

Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health Research Development and Approval Processes (August 2005)

1. Purpose of Paper

The purpose of this paper is to describe the processes for the development and approval of research projects funded or endorsed by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRCAH). The sections are as follows:

1. Purpose of paper
2. Sources
3. Programmatic approach
4. Project categories
5. Project development and approval processes
6. In-Kind project approval processes
7. Criteria for assessment

2. Sources

This paper includes extracts from relevant documents approved by the CRCAH Board, including:

- *Developing the CRCAH Research Agenda* (August 2003)
- *Emerging Priorities* (Approved March 2004)
- *Guidelines to the Statement of Project Responsibilities* (May 2004)
- *A Programmatic Approach to the CRCAH's Research and Development Activities* (October 2004)
- *In-Kind Contributions – an Explanation* (May 2005)
- *Operationalising the Board's Research Agenda* (March/August 2005)

3. Programmatic Approach

The CRCAH Board in September 2004 decided that the CRCAH would move to a programmatic approach. A CRCAH Research Program comprises a number of related research projects, research transfer and capacity development activities, that together form a coherent approach to addressing areas in which improvements in knowledge or its uptake may lead to health gains. Research Programs can vary in size and scope, and may require different levels of financial or other support from the CRCAH, but all will be framed by specific research questions.

The following five large Programs of research have been endorsed by the Board and will be reviewed on a regular basis:

- Comprehensive Primary Health Care, Health Systems and Workforce
- Chronic Diseases
- Healthy Skin [scabies and skin diseases]:
- Social Determinants of Health
- Social and Emotional Well Being

It is intended that all CRCAH projects, whether current or new, funded or in-kind, will be aligned with at least one of these Programs. Thus, each project should strengthen the Program through building on or cohering with other projects in that area. However, there might be a small number of projects that will fall outside these areas.

4. Project Categories

The CRCAH has three categories of projects which are briefly described below. Each category includes research, research transfer and/or capacity development activities.

- **CRCAH funded projects:** This category covers all projects that receive funding from the CRCAH. Many of these projects will involve some in-kind contributions and some will also receive external funding. These projects can vary considerably in size, from a small scoping activity to a large body of research that might be considered a “program” by funding bodies such as the NHMRC.
- **In-Kind projects:** An in-kind project is one that a partner organisation funds itself or through sources other than the CRCAH and that is endorsed by the CRCAH. In some cases, small amounts of additional funding may be requested to strengthen a project and these projects will then become CRCAH funded projects.
- **External projects:** An external project is one which involves an external organisation paying for the CRCAH to conduct research, research transfer or capacity development activities.

5. Research Development and Approval Processes

5.1 Facilitated Program/Project Development Process

Each Program has three Program Leaders, with at least one to provide research knowledge and leadership (usually from a research institution) and at least one to provide policy and practice experience and leadership (usually from a community organisation or government department). Additionally a Program Manager will be appointed to each Program to provide support in development and implementation processes. The Program Leaders and Program Manager will provide a leading role in the development of research Programs, and in facilitating the development of projects.

Each new project should be developed with the advice and support of Program Managers, and to a lesser degree, Program Leaders. This support might include assisting with developing projects in collaboration with community organisations, identifying appropriate people to be involved in the development, conduct and dissemination of the research, and in writing up the proposal.

Diagram 1 (CRCAH Research Development and Approval Flowchart) illustrates the process for the development and approval of projects.

5.2 Community Engagement/Network of Interest

Engagement with the Aboriginal health sector, particularly Aboriginal community organisations, is considered essential by the CRCAH because research has shown that this is most likely to result in the research results being transferred into policy and practice (*CRCAH/National Institute of Clinical Studies, unpub, Research Transfer and Knowledge Brokering in Indigenous Health Contexts.*) Diagram 1 (CRCAH Research Development and Approval Flowchart) illustrates how Aboriginal health sector organisations and other Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) will be involved throughout the process of development and conduct of research. Local Aboriginal Medical Services should be consulted when research is being planned in a particular area.

The CRCAH is establishing a Network of Interest which is expected to provide a mechanism for consultation and knowledge sharing with a wide group of stakeholders. This network will include SMEs who have been identified as important stakeholders.

5.3 Capacity Development, Research Transfer and Knowledge Brokerage

The CRCAH is committed to high quality research that makes a difference by improving health outcomes, changing policy and practice and developing the capacity of Indigenous organisations and individuals. Therefore, it is considered essential that all research projects develop capacity development and research transfer plans. Program Managers and the Capacity Development Officer can assist with these.

