

## In Conversation Snapshot

# Commissioning research differently – what did we learn?

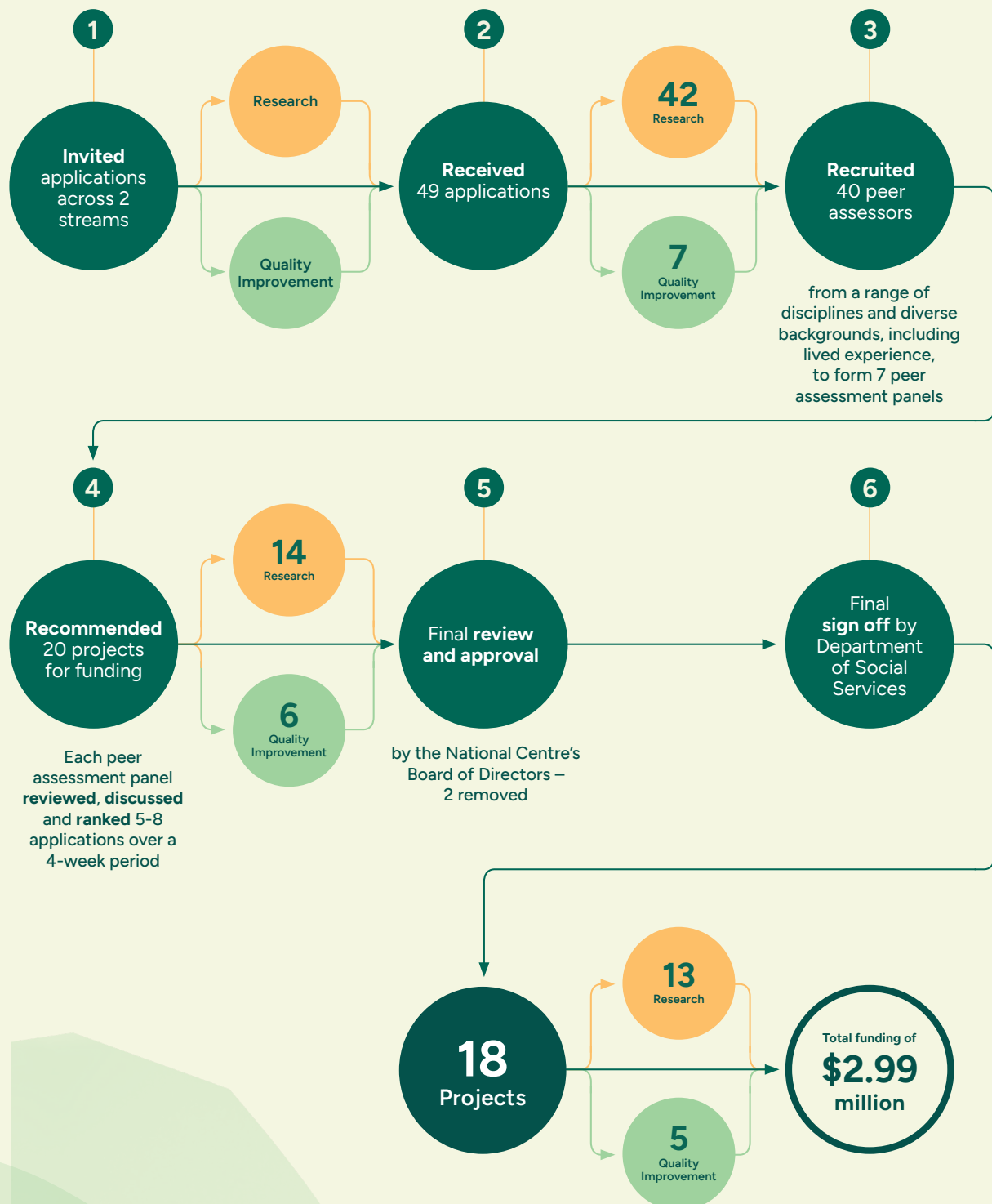
In a recent public conversation hosted by the National Centre, we explored our inaugural competitive grants round. This was the first Australian funding opportunity dedicated to child sexual abuse research to identify and address evidence gaps on prevention, healing and recovery.

### The conversation featured panellists:

- **Professor Andrea de Silva**, Director, Knowledge Generation, Research and Evaluation, the National Centre
- **Alexandra Shriane**, Manager, Research and Evaluation, the National Centre
- **Dr Amy Webster**, Manager of Policy, Advocacy and Research, Sexual Assault Services Victoria
- **Associate Professor Lynne McPherson**, Director of Research, Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care, and Associate Professor in Social Work, Southern Cross University
- **Jamie Sorby**, a Kamilaroi woman, National Centre First Nations and Lived Experience College member and Lecturer, University of South Australia.



