The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital

Research Strategy 2025

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Aim

The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital Research Strategy aims to provide clarity and guidance as to how the Eye and Ear prioritises, supports and manages research involving the hospital.

It outlines:

- how research on the Eye and Ear campus will be managed;
- how governance processes and oversight will be applied;
- how resources will be utilised;
- the types of research the Eye and Ear will support;
- the Eye and Ear research priorities;
- how collaborations and partnerships will be encouraged and promoted; and
- how Eye and Ear research will be monitored.

The Eye and Ear Research Strategy acknowledges and respects the research autonomy of its campus partners and does not intend to impose on or direct their research. The strategy aims to identify common research interests that can be conducted in collaboration and explore opportunities by which the campus research partners can assist the Eye and Ear with its research priorities.

Objectives

The Eye and Ear Research Strategy will:

- provide clarity and transparency on how and which research involving the hospital occurs on campus
- provide assurance that the Eye and Ear's research priorities are identified and appropriately supported
- provide guidance on how and which campus research involving the hospital will be funded and supported by the Eye and Ear
- provide assurance that research on campus is supported in an integrated and coordinated manner that will help facilitate the research strategic objectives of the Eye and Ear and its campus research partners
- support interaction, collegiality and communication with Eye and Ear campus research partners to encourage research collaboration and a shared understanding of a collective campus research strategy.

The Eye and Ear Research Strategy Framework

The Eye and Ear Research Strategy will facilitate a systematic and integrated approach to guide and manage the conduct of research on campus and set out how Eye and Ear resources will facilitate research initiatives.

The Eye and Ear Research Strategy comprises five key elements:

1. Enhance the Eye and Ear's engagement with Research Partners
2. Establish the Eye and Ear's Strategic Research Themes
3. Establish a targeted approach to how the Eye and Ear's research is supported and funded
4. Support translation of research into practice and promote greater dissemination of findings
5. Explore resourcing options to facilitate implementation and support of the Eye and Ear Research Strategy

Diagram 1: The RVEEH Research Strategy Framework

| Enhance Engagement with Research Partners | Eye and Ear Strategic Research Themes | Target Eye and Ear funding to support Eye and Ear Research Strategic Themes | Enhance Translation of Research into Practice | Research Resources and Implementation |

Strategy Element 1 - Enhance Engagement with Research Partners

The Eye and Ear Research Strategy aims to enhance the hospital's relationships with existing campus partners and explore opportunities to expand the hospital's research collaborations, links and partnerships. The strategy aims to expand the Eye and Ear's sphere of influence as a partner in research and clinical care with a broader base and also assume a leadership role in public and community awareness.

Eye and Ear Research Committee

In late 2023, the Eye and Ear Research Committee was re-established. This is an important channel through which all campus partners can be engaged, expectations declared, and a mutually beneficial pathway forged.

The Research Committee will help enhance the collaboration and cooperation between the Eye and Ear campus research partners via greater communication and awareness of research activity, expectations and requirements of campus partners. The Research Committee will provide a structured forum to discuss Eye and Ear campus research matters. This will facilitate communication so that high-level research matters from across the campus can be tabled and addressed.

Engaging with our Campus Research Partners

To increase the Eye and Ear's knowledge and understanding of research conducted on campus by others and the potential impact on the hospital, the Eye and Ear has invited representation from campus research partners to join our Research Committee. This will facilitate sharing information including current and planned research. In addition, it will provide the Eye and Ear with an opportunity to discuss research opportunities, challenges or needs that could involve our campus research partners.

Establish broader community partnerships, awareness and training

Enhanced engagement with our research partners is expected to increase awareness of the Eye and Ear's research, reaching an audience beyond the

