

Maternal and Child Health Service Innovation Fund Guidelines

1. Introduction

Early childhood development is at the heart of the Victorian Government's vision for the Education State. The Victorian Government recognises that access to high quality early years services are central to giving every Victorian child the best start in life, and is committed to achieving this goal. Families deserve a choice of flexible, accessible, affordable and high quality early childhood education and care services. Vulnerable families and children in particular need service responses that are integrated and coordinated and support their needs.

The Victorian Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Service is an integral component of a comprehensive system of child and family services in Victoria. The environment in which Victoria's children and families live, develop and grow, has changed significantly over the past few decades. To remain effective MCH Services need to respond to the changing landscape of family life, and operate effectively in an increasingly complex service environment. They also need to be able to develop localised responses adapted to the needs of their communities.

Supporting innovation has been identified as a key priority by the MCH sector as a means to foster service improvements to meet the diverse needs of families. Innovation drives long-term sustainable improvement in productivity and quality, and leads to better outcomes for families.

On 22 May 2015, the Minister for Families and Children, Jenny Mikakos MP, announced \$950,000 for a MCH Service Innovation Fund (MCHSIF) to support Victoria's MCH Services to continue to meet the evolving needs of children and families. The MCHSIF will focus on improving service delivery and outcomes for vulnerable families and children.

Innovative and responsive practice occurs at a local level throughout the MCH Service. However, there has been limited capacity for these initiatives to impact on service delivery at a systemic level. The MCHSIF will capitalise on the practices that MCH services employ to drive service improvement by fostering the development, adoption and sharing of innovative practices that have the potential to enhance efficient and effective service delivery. The development of a MCH good practice guide will facilitate information sharing regarding innovative and promising practices across the state.

What do we mean by innovation?

For the purposes of the MCHSIF, innovation is defined as the application of knowledge to behaviours, approaches or ways of working within the MCH context which are:

- perceived as a new way of working for the service
- an enhancement beyond current MCH practice or service provision (as outlined in the MCH Service Practice Guidelines or beyond what a particular MCH service currently provides)
- implemented by means of planned and coordinated action by individuals, teams or organisations.

Innovations can include those that:

- make better use of technology and/or resources to improve service provision
- enable better access to services
- enhance ongoing engagement and quality engagement with families, particularly more vulnerable families
- improve service delivery efficiency and/or cost-effectiveness.

2. Objectives of the MCH Service Innovation Fund

The MCHSIF is intended to support long term change in response to local needs, particularly the needs of vulnerable families. The MCHSIF will enable MCH Services and Department of Education and Training (DET) to understand the impact of various approaches to service provision and to apply what has been learnt to systemic service improvement efforts.

The MCHSIF will fund a selected number of local councils (or directly funded MCH Services where applicable) to implement service innovations that are consistent with the MCHSIF objectives.

The objectives of the MCHSIF are to:

- foster the development and adoption of practices to enhance outcomes for vulnerable children and families
- enable sustainable change in response to local needs
- foster the development and adoption of practices to enhance efficient and effective MCH service delivery
- provide information to foster system wide change and learning regarding practices to enhance efficient and effective MCH Service delivery.

The Victorian Government is committed to redressing disadvantage and better targeting funding to need. It is widely recognised that vulnerable families have lower levels of participation in universal services than the general population due to a range of service barriers including lack of transport, service hours, lack of continuity between services, and service not being able to meet family needs.

Improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families is a specific focus of the MCHSIF. In assessing projects across both the local and collaborative streams, projects will be assessed for how they address service barriers, practices and/or outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

Evaluating the MCHSIF

DET will conduct an evaluation of the MCHSIF to understand the overall impact of the fund against its objectives and will make recommendations regarding how the learnings of individually funded projects can be applied to MCH Service improvements more broadly.

To inform the evaluation of the MCHSIF, local councils must complete a final project report one month following the conclusion of your project.

The evaluation will inform the development of a MCH good practice guide that will provide information regarding good practice in innovations that are sustainable and transferable. Innovative practices with proven results will provide case studies that can then be shared across the MCH sector, supporting a culture of continual improvement.

3. Key dates

Applications must be submitted by 4:00pm on 27 November 2015.

Activity	Date
Applications open	9 October 2015
Applications close	By 4:00 pm, 27 November 2015
Successful applicants announced	January 2016
Grant payments made	February – March 2016
Projects commence	February – March 2016 (unless otherwise negotiated)
Mid-point Progress Report due	Half way through funded project
Projects completed by	April 2017
Final Project Report due	One month following project end date

4. Funding available

The Fund will provide grants in two streams.

Stream 1: Local Innovation and Service Improvement

These grants will fund projects or initiatives within a municipality to scope, develop, trial and pilot and/or implement local MCH service innovation. Projects can be a collaboration between an MCH service and other services within the municipality.

Examples might include, but are not limited to:

- the provision of flexible service hours
- outreach to family homes, playgroups or other community groups etc.
- improving the quality of nurse practice
- the use of innovative communications tools

Stream 2: Collaborative Practice

These grants will support partnerships that scope, develop, trial, pilot and/or implement collaborative practices to improve service delivery to children and their families. Partnerships can be between one or more MCH service(s) and other services working with children and families e.g. Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services Alliances, specialist family violence services, maternity services, Supported Playgroup, Best Start.

Examples might include, but are not limited to:

- Creating communities of practice between MCH Services and other early childhood and family services to enhance service collaboration and quality of care
- Coordination or collaboration between a group of MCH Services and other services to build continuity of care and enhance service engagement.

Funding will be allocated to one local council only (or to a directly funded MCH Services where applicable). Where partner organisations and/or more than one local council is included in a project, the lead council will be responsible for dispersing funding.

