



**Australian Government**  
**National Health and Medical Research Council**



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Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
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## **National Health and Medical Research Council submission to Inquiry into assessment and support services for people with ADHD**

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is Australia's leading expert body in health and medical research. It has a legislated role in issuing guidelines, and advising the community, on matters relating to the improvement of health and the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease.

This brief submission addresses the Inquiry's terms of reference (j) *'the viability of recommendations from the Australian ADHD Professionals Association's Australian evidence-based clinical practice guideline for ADHD.'* and (l) *'any other related matters.'*

### *NHMRC standards and approval*

NHMRC issued *Clinical practice points on the diagnosis, assessment and management of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children and adolescents* in 2012. This document is now out of date and has not been updated.

NHMRC no longer issues clinical practice guidelines itself but instead runs a clinical practice guidelines approval program. Under this program, in place since 2011, guideline developers who develop guidelines to NHMRC guideline development standards<sup>1</sup> can seek my approval of the completed guideline under section 14A of the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act (1992)*.

Users of NHMRC approved guidelines can be assured that they are based on the best-available evidence, have been developed in a transparent manner with effective management of conflicting interests, have the full involvement of people who will be affected by the guideline recommendations, and have been subject to public consultation. The NHMRC approval program encompasses many of the important clinical guidelines in use in Australia today.

### *Guideline implementation*

A key NHMRC standard relevant to this submission is that a guideline will 'be feasible to implement' (NHMRC standard 1.4). The Australian ADHD Professionals Association (the developer) has met this standard with its *Evidence-based guideline for diagnosis, management and treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder* (the guideline).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelinesforguidelines/standards>

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The developer has used the NHMRC prescribed GRADE (Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation) methodology to develop its recommendations. The GRADE process is the international *de facto* standard for guideline development. It explicitly addresses the shortcomings of earlier grading systems and allows for issues such as patient values and preferences, feasibility, acceptability and local context to be applied to guideline recommendations. However, it does not consider the cost of implementation.

Some commentators have expressed concern that the evidence base for the guideline is, in some areas, of low or very low certainty. This is not uncommon and the GRADE process helps developers to make recommendations transparently and scientifically using best-available evidence, as has been done in this case.

It is important that recommendations are based on an up-to-date body of evidence (NHMRC standard 8.1) and that guidelines are regularly updated as new evidence emerges. For this reason, on the advice of NHMRC Council, I have approved the guideline for a period of no more than five years with the expectation that it will be reviewed and updated before July 2027.

NHMRC continues to support research to inform the body of evidence from which guidelines such as this derive their recommendations. Between 2013 and 2022 NHMRC has expended \$22.0 million on research relevant to ADHD.

The developer has submitted the draft guideline to extensive public consultation allowing potential users the opportunity to comment on the feasibility or otherwise of guideline recommendations in the Australian context.

In following NHMRC standards, the developer has developed a dissemination and implementation plan to help with the uptake of guideline recommendations in clinical practice. Guidelines do not implement themselves and ensuring effective uptake in clinical practice requires an understanding of the scientific basis of implementation<sup>2</sup> as well as careful planning and making recommendations that are implementable.

By following NHMRC standards and using scientific and transparent development methods, the Australian ADHD Professionals Association has developed a guideline that has the best chance of being used in clinical practice. This has been confirmed by independent expert and methodology reviews commissioned by NHMRC during the development process, as well as post-publication endorsement by groups such as the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists and the Australian Psychological Society.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Anne Kelso AO  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelinesforguidelines/implement/implementation>