Some research transfer, capacity development and knowledge brokerage activities (such as workshops or reports) might be conducted on a Program level and go beyond the boundaries of individual projects. Such overarching Program activities will not necessarily go through this project development process as they may require responsive action to opportunities.

5.4 Quality Assurance Processes

Before receiving final approval to proceed, a CRCAH funded research proposal will be subject to a rigorous quality assurance process. This process will focus on the criteria for robustness (see criteria listed under 6.3) to ensure the research will be of a high quality.

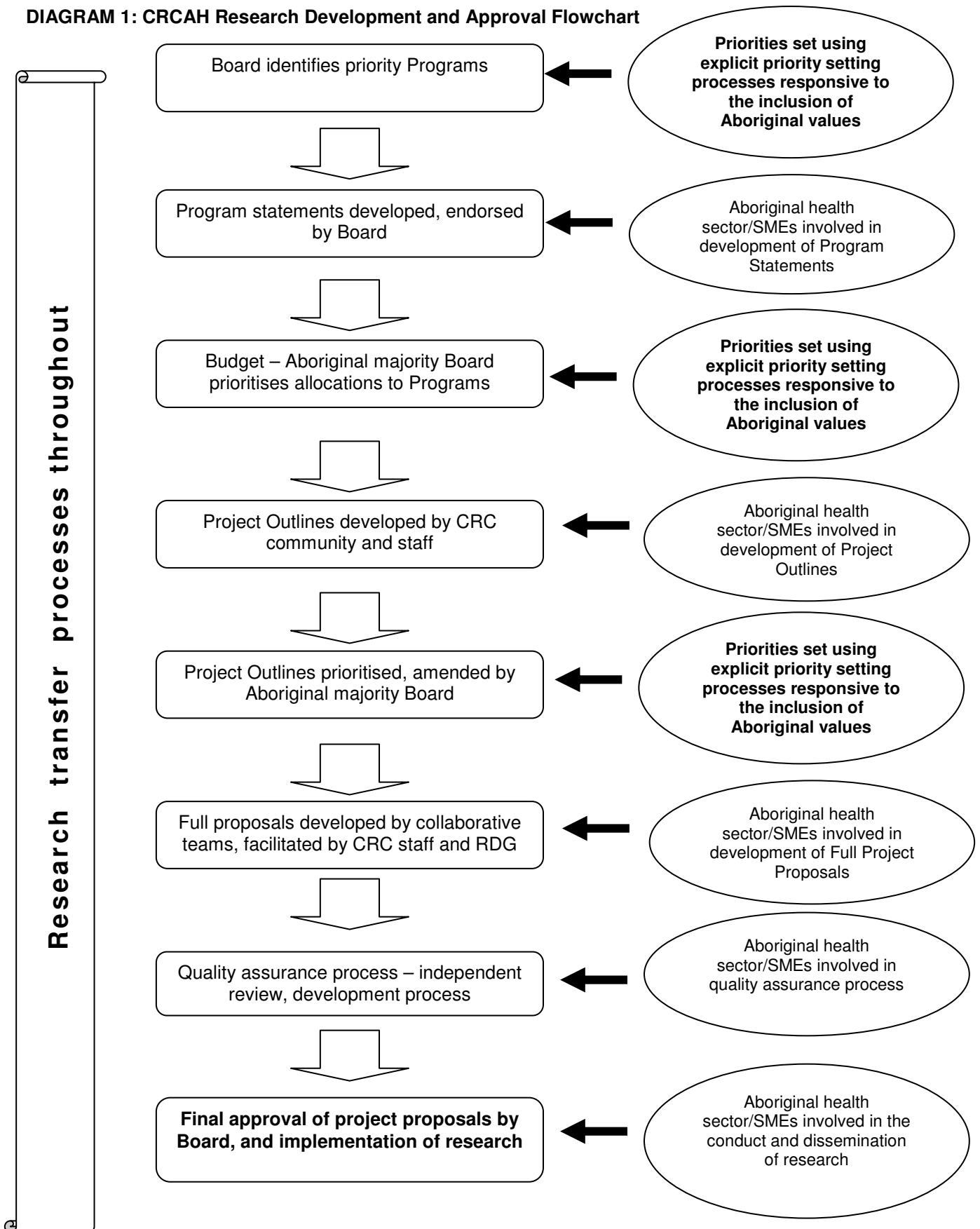
It is proposed that the quality assurance process involve independent reviewers including researchers with expertise in the relevant disciplinary fields, Aboriginal people, and representatives of other end users of the research (for example, government agencies, health services, non-government organisations). The CRCAH proposes to use an interactive and developmental approach which may, for instance, involve the project development team meeting face to face with reviewers to workshop improvements to the project.

