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1. Introduction

The Dust Diseases Board has been providing research funding since 1983. The 2020-2024 Dust Diseases Board Grant Strategy aims to make a positive difference to those impacted by hazardous dust exposure and dust diseases. This will be achieved through the **Ideas to Action** and **Focus** funding streams.

Through funding research, we aim to reduce the risk of people developing dust diseases and to optimise health and care outcomes for people with a dust disease and their families.

icare dust diseases care, also known as the Dust Diseases Authority (DDA), provides financial and health care support to over 5,100 people affected by work-related dust diseases annually.

More than 86% of the dust diseases managed by icare dust diseases care are asbestos related. icare dust diseases care only administers research funds directly related to the dust diseases dealt with by icare dust diseases care:

- Aluminosis
- Asbestosis
- Asbestos induced carcinoma
- Asbestos related pleural diseases
- Bagassosis
- Berylliosis
- Byssinosis
- Coal dust pneumoconiosis
- Farmers' lung
- Hard metal pneumoconiosis
- Mesothelioma
- Silicosis
- Silico-tuberculosis
- Talcosis
- And other diseases caused by the same dusts that cause the above diseases.

2. Dust Diseases Board Grants Program

Overview

The Dust Disease Board's vision is to make a positive difference to those impacted by hazardous dust exposure and dust disease through our grant programs. The 2021 grant programs include Discovery grants, Translational Research grants and Focus grants, with the latter specifically targeting the current research priority of occupational exposure to silica.

Across our grants program the Board encourages collaborative partnerships between research groups, with industry partners and across specialties, that aim to deliver increased research efficiency by sharing knowledge, capacity and resources through collaborative research effort.

The Board also encourages applications for novel and innovative benchtop research, new treatments and pilot programs to improve health outcomes and quality of life of workers with dust diseases. We support early stage innovations and ideas that can be turned into impact.

Ideas to Action Funding Stream

i. Discovery grants

Discovery grants provide funding for research projects undertaken by individual researchers or research teams for:

- Basic and translational research that provides the foundation upon which therapeutic discovery can occur and/or deepen our understanding of dust diseases.
- Exploratory, novel studies that break new ground or extend previous discoveries toward new directions or applications.
- High risk, high reward studies (subject to due diligence) that may lead to a breakthrough in a particular area, or result in novel techniques, agents, methodologies, models or applications that will impact biomedical or clinical research.

ii. Translational research grants

Translational Research grants are available to facilitate the rapid transformation of research discoveries into clinical trials. The grant funds exceptional researchers who have demonstrated the capability to carry out ground breaking research and start to make inroads into treatments.

Focus grants funding stream – Occupational exposure to silica

Focus grants are available for projects that are focussed on creating a greater awareness around the dangers of working with products that contain silica and reducing the incidence of silica related occupational diseases.

For further information on the scope of the focus grants please see Appendix 1 Dust Diseases Board Focus Priority at the end of this document.

3. General provisions

Funding

Project grant funding will commence between 1 January 2022 and 30 June 2022 and will be offered for a maximum of three years.

The grant will be offered as a “one line” grant without specification of distribution between salaries, consumables and equipment. There will be no additional sums paid by icare dust diseases care outside of the one-line grant.

The grant must be spent wholly for the purposes for which it was requested and so certified by the Chief Investigator and the Administering Institution. If the research is terminated early or completed at a lower than initially envisaged cost, icare dust diseases care must be advised and any unspent funds returned.

Payments in respect of any grant will be within the terms and conditions specified in the funding offer and set out in the Funding Agreement.

Funds will not be provided to cover any overhead costs levied by the Administering Institution or organisation.

All amounts referred to in the Funding Agreement are exclusive of GST, unless stated otherwise.

Administering Institutions or organisations are responsible for all financial and taxation implications associated with receiving funds.

Privacy and confidentiality

Documents containing personal information will be handled and protected in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.

Applicants are required to consent to the information supplied as part of their application being disclosed for assessment and purposes connected with the making and administration of the grant. Such disclosure includes, but is not limited to, members of the Dust Diseases Board, independent assessors requested by the Board to provide advice, and relevant employees of Insurance and Care NSW (icare) involved in the grant process.

