged to briefly explain how the project has been designed with the neuromuscular community in mind, or how the community will be involved.

Submission method, formatting, page limits, attachments and institutional sign-off requirements will be specified in each round announcement.

8. Assessment Process

Eligible applications are assessed competitively against published criteria. Applications are assessed by the MDNSW Research Grants Committee (RGC). MDNSW may obtain external peer reviews. Conflicts of interest are declared and managed; conflicted members do not score or discuss affected applications.

9. Assessment Criteria (Standard Weighting)

Criterion	Weight
Scientific merit & innovation	25%
Relevance to muscular dystrophy and other neuromuscular conditions	20%
Feasibility (methods, timeline, risks)	20%
Team capability & environment	15%
Translation potential / next steps	10%
Consumer relevance & clarity of benefit	5%
Value for money	5%

10. Outcomes, Conditions, and Funding Decisions

The RGC provides MDNSW with a ranked list of recommended proposals and suggested funding amounts and conditions. Final approval is made in accordance with MDNSW governance (CEO and/or Board as determined). MDNSW may make conditional offers (e.g., ethics approvals, budget clarifications, revised milestones).

11. Funding Agreement, Payments, and Variations

Successful applicants must enter into a grant agreement via the administering institution. The agreement covers scope, milestones, budget, reporting, compliance, intellectual property arrangements (typically institution-led), publications, acknowledgement, variations, termination and repayment if applicable.

Payment schedule may be staged; for example, 70% on execution; 30% after an acceptable midpoint report or milestone evidence. The exact schedule will be stated in round details.

Any variation to scope, budget, timeline, or key personnel must be requested in writing and approved prior to implementation.

12. Reporting and Monitoring

- Midpoint progress report (brief): progress vs milestones, risks/issues, expenditure to date.
- Final report: scientific outcomes, outputs, data generated, next steps and final financial acquittal.
- Acknowledgement: Publications and other outputs must acknowledge MDNSW, and any related donor funding, using the approved wording.
- Plain-language summary: Provide at least two updates for donors and the community during the funding period.
- MDNSW Neuromuscular Information and Research (NIRD) Event: Be available to present at the annual NIRD event (usually held in August).

13. Privacy, Confidentiality, and Complaints

MDNSW will handle personal information in accordance with applicable privacy laws and internal policies. Application materials are confidential and shared only with those involved in assessment and governance (including external reviewers under confidentiality obligations). Complaints about process (not scientific judgement) may be lodged in writing within the timeframe stated in outcome notifications. MDNSW's decision following review is final.

14. Key Dates (Round 1 – Indicative)

Milestone	Indicative timing
EOIs open	*NA (this round)*
EOIs close	*NA (this round)*
Full applications open	3 August 2026
Full applications close	5PM 4 September 2026
Assessment and ranking	9 October 2026
Recommendations and approval	30 October 2026
Contracting and project start	November/December 2026

Have enquiries about the program? Contact us.

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