

SYNERGY Innovation Scholarship

GUIDELINES 2023–2024

Introduction

The Office of the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer, ACT Health Directorate and the SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre promotes a culture of innovation, learning and development through the provision of various scholarships and programmes made available to midwives and nurses across the ACT public health sector. These programmes have been developed to support the ongoing commitment and investment in nursing and midwifery research, practice and process improvement.

The SYNERGY Innovation Scholarship (SIS) supports nurses and midwives to undertake a **research, practice or process improvement project** within their work area for 12 months.

Aims

The aims of the SYNERGY Innovation Scholarship are to:

- increase the evidence base of nursing and midwifery practice within the ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD), Canberra Health Services (CHS) and Calvary Public Hospital Bruce (CPHB),
- support research, practice or process improvements in nursing and midwifery clinical areas at ACTHD, CHS and CPHB,
- build the capacity of nurses and midwives for innovation, research and practice improvement and
- improve outcomes for patients and healthcare consumers as well as staff.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for a SYNERGY Innovation Scholarship, applicants must:

- Be permanently employed or on a long-term contract as an Enrolled Nurse or Registered Nurse, or Midwife, (with a practicing registration) within the ACTHD, CHS or CPHB, and
- Be supported by their Director of Nursing/Midwifery (DON, DOM or Operational Manager) and academic mentor.

Application Process

Stage 1: Read these Guidelines and submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) – the EOI form can be found here: [Research Centre for Nursing and Midwifery | Health \(act.gov.au\)](#)

The EOI includes a project overview of no more than 500 words which should include:

- project aims,
- rationale,
- proposed methods (methodology, participants, setting, data collection, analysis),
- proposed outcomes,
- references.

Stage 2: EOIs are reviewed by SYNERGY and a decision to support the application through to the next stage is made based on quality of the EOI, feasibility, potential impact and value for money. Applications that are supported will receive an invitation from SYNERGY to submit a full scholarship application.

Stage 3: The applicant submits an application which is found on the website: [Research Centre for Nursing and Midwifery | Health \(act.gov.au\)](#) The application includes a project proposal which must include:

- an outline of the project aims and objectives and the rationale and evidence supporting the need for change (including literature review),
- a clear description of the process/method to be used,
- a realistic scope and timeframe for achieving the project aims within the 12-month SIS year,
- a realistic budget request and justification which may include backfill for the applicant's time to attend SIS workshops and carry out project activities, and expenses such as conference registration and printing
- likelihood that the project outcomes will be sustained beyond the project period,
- a plan to disseminate results and experiences to others, and
- outcomes that have the potential to be transferable to other units, teams and settings.

Stage 4: Applications are reviewed by SYNERGY and appointed accordingly.

Assessment of Expressions of Interest and Applications

Opportunities for a SYNERGY Innovation Scholarship will be advertised within ACTHD, CHS and CPHB, with Expressions of Interest (EOI) and applications considered by a panel made up of at least one of the SYNERGY Clinical Chairs and senior nurses and midwives.

Should an applicant be dissatisfied with the panel's decision, an appeal process has been established.

Written requests with review of panel decisions must:

- Be provided within two weeks of the applicant receiving notification of the panel's decision,
- Identify the basis of the appeal, and
- Be addressed to the supervising Clinical Chair, SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre: synergy@act.gov.au.

The decision of the Clinical Chair is final.

Supervisor

The supervisor is the applicant's manager or person who oversees the applicant's role.

Project Sponsor

The project sponsor is the person who gives permission for the project to go ahead, supports the project and provides guidance and resources to the applicant and project staff.

Academic Mentors

Academic mentors will be an ACTHD, CHS or CPHB employee. If the applicant does not have an academic mentor in mind, SYNERGY will help the applicants identify a mentor.

The role of the project academic mentor is to:

- become part of the project team,
- attend and contribute to SIS workshops,
- provide guidance, support and advice to the recipient,
- work with the ideas of the recipient and guide the development of a feasible practice development proposal,
 - consider projects, for instance, that will not necessitate Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval or will require no more than low risk HREC approval,
- support the recipient and other team members to develop skills in leadership, project management and practice development,
- meet with the recipient and other team members on a regular basis,
- assist with progressing the project to successful completion,
- support the recipient and other team members in dissemination of project results,
- co-author any paper/presentations for publication with recipient as first author, and
- review and approve progress and final reports.

Workshops

SIS workshops are designed to provide education to assist recipients to successfully complete their projects. Workshops are four full day workshops. Attendance by recipients and their academic mentor is **compulsory**. Notice of upcoming workshops will be provided at least 6 weeks' prior.

As an example, Workshop One will cover the experience of previous SIS recipients, clarifying SIS roles and responsibilities, use of the library, clarifying project aims and objectives, project management, identifying project challenges, ethical issues and strategies for success, and individual assistance as needed. The fourth workshop is when the projects are presented to the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer and senior nurses and midwives.

Funding

SYNERGY Innovation Scholarship funding is primarily intended to pay for backfilling of recipients' positions to allow them to undertake their project within the 12-month period. This includes time to attend the SIS workshops. The SIS scholarship is not intended to cover the full cost of the nurse or midwife's time to undertake the project. It should be understood as supplementary funding.