The announcement of the successful applicants will involve the dissemination of information to the public about the general nature of the Grant funded including the lay description provided in the application, the funding awarded, the applicants involved in the Grant, and the administering institution or organisation, and any actual organisations at which the Grant is being carried out.

Intellectual property

Applicants must adhere to an Intellectual Property Policy approved by the governing body of the Administering and/or research institutions that is similar with the document ‘National Principles of Intellectual Property Management for Publicly Funded Research’ released in September 2001: www.arc.gov.au/policies-strategies/policy/national-principles-intellectual-property-management-publicly-funded-research and to the intellectual property requirements set out in the Funding Agreement.

Conflict of interest

All parties involved in or associated with the application/project are required to disclose to icare dust diseases care any conflict of interest that has the potential to influence, or appear to influence, the project and activities, publications and media reports or request for funding related to the application/project. Such conflicts may be disclosed to icare dust diseases care at the time of submission of the application, and in reporting on funded grants as soon as practicable after the conflict of interest is identified.

Enquiries

Enquiries can be directed to icare dust diseases care by email at ddcgrants@icare.nsw.gov.au.

3.1. Ideas to Action - Discovery Grants & Translational Research Grants

Administering Institution

Applicants must nominate a single Administering Institution that will be responsible for the management of the grant. Applications are to be lodged through the Administering Institution.

The Administering Institution must have in place policies and procedures for the administration of public funds; for the management of intellectual property; and proper conduct of research in relation to ethics. The Administering Institution must have a good scientific practice and will provide appropriate infrastructure to allow the research supported by the grant to be undertaken.

For the purposes of GST arrangements, the institution is defined as the supplier.

Research Institution

Applicants must nominate the institution where the research will be undertaken. The Administering Institution and Research Institution may be the same.

Chief Investigator

Chief Investigators must hold relevant professional qualifications and have the skills, knowledge and resources necessary to carry out the proposed grant.

Obligations regarding previously funded projects must have been fulfilled to the satisfaction of the Dust Diseases Board for all Chief Investigators. The application will not be considered if there are outstanding progress, financial or final reports for any current or previously funded grant.

Profile and CV

Profile and CV information must be provided for all Specified Personnel named on an application.

Incomplete, false or misleading information

The application is the only source of information available for assessment. As such it must contain all the information necessary for assessment of the project without need for further written or oral explanation or reference to additional information.

All details provided in the application must be current, particularly concerning any other successful grants, at the time of application.

If you provide false or misleading information within the application to the Dust Diseases Board, it will be excluded from any further consideration for funding.

Certifications

Signatures on applications certify the accuracy and validity of all information submitted.

The Administering Institution signatory is certifying that it will be responsible for the appropriate use of the funds awarded, for the performance of the grant supported project or activities resulting from the application, and all other items as dictated by the funding agreement.

The Administering Institution signatory must have the appropriate authority to sign on behalf of that institution.

Electronic signatures on grant applications are acceptable. Funding agreements must have original signatures.

3.2. Focus Grants - Occupational exposure to silica

Organisation

Applications are open to not-for profit businesses as well as those for profit and government agencies.

The Organisation will need to provide a proven track record of project delivery, a financially sustainable business/delivery model and financial viability.

The Organisation must have in place policies and procedures for the administration of public funds; for the management of intellectual property; and proper conduct of project management in relation to ethics. The Organisation must be able to provide appropriate infrastructure to allow the project supported by the grant to be undertaken.

For the purposes of GST arrangements, the organisation is defined as the supplier.

Chief Investigator

Chief Investigators must hold relevant professional qualifications and have the skills, knowledge and resources necessary to carry out the proposed grant.

Obligations regarding previously funded projects must have been fulfilled to the satisfaction of the Dust Diseases Board for all Chief Investigators. The application will not be considered if there are outstanding progress, financial or final reports for any current or previously funded grant.

Profile and CV

Profile and CV information must be provided for all Specified Personnel named on an application.

Incomplete, false or misleading information

The application is the only source of information available for assessment. As such it must contain all the information necessary for assessment of the project without need for further written or oral explanation or reference to additional information.