6. In-Kind project approvals process

Most in-kind projects will be developed outside the CRCAH facilitated development processes. To have a project endorsed as an in-kind contribution, project leaders should complete an in-kind concept form and attach original project documentation (grant application or contract, course outline, etc). Link people and Program Managers will assist in the process of putting forward in-kind projects.

Proposals will be reviewed by the CRCAH Executive (CEO, Research Director and Research & Development Manager) and recommended for endorsement as CRCAH in-kind projects / courses. If endorsed, in-kind research projects will be asked to develop a research transfer plan if one does not already exist for the project do not already have one. Program Managers can assist with this work.

DIAGRAM 1: CRCAH Research Development and Approval Flowchart



7. Criteria for Assessment

The CRCAH takes a holistic view of health which encompasses the existence of social and emotional wellbeing as well as the absence of disease. Research Projects will be assessed according to the following sets of qualities and criteria:

7.1. Consultation and Collaboration

These criteria are about how the project brings together the necessary people and expertise, and how well the project is linked to people and organisations in the Aboriginal health sector and Aboriginal communities.

- The extent to which community and/or government organisations have been involved in the identification of the issue/problem and developing the proposal, and ongoing collaboration during the conduct and implementation of the research. (Where research is planned in an area serviced by an Aboriginal Medical Service(AMS), the AMS should have been consulted in the process)
- The extent to which the research draws together multiple CRCAH partners (alternatively a clear argument should be given for a single partner proposal).
- The extent to which the proposal demonstrates consultation and collaboration with stakeholders in considering research transfer and capacity development plans.
- The extent to which the proposal links CRCAH Research Programs.

7.2. Potential Health Outcomes

These criteria are about making sure that research will make an impact either directly (leading to immediate improvements in health outcomes, service provision or capacity) or indirectly (such as improving the knowledge base in order to develop health gains in the future).

- The potential impact of research outcomes in Indigenous health (this does not exclude foundational research in which the link with health outcomes may be less direct, but can be soundly argued).
- The extent to which the proposed research will be of interest and use to stakeholders within the Aboriginal communities and/or Aboriginal health sector.
- The capacity of industry and stakeholders to utilise outcomes.
- The potential for developing the capacity of Indigenous people, communities and organizations.
- The extent to which the proposal demonstrates planning, in collaboration with stakeholders, to achieve transfer of research into policy and practice throughout the development, conduct and dissemination of the project.
- The research includes (where relevant) plans for economic evaluation to demonstrate the value to government, community or other organizations in taking up the findings.

7.3. Robustness

These criteria are about making sure research is scientifically sound, that the planning and design are likely to be effective and that the project team has the capacity to carry out the project.

- The quality of the proposal (including soundness of methodology and appropriateness of approach).
- The feasibility of the proposal and its prospects for successful outcome.
- The track record of proponents in research, research outcomes, and collaborative work with Aboriginal people.
- The clarity of timeframes and milestones.

7.4. Relationship with CRCAH Objectives and Priorities

These criteria are about whether or not the project is in scope. In most cases this will be a matter of demonstrating it is aligned with a relevant Program Statement.

- The extent to which the proposed research can contribute to the achievement of the goals of one or more CRCAH Programs.
- The extent to which the project demonstrates how it coheres/links with other projects and development activities within relevant Program(s).
- The extent to which the project builds on existing work.
- The extent to which the project reflects Aboriginal values.
- The extent to which the proposed research is consistent with the CRC for Aboriginal Health aims and objectives.

7.5. Value/cost

These criteria are about the how much the project costs, how realistic is the budget, how much in-kind or external funds it brings to the Program and how the potential outcomes demonstrate that the funds are being spent effectively.

- Relative value and absolute cost of the proposed project.
- Make a good case for prospects for leverage of external funds. If external funding is possible, indication of timelines and strategies should be provided.

Example of relative cost:

A project might be seeking \$100,000 in CRCAH funds but bring no in-kind support and its outcomes might apply to improving the health of a very small number of patients. This project would have less overall value than a project which sought \$100,000 of CRCAH funds, brought in \$1,000,000 in in-kind and external contributions, and could be applied to the work of health services across Australia.

Example of leveraging:

The term leveraging is about how much in-kind and external funds can be drawn into the project or Program with some contribution from the CRCAH. In some cases, a small amount of funds from the CRCAH can dramatically improve the outcomes from a project already funded from other sources.

7.6 In-Kind and External Projects Criteria Variation

In-Kind and external projects will be assessed according to the above criteria, but greater flexibility will be exercised in the application of these criteria.

Endorsed by the CRCAH Board on 16 August 2005