



## Heart Foundation: Keeping Consumers at the Heart of Our Research

Liam Rodgers

National Heart Foundation of Australia

The Heart Foundation research program has been funding cardiovascular research for over 60 years. As a charity relying on generous donations from the public, we must ensure we are funding high-quality relevant research with translatable outcomes that matter to patients, carers and their families. Using robust and transparent processes is central to our ways of working.

Recognising the vital role the public plays in shaping all stages of research, we have been involving consumers in our research application review process since 2019. Consumer Review Committee members review all applications according to a strict set of criteria, including the potential impact of the research. Currently, consumer review of applications contributes 30% of the final ranking to determine which research is funded.

Involving consumers in health research has many benefits. Firstly, consumer involvement improves public understanding of health research. This is crucial to ensure research is translated into meaningful policies and programs that can improve individual and population level health outcomes.

Secondly, when communities are engaged in scientific research, they tend to support it. With strong community support comes greater incentive for researchers to conduct studies that are immediately relevant to the community's needs. Increased public understanding

and engagement in turn supports higher levels of public confidence in researchers' use of donated funds.

Thirdly, research teams who involve consumers run better studies. This is because the research has more relevance to participants, studies are designed in a way which is acceptable to participants, participant information is better understood, and enrolment improves [1].

Members of the Heart Foundation Consumer Review Committees include people with lived experience of cardiovascular disease, carers and health professionals. When forming the committees, diversity of membership is of utmost importance. We take into consideration gender, age, geographical location, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation, and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to ensure we have an accurate depiction of the Australian population.

### How to Get Involved

If you are a researcher applying for Heart Foundation funding, please refer to the 'Consumer Guide for Researchers' to see how you can incorporate consumer engagement in your research proposals: [heartfoundation.org.au/research/research-funding-available](https://heartfoundation.org.au/research/research-funding-available)

If you would like to volunteer to participate in the Heart Foundation Consumer Review Committees, sign up here: <https://prod-nhf.microsoftportals.com/community-enrolmenthome/>

### Reference

- [1] McKenzie A, Bowden J, Zalberg, Conroy K, Fallon-Ferguson J, Jesudason S, et al. A snapshot of consumer engagement in clinical trials in Australia: results of a national survey of clinical trial networks and research organisations. *Res Involv Engagem*. 2022;8(3). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-022-00338-w>.