hospital's current research partners. Greater awareness could lead to increased research or training opportunities.
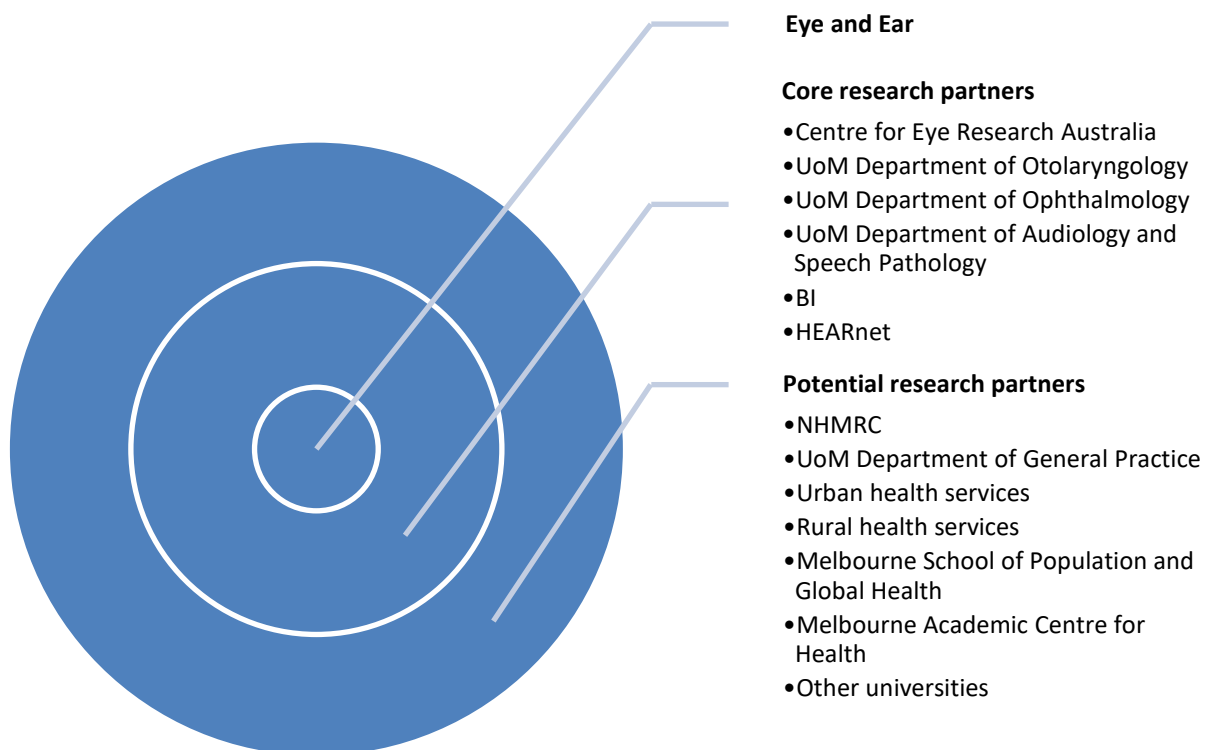
Regular review of the Eye and Ear Research Strategy will involve a broad environmental scan to gain a better appreciation of important players within the immediate and broader research sphere. This scan will have a particular focus on those players operating across, or able to facilitate aspects of, the hospital's research priorities.

In the short term, the hospital may gain significant benefit from greater interaction and establishing stronger relationships with schools and departments across the university sector and other public health services.

Where possible, these broader interactions will be facilitated through the existing campus partners. Such connections may also be facilitated through the hospital's membership of the Melbourne Academic Centre for Health.

The diagram below depicts existing and potential research relationships that could be or are important to the Eye and Ear as part of its research strategy.

Diagram 2: The Eye and Ear campus and potential broader research collaboration partners

Eye and Ear

Core research partners
- Centre for Eye Research Australia
- UoM Department of Otolaryngology
- UoM Department of Ophthalmology
- UoM Department of Audiology and Speech Pathology
- BI
- HEARnet

Potential research partners
- NHMRC
- UoM Department of General Practice
- Urban health services
- Rural health services
- Melbourne School of Population and Global Health
- Melbourne Academic Centre for Health
- Other universities

Research Promotion

Promoting the Eye and Ear and its research partners to the broader community is important to ensure that appropriate recognition and support is attained. The benefits received from philanthropic donations and other fund-raising activities are an important source of funding for a range of research activities conducted on campus. Attracting donations from past, current and new donors is a priority that will build the current research investment capital base.

There is a need to better promote research involving the hospital to both internal and external audiences. The Innovate Annual Review is one of the main communication tools and a range of additional activities will be developed or enhanced including internal and external webpages describing our research activity, research focused staff fora, and individual and/or joint research showcase events.