The SIS may also be used to pay for conference registration and/or poster development and printing, or other expenses directly related to the project aims. SIS may be funded from \$5,000-\$20,000.

Applications requesting funds in excess of \$10,000 will need to demonstrate a track record in successfully leading and completing projects of an equivalent scope.

The recipient's work area is required to invoice the SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre for 50% of funding for backfill early in the project period and the remainder 50% for backfill once the project interim report is submitted and accepted. If invoices for reimbursement are not submitted as appropriate the work area risks losing their funding.

Expenses such as conference registration and/or poster development and printing and direct research costs will be claimed by the recipient as reimbursements from SYNERGY as required and negotiated.

It is very important that project budgets are discussed regularly between recipients and their DON/M, especially prior to the end of the financial year (that coincides with the end of the scholarship period).

Expending Funds

It is the SIS recipient's responsibility as well as their DON/M to monitor the project budget to ensure scholarship monies are expended before the end of the 12-month scholarship period (that coincides with the end of the financial year).

Receipt of scholarship funds and project expenditure should be noted in the SIS Project Budget Report.

Unspent Funds

The scholarship recipient must notify the SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre in writing to synergy@act.gov.au if:

- there are any unspent monies prior to the end of the 12-month scholarship period/financial year, and/or
- the project terminates or is likely to terminate before completion. The recipient must make arrangements with the DON/M to return unspent funds.

Conditions

The following conditions apply for successful recipients of a SYNERGY Innovation Scholarship. Recipients must:

- Attend the SIS workshops with their academic mentor.
- Upon request, submit an interim and final report to SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre.
- Acknowledge the ACT Health Directorate and SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre in all project-related publications and presentations.
- Present their final project at a SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre Grand Rounds: Research and Practice Improvement Forum, or another appropriate forum.
- Notify SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre immediately if their project is not progressing satisfactorily or anticipated that it will not be completed within the 12-month scholarship period. An explanation and budget report are required if the project does not proceed to completion.

- Notify SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre immediately if the recipient intends to leave the project team and provide the name and contact details of the new project leader.
- If requested, provide SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre within fourteen (14) days, written progress reports or any other information required.

Agreements

Successful applicants will receive a SYNERGY Innovation Scholarship Agreement and are required to sign the Agreement, have their signature witnessed, and return it to the SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre by the due date specified in the letter of offer.

The scholarship recipient's DON/M will receive a Letter of Agreement for Funding. The DON/M is required to sign the Letter of Agreement for Funding and return it to the SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre by the specified due date. The Letter of Agreement includes the commitment of the recipient's work area to invoice SYNERGY at the beginning of the project and when the project interim report is submitted and accepted.

Extension and Suspension

All requests for variation to the SYNERGY Innovation Scholarship Agreement must be notified in writing to SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre and the DON/M of the health service.

Be advised that as a 12-month scholarship, there is limited opportunity to vary any aspect of the scholarship. Deferral of a scholarship may be negotiated in extenuating circumstances. Recipients must discuss this with their supervising SYNERGY Clinical Chair and their DON/M.

If a project is not completed within the 12-month scholarship period, a request is to be made in writing to SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre for an extension of time. An extension of time to complete a project does not include additional scholarship funding.

In the event of illness which impacts a project, the recipient will not automatically be entitled to an extension of the scholarship. ACTHD, CHS and CPHB may, on formal application, agree to a scholarship extension if the extension can be met by the health service's operational requirements.

Termination

A SYNERGY Innovation Scholarship may be terminated at any time if:

- in the opinion of the ACTHD, CHS, CPHB or supervising SYNERGY Clinical Chair, the project progress is unsatisfactory in accordance with fair performance management principles,
- the recipient terminates their project,
- the recipient fails to complete their project,
- the recipient ceases employment with ACTHD, CHS or CPHB, and/or
- the recipient fails to observe the conditions of the SYNERGY Innovation Scholarship Agreement.

Timeline

EOIs open	19 April 2022
EOIs close	30 April 2022

Feedback provided to EOI applicants	6 May 2022
Successful EOI applicants invited to submit a SIS application	6 May 2022
Final applications close	31 May 2022
Final applicants notified of outcome	1 July 2022
Workshop 1	Meeting with supervisor
1 st disbursement of workplace (backfill) funds (50%)	October 2022
Catch up session 1 for recipients and academic mentors	To be advised
Workshop 2	8 December 2022
Workshop 3	13 April 2023
Interim report due	1 May 2023
2 nd disbursement of workplace (backfill) funds (50%) (once interim report has been submitted and accepted)	May 2023
Catch up session 2 for recipients and academic mentors	To be advised
Workshop 4	3 August 2023
Reimbursements for expenses to be claimed by the recipient	As required and negotiated with SYNERGY
Final report due	1 July 2023
Present final project at SYNERGY Grand Rounds: Research and Practice Improvement Forum, or another appropriate forum	To be discussed with SYNERGY

Contact

SYNERGY Nursing & Midwifery Research Centre: synergy@act.gov.au