All details provided in the application must be current, particularly concerning any other successful grants, at the time of application.

If you provide false or misleading information within the application to the Dust Diseases Board, it will be excluded from any further consideration for funding.

Certifications

Signatures on applications certify the accuracy and validity of all information submitted.

The Organisation signatory is certifying that it will be responsible for the appropriate use of the funds awarded, for the performance of the grant supported project or activities resulting from the application, and all other items as dictated by the funding agreement.

The Organisation signatory must have the appropriate authority to sign on behalf of that institution.

Electronic signatures on grant applications are acceptable. Funding agreements must have original signatures.

4. Submission of applications

Applicants must use the Dust Diseases Board grants program application form, available from the icare dust diseases care website at: <https://www.icare.nsw.gov.au/injured-or-ill-people/work-related-dust-disease/research-and-funding>. Please note that word limits are strictly enforced. Any information provided beyond the word limit will not be considered.

Applications (including all supporting information) must be received by the closing date. Applicants must respond to the questions in the application form and must not amend any of the questions.

Applications which omit significant information may not be considered.

Applications must provide a detailed budget and justification for proposed project expenses. The project details will be used in the assessment of the merit of the research and the qualifications and experience of the research group. The budget details will be used to ensure that the appropriate level of budget discipline and accountability will be exercised in the project.

Projects that propose to use icare dust diseases care's data or scheme participants as research subjects must include all the costs associated with these requirements in their research budget. Researchers proposing access to participants as part of their projects must discuss the feasibility of the project with icare dust diseases care before submitting the grant applications.

The application must be submitted by email to ddcgrants@icare.nsw.gov.au

The application must be saved as a pdf using the following format and using the following subject line: DDC Research Grant_Surname_First Name.

Applications must be submitted by 5.00pm AEDT on **29 January 2021**.

5. Assessment of applications

Upon receipt, applications will be reviewed for completeness and eligibility.

The Dust Diseases Board will score and rank eligible applications based on an assessment of merit against the Board's research principles, the application criteria and the amount of funding requested.

Applications may be reviewed by additional independent assessors if required.

The submission of an application does not confer any entitlement on the applicant.

The decision to make a grant is totally within the discretion of the Board and icare dust diseases care, and their decision is final.

The Board requires its members and independent assessors to declare conflicts of interest and to withdraw from considering individual applications where such conflict exists.

Applications will be considered in the first instance for adherence to one or more of the Board's Grant Strategy principles:

- Benefits NSW workers with dust diseases and their families and contributes to a better quality of life for workers with dust diseases.
- Develop a better understanding of dust diseases in NSW, including epidemiology, to prevent the development of dust diseases among people at risk.
- Contributes to the effective administration of the dust diseases scheme in NSW.
- Provides funding for novel and innovative benchtop research, new treatments and pilot programs to improve health and quality of life.
- Supports early stage innovations and ideas that can be turned into impact.
- Advances and accelerates the translation of research into policy and practice delivering meaningful outcomes to workers.
- Fosters collaboration to develop and broaden expertise and leverage investment to increase impact.
- Builds capacity and capability; developing dust diseases researchers of tomorrow.

Applications meeting the Board's research principles will be merit assessed against the following selection criteria.

Design and methodology (50%)

Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? The assessment includes:

- the clarity of the research question including objectives and literature review
- appropriateness of study design
- rigor of methods including adequacy of sample size and controls and validity of statistical analysis
- feasibility of goal and predicted outcomes, based on duration of project, expertise of applicants, preliminary data and budget

Cost vs benefit (20%)

Are there clear details and relevant examples of how the research/project is relevant to and can benefit icare dust diseases care and its customers?

Is there a clear and compelling rationale for why the proposed research/project is of value and significance? Does the project identify unique and essential attributes in light of the relevant extant literature?

Are there full details and justification regarding expenses and research costs and other financial support provided or sought?

Significance (20%)

Discovery Grants and Translational Research Grants: Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions in dust diseases?

Focus Grants: Does the project focus on one of the 3 problem statements; creating a greater awareness, reducing the incidence of silica related occupational diseases or supporting workers diagnosed with a silica related disease? If the aims are achieved how will the impact be measured, and results used to effect change?