Such activities will help build stakeholder understanding of the scope and value of research and the role research plays in delivering better health outcomes to our patients and communities.

Strategy Element 2 - Establish and support Eye and Ear research themes and priorities
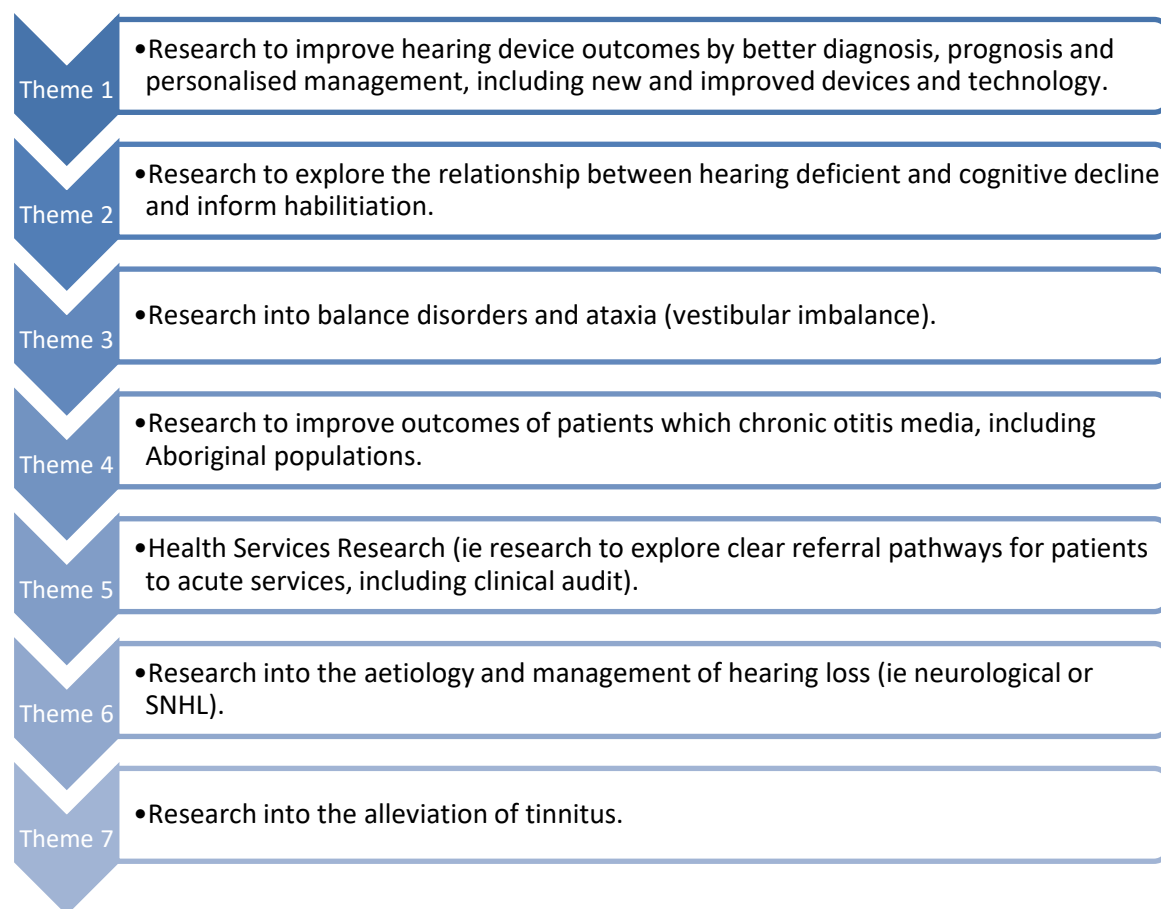
The hospital has identified a number of research themes and priorities, grouped under the key domains of ENT, Ophthalmology and Anaesthesia, that it is interested in pursuing and supporting either as standalone initiatives or through appropriate research collaborations.

ENT Research Themes and Priorities

The main ENT research priorities of the Eye and Ear relate to cochlear implantation, otology, and hearing, acknowledging that the broader aspects of ENT, including rhinology and laryngology are also encouraged.

The flow chart below depicts the key strategic themes that will guide the hospital and its partners in conducting otology and hearing research.