Grant stream	Spread
Stream 1: Local Innovation and Service Improvement (can also be collaborative projects)	At least 2 per DET region (\$40,000-\$60,000 per grant)
Stream 2: Innovative Collaborative Practice (one or more MCH service(s) and other partners)	At least 1 per DET region (\$50,000-\$100,000 per grant)

Focus on vulnerability

Within each stream, projects that are explicitly dedicated to improving participation and/or outcomes for vulnerable children and families will be weighted more heavily. This is reflected in the assessment criteria below.

Aboriginal, asylum seeker and refugees families will be considered as vulnerable cohorts. As will families having one or more of the following risk factors:

- family violence issues
- families known to Child Protection, including young mothers who have a history of being in Out of Home Care
- drug and alcohol issues
- mental health issues
- homelessness
- unsupported parent(s) under 24 years of age
- low-income, socially isolated, single-parent families
- significant parent–baby bonding and attachment issues
- parent with an intellectual disability
- children with a physical or intellectual disability or developmental delay.

Funded Activities

Funded activities should include, for example, brokerage, new use of technology, short term employment arrangements to establish collaborative practices, and other means of generating and embedding the innovative practice into the MCH service.

Funded activities should not include staffing positions that will attract the expectation of ongoing employment, but activities that generate innovations which can be incorporated into existing practice.

Capital expenses

Project budgets may include funding for up to 15 percent capital expenses where the capital is not required for the business as usual operation of the MCH Service.

5. Eligibility and restrictions

Applications must be by a local council (or directly funded MCH service) that is nominated as the lead for the application process.

All applications must:

- ✓ Be a local council providing a MCH service or an organisation directly funded by DET to provide a MCH service
- ✓ Demonstrate that the project responds to the needs of vulnerable children and families
- ✓ Demonstrate that the proposed project focuses on innovation, service improvement, practice quality, collaboration and/or system change in MCH services
- ✓ Demonstrate how the initiative is consistent with local government early years plans
- ✓ Focus on systemic, evidence based change
- ✓ Be submitted [online](#) by the due date (except where previously agreed to by DET)
- ✓ Be supported by the applicant organisation's CEO or equivalent
- ✓ Only one application per municipality will be accepted
- ✓ All projects must submit a Mid-point Progress Report and a Final Project Report due one month following the conclusion of the project
- ✓ Agree to provide project information, and make a staff member available for interview by the MCHSIF evaluator.

Projects must not include:

- × Business as usual costs or operation expenses for MCH services or other local council activities.
- × Capital or building expenses required for the business as usual operation of the service
- × Fundraising activities
- × Funding of existing debts or shortfalls
- × Employment of staff that may create an expectation of ongoing employment.

6. Funding administration

All funding decisions are final and are not subject to further review. However unsuccessful applicants may contact the DET contact officer on the number below to discuss the assessment panel's comments and feedback on their application.

Funding will be allocated to one local council only (or directly funded MCH Services where applicable). Where partner organisations and/or more than one local council is included in the project, the lead council is responsible for dispersing funding to these organisations.

How to Apply

Applications must be made by eligible organisations via the Smartygrants website at <https://mch-innovation.smartygrants.com.au/>.

Application support

Any queries about the Fund or the application process, including any technical or access difficulties, can be directed to MCH.innovation@edumail.vic.gov.au or call (03) 9651 3274.

Assessment process

Grant applications will be assessed against the assessment criteria listed below.

A DET regional representative will be asked to provide recommendations regarding the suitability of the applications in their region. Assessment will be by a panel comprising members from DET, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Municipal Association of Victoria.

Assessment criteria	Weighting of relative importance (1-5)
1. The proposal demonstrates it responds to vulnerable children and families.	5
2. The proposal demonstrates an innovative response to a significant identified challenge in MCH service provision in the local government area(s) concerned.	4
3. The proposal logically links the identified challenge with the proposed response and includes appropriate output and outcome measures.	4
4. The proposal demonstrates the capacity for sustainability within the existing staffing complement and consistency with the council's early years plan.	3

Notification process

Applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome of the assessment process. Acceptance of offers for funding will be in writing and will need to be signed by the accepting organisation and uploaded onto the Smartygrants website at <https://mch-innovation.smartygrants.com.au/>

Funding agreements and negotiations

Funding to successful proposals will be distributed through existing Funding and Service Agreements.

7. Project reporting

Mid-point Progress Report

A Mid-point Progress Report is to be submitted using the progress report template provided at [https://mch-innovation.smartygrants.com.au.](https://mch-innovation.smartygrants.com.au/)

Final Project Report

The Final Project Report is required to be completed and submitted online at <https://mch-innovation.smartygrants.com.au> one month from the stated end date of the project. The final report information will be used to inform an evaluation over the MCHSIF overall.

Evaluation of the MCH Service Innovation Fund

The DET will be undertaking an evaluation of the MCHSIF to understand the overall impact of the fund and how learnings from individual projects promote local and system wide service improvement.

As a condition of accepting grants each party to the agreement must agree to provide information and/or provide appropriate staff for interview by the external evaluators.

8. Other conditions

Dissemination of Outcomes

Successful projects may be featured in a MCH good practice guide and on the MAV's Innovative Practices website. Successful grant applicants will also have the opportunity to showcase their project at the bi-annual MCH Conference.

Acknowledgement of MCHSIF

All successful applicants are required to acknowledge the MCHSIF grant in speeches and presentations regarding the funded project, and, if applicable, on the organisation's website.

Successful applicants may be required to host a launch event with the Minister or her representative to showcase the MCHSIF.

Further information

For further information on the MCHSIF, please contact MCH.innovation@edumail.vic.gov.au or call (03) 9651 3274.