Research qualifications, experience and reputation (10%)

Are the investigators, collaborators, and other researchers including the project team well suited to the project? If Early Stage Investigators or New Investigators, or in the early stages of independent careers, do they have appropriate experience and training? If established, have they demonstrated a record of achievement that has advanced their field(s)? Track record will be considered in relation to opportunity, accounting for career interruptions, administrative and clinical/teaching load, and typical performance (including publications) for the field in question.

If the project is collaborative, do the investigators/project team have complementary and integrated expertise; are their leadership approach, governance and organisational structure appropriate for the project? Do the investigators have suitable experience in supervising students in research if relevant?

Notification of outcome

All applicants will be notified directly of the outcome of their application by July 2021. The details of successful grant applications (i.e. project title, Chief Investigator, Institution/Organisation and total funding awarded) will be published on icare dust diseases care's website and in other publications as considered appropriate.

6. Grant administration

Grant funding agreement

If the application for grant funding is successful, the Administering Institution/Organisation will be required to enter into icare dust diseases care's standard Funding Agreement. Preparation of the Funding Agreement will commence in August 2021.

The Funding Agreement details the specific conditions for each grant type and each individual grantee including reporting requirements and financial management.

All parties involved in a grant should familiarise themselves with the Standard Agreement conditions, but only the Administering Institution/Organisation and icare dust diseases care will be parties to the document.

By signing the Agreement, the Administering Institution/Organisation is agreeing to the conditions contained in that Agreement.

A grant will not commence, nor grant funds be expended, prior to:

- The Agreement between icare dust diseases care and the Administering Institution/Organisation having been signed by both parties; and
- Appropriate clearances having been obtained relevant to the project e.g. ethics approval and provided to icare dust diseases care.

Evidence of Research Ethics Committee approval, Institutional Biosafety Committee approval or other regulatory body approvals, as appropriate to the project being conducted, must be forwarded to icare dust diseases care upon their receipt. The offer of funding may be withdrawn if the necessary approvals/licenses are not received 6 months after the date of the research funding agreement.

Applicants should be aware that the Schedule of Progress Reports and Stage Payments is part of the funding agreement and the Performance Measures are used to evaluate satisfactory progress.

Requests to vary an agreement or schedules must be forwarded in writing. Amendment of any clauses of the Agreement will be at icare dust diseases care's absolute discretion. A standard Funding Agreement is available on request from the icare DDC Research & Education Unit.

Travel expenses

The grant may include justified travel expenses covering the cost of travel where it is directly related to progressing the project and achieving the intended objectives and outcomes of the project.

Progress reporting

icare dust diseases care requires progress reports and expenditure reports to be submitted according to the Schedule of Progress Reports which is part of every funding agreement. Any departure from the approved project and/or the budget must be disclosed in the progress reports.

icare dust diseases care reserves the right to suspend or terminate a grant if progress reports are not supplied by the due date or if progress is considered unsatisfactory by the Dust Diseases Board and/or icare dust diseases care. If a project fails to obtain the target number of research subjects the Board may reduce the grant. If a project fails to obtain sufficient research subjects to produce statistically significant results, the Board may terminate the funding for the project. icare dust diseases care will provide notice in writing of any concerns to the Administering Institution.

At the completion of the project, the Administering Institution/Organisation will be required to arrange for an audit by an accredited auditor of all grant monies expended. Applicants should include financial auditing expenses in their project budget.

Random audits may be conducted during the course of the project. icare dust diseases care will provide reasonable notice should a random audit be required. The Administering Institution/Organisation must ensure documents and other financial records are properly maintained and available if required.

icare dust diseases care withholds the final 5% of grant monies which are not paid until all of the researcher's obligations under the funding agreement are fulfilled.

Recognition of funding

All publications, media releases or discussion of results emanating from a grant must acknowledge funding support with the following wording:

“This project was supported by a Dust Diseases Board competitive grant. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of icare or the Dust Diseases Board.”

Use of icare’s logo requires approval on a case by case basis.

Appendix 1

Dust Diseases Board Focus Priority

Occupational Exposure to Silica

The Dust Diseases Board is calling for funding application proposals for research projects focussed on occupational exposure to silica.