Diagram 3: ENT research themes and research priorities

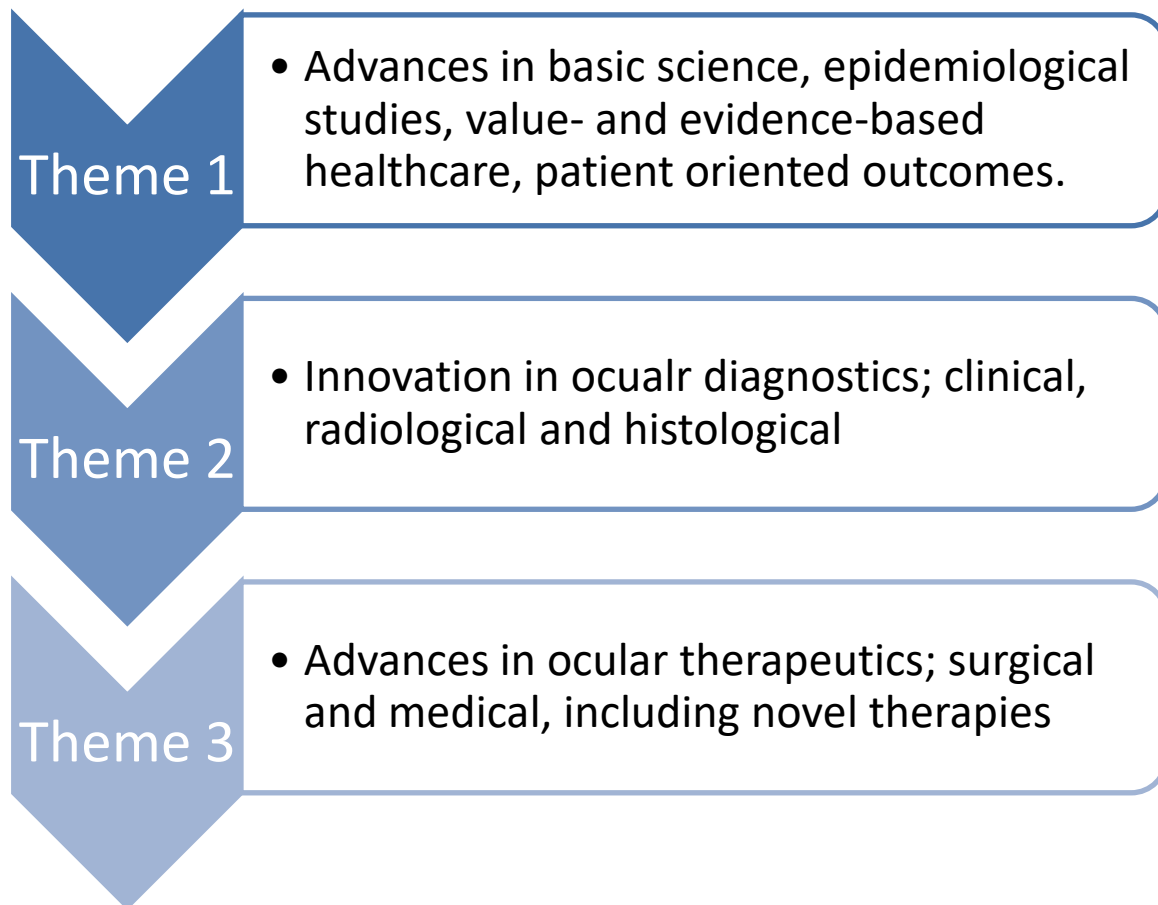| Theme 1 | •Research to improve hearing device outcomes by better diagnosis, prognosis and personalised management, including new and improved devices and technology. |
Theme 2	•Research to explore the relationship between hearing deficient and cognitive decline and inform habilitiation.
Theme 3	•Research into balance disorders and ataxia (vestibular imbalance).
Theme 4	•Research to improve outcomes of patients which chronic otitis media, including Aboriginal populations.
Theme 5	•Health Services Research (ie research to explore clear referral pathways for patients to acute services, including clinical audit).
Theme 6	•Research into the aetiology and management of hearing loss (ie neurological or SNHL).
Theme 7	•Research into the alleviation of tinnitus.