# What we did



# What was unique about our approach?

## Application process

By offering a Quality Improvement Stream we recognised the **unique perspectives** and **value of programs** provided by practitioners and service providers who **work directly** with victims and survivors.

Applicants were required to demonstrate how their project approach would:

- include **collaboration** with victims and survivors of child sexual abuse
- be **trauma** and **healing-informed**
- be **inclusive** and **culturally safe**
- be **rigorous, ethical** and **transparent**
- lead to outcomes that are **relevant** and can be **translated to practice**.

## Assessment process

Peer assessment panels were made up of **researchers, practitioners, policy makers** and **people with lived & living experience**.

Groups represented people who would be impacted by the outcomes of the research and would likely access and use the findings to improve processes and practices.

First Nations project applications were assessed by **First Nations assessors**.

**Information sessions** were offered to all peer assessors, including a dedicated session and **ongoing support** for assessors with lived and living experience of child sexual abuse.

## Feedback & support process

Unsuccessful applicants were invited to meet with the research team to **receive feedback** on their application and to **provide feedback** on the grants process.

An online survey was sent to assessors to understand their experience of the process and **identify improvements** in future rounds.

**Ongoing support** and **guidance** is provided to Quality Improvement Stream projects, recognising those organisations often do not have access to the same resources or research expertise as research institutions do.

# Embedding a trauma informed approach - what other commissioning organisations can learn

- 1. Centre the lived and living experiences** of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse throughout all steps of the process. Be prepared to challenge, troubleshoot and adapt systems to do this.
- 2. Create safe, supportive spaces** for people with lived and living experiences of child sexual abuse to fully participate in assessment panels. Give people choices about how and where they participate, empower individuals to share their views, ensure there is equal decision-making powers and appropriate remuneration.
- 3. Require applicants to demonstrate how their research will align with your organisation's values**, including how their research will demonstrate a trauma informed approach, and include this as part of your selection criteria.
- 4. Streamline documentation processes**, including applications and progress reports, to enable applicants to focus more on the 'doing' of research than paperwork.
- 5. Allow time.** A successful grant round requires time. Time to develop application and assessment frameworks, time for applicants to carefully consider their proposals, time to review applications and make considered decisions. Negotiations with successful organisations can be complex so it is important to also allow time for these processes with successful applicants.
- 6. Recruit a broad range of peer assessors** with a diversity of experience, knowledge, and opinions. Peer assessor recruitment should include, at a minimum, researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and people with lived and living experience of child sexual abuse.



Jamie Sorby,  
*Kamilaroi woman,  
peer assessor*

"Coming from the lived experience lens...I know safety is paramount, trauma informed yes. But we've got to be able to share our stories too, and we've got to have that platform...We can be as risk averse as we like, but at the same time, how do we work around those barriers so people can still share their stories?"



Dr Amy Webster,  
*Quality Improvement  
Grant applicant.*

"...the practitioner-led quality improvement opportunity [is] so rare, [and] really greatly appreciated. [It] really gives organisations and practitioners, who are doing this work every day, the opportunity to have their expertise recognised, heard and translated into really meaningful applications quickly"

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7. **Think creatively to create opportunities for applications from non-research organisations** to conduct practice-led research and evaluation projects, alongside traditional, large-scale research projects. Streamline application processes so they are accessible for non-researchers and smaller organisations.
  8. **Ensure First Nations project applications** are assessed by panels consisting wholly or predominately of First Nations people. Data sovereignty practices, where Indigenous people maintain the right to collect, use, share and own their own data, must be embedded in protocols.
  9. **Support applicants and invest time and effort to provide constructive feedback** to those who were unsuccessful. Share the strengths of their applications and provide information on what could be improved. Face-to-face feedback demonstrates respect and appreciation for the work undertaken by the applicant/s and their organisation.
  10. **Be Responsive**, actively invite and be informed by feedback.



*A/Prof Lynne McPherson,  
peer assessor and Research  
Grant applicant*

**"I went back to the Faculty of Health at my university and I shared at a faculty meeting this really innovative approach to grant applications and grant assessment, and people in the faculty were pretty excited...they've started to develop learning materials and professional development opportunities for applicants who are developing or likely to develop grant applications involving people with lived experience"**



*Jamie Sorby,  
Kamilaroi woman,  
peer assessor*

**"I was a little bit unsure in the beginning about what my role would look like and feel like...but I had all the support [from the National Centre] I needed. I got direction on what to anticipate, what to expect and what was asked of me. [Reading applications] at times were triggering, and knowing that you had people there that, you know, were there when you needed it was really reassuring and helped me get through that process"**

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[Click here to access a recording of our Commissioning Research Differently In Conversation Webinar.](#)

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