The Board is seeking funding application proposals from individual researchers and research teams for research projects focussed on ways to create greater awareness around the dangers of working with silica containing products, and /or reduce the incidence, and the negative health and wellbeing impact, of silica related diseases.

The Board is open to applications that can address one or more of the following problem statements.

Problem Statements

1. How can we create greater awareness around the dangers of working with silica containing materials?
2. How can we reduce the incidence of silica related occupational diseases?
3. How can we best support workers who are diagnosed with a silica related disease?

Context

In the early part of the 20th century, NSW had a large number of silicosis cases diagnosed which led to the creation of the Joint Silicosis Workers' Compensation Committee. In recent decades, the number of incidences of silicosis in NSW decreased and instead a focus was placed on the growing incidence of asbestos related diseases in NSW.

More recently there has been significant media attention regarding the increasing numbers of workers diagnosed with silica related lung diseases in Queensland. There are concerns that New South Wales may see a similar increase in silica related disease in the future. The Board would now like to invest in grants to build our knowledge about silicosis and other silica related diseases.

There are many possible reasons for the increase in the number of people diagnosed with a silica related disease. Contributing factors may include:

- Changed work practices including the increased use of electrical tools
- The lack of effective controls in place to minimise exposure
- Increased use of manufactured stone products, particularly outside of a controlled environment
- Ill-fitting or incorrectly used personal protective equipment
- Proactive case finding approaches being adopted that target at risk employers and workers

The Board encourages proposals that relate to those working with natural stone e.g. tunnelling and stone masonry as well as the manufactured stone industry.

What is silica?

Silica is a naturally occurring mineral found in most rocks, sand, clay and in products such as bricks, concrete, tile and manufactured stone (engineered or composite stone).

What is respirable crystalline silica?

Respirable crystalline silica refers to silica particles that can penetrate deep into the lung because of their small size.

How does silica get into the lungs?

Dusts can easily be breathed into the lungs but are then normally removed by the lung's natural defence mechanisms. These defence mechanisms may not be able to remove dusts such as silica completely, especially following a lot of exposure. This can result in inflammation and scarring of the lung and serious diseases may develop later.

What harm can silica cause?

Depending on factors such as the percentage of silica in the material being worked with, as well as how much dust a worker breathes in and for how long, crystalline silica can cause the following health effects:

- Silicosis (acute, accelerated and chronic types)
- Lung Cancer
- Silico-tuberculosis (silicosis complicated by tuberculosis)
- Silicosis complicated by fungal infections
- Rheumatologic diseases; e.g. rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma
- Chronic kidney diseases
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases e.g. emphysema and chronic bronchitis

These diseases are completely preventable. Minimisation or elimination of exposure and then early detection through health monitoring can minimise the impacts of these diseases on the worker's health.

What kind of research might be beneficial in helping to create greater awareness and reduce the incidence of silica-related dust diseases?

The Board will consider all research proposals focused on ways to raise awareness and reduce the incidence and impact of silica-related dust diseases, or improve the health and wellbeing of people with those diseases.

Examples of some topics that may achieve this aim might include:

- How can the ongoing risk for silica-related dust diseases be better communicated to young workers and apprentices?
- How can we better support workers from diverse cultural backgrounds who are at high risk of developing a silica-related dust disease?
- How can we effectively train health care professionals to recognise patients who present with symptoms of silica-related dust diseases?
- How can the discovery of genes, proteins or other molecular factors, promote the early detection of silica-related dust diseases?

- How can the discovery of genes, proteins or other molecular factors lead to the treatment of silica-related dust diseases?
- How can we better support the mental, social and financial wellbeing of workers diagnosed with a silica-related dust disease?
- How can we better support the families of those with a silica-related dust disease, in particular very young dependent children, taking into consideration the requirement for specialist support services?
- How can we better support workers from diverse cultural backgrounds who are diagnosed with a silica-related dust disease?

How to apply

For more information on the grants program, including the application guidelines and application forms go to:

www.icare.nsw.gov.au/injured-or-ill-people/work-related-dust-disease/research-and-funding or email: ddcgrants@icare.nsw.gov.au