The Eye and Ear, through the Cochlear Implant Clinic (CIC), has established an overarching CIC research governance framework that defines the terms by which cochlear research will be supported by the hospital, and how access to CIC patients and databases will be administered. A key part of the CIC research governance framework was to establish the CIC partners agreed research strategic priorities, with due consideration to the research needs and expectations of the Eye and Ear.

Ophthalmology Research Themes and Priorities

The main ophthalmology research themes and priorities for the hospital are pursued with the aim to deliver better health outcomes for our patients through collaboration with our research partner organisations on research that is high quality, innovative and patient centered. The hospital works closely with the Centre for Eye Research Australia and shares a Joint Research Strategy 2022-2026 (Eye and Ear - CERA).

Diagram 4: Ophthalmology research themes and research priorities

Theme 1
- Advances in basic science, epidemiological studies, value- and evidence-based healthcare, patient oriented outcomes.

Theme 2
- Innovation in ocualr diagnostics; clinical, radiological and histological

Theme 3
- Advances in ocular therapeutics; surgical and medical, including novel therapies

Eye and Ear Ophthalmology Research Themes and Priorities

1. Research Informing better clinical outcomes

- Significantly increase the number of clinical trials and the number of patients enrolled within these.

- Deliver ocular gene therapies with regulatory approval in Australia and participate in clinical trials of new gene therapies.

- Further develop and resource an Ocular Genetics Clinic with multi-disciplinary services and combined clinical and research capabilities.

- Jointly explore options for value-based healthcare / health services research (including service improvement / implementation research / improved care pathways).

- Use research to help improve the efficiency of patient care, including referral refinement and efficient use of community resources.

- Continue to develop the Lions Eye Donation Service (LEDS) joint venture which provides donated eye tissue for transplantation and medical research, as well as establishment of a research tissue bank.

2. Organisations working in partnership on research excellence

- Identify and prioritise clinical issues where research could help improve clinical care.

- Improve the evaluation of clinical outcomes for specific eye conditions, particularly those that are high volume, high cost and with long waiting lists.

- Co-develop optimal shared infrastructure, including co-location of clinical trials activity and LEDS within the hospital.

- Align approaches to philanthropic support to maximise outcomes and streamline and clarify approaches to donors.

- Develop a collaborative approach to publicity and strategic communications.

Anaesthesia Research Themes and Priorities

The key principles guiding anaesthesia research are:

1. Encourage research in anaesthesia, pain and perioperative medicine which benefits the community by leading to improved effectiveness, quality and safety in clinical care.

- Effectively communicate and share research activities and outcomes with the community and hospital.

- Share and build resources and findings in anaesthesia research to the hospital and community. Ensure high quality research for the department and hospital.

- Maximise the efficient use of the resources available for supporting research

2. Develop research skills in the specialty of anaesthesia, pain and perioperative medicine.

- Support development of trainees in research, support and build a research department with trained perioperative research nurses.

- Encourage development of post graduate research qualifications.

- Include patient focused and educational based research and novel innovation research.

- Support teaching and training in anaesthesia and research.

3. Contribute to research capacity and capability in the anaesthesia, pain and perioperative medicine community.

- Build resources for supporting research activities and funding.

- Support and build collaborations within the hospital and across the campus with research partner organisations and community groups.

The key aspects of anaesthesia research include:

- Content: Improve ophthalmic and airway adult and paediatric anaesthesia research.

- Translation: Ensure equity and support translational research into patient care and community benefits.

- Equity: Improve access to care and equity in distribution of research resources.

- Education: Support and develop emerging researchers and connect to the wider research community for mentors and guidance.

- Innovation: Build novel and innovative research skills and translation into improved patient care.

- Audit: Identify areas of strength and weakness in individual areas and act on these findings.

- IT security: explore and implement secure and safe online and AI strategies and tools for increasing efficiency in research.

- Sustainable resources: Build grants and funding resources and income for a sustainable research department.

Strategy Element 3 - Funding of targeted research

The Eye and Ear research themes underpin the hospital's research focus and investment. It is acknowledged that there will be elements of research that are undertaken by the campus research partners that will provide benefit back to the Eye and Ear but may not be easily captured under any of the identified RVEEH research themes and priorities. Such research may provide value and potential future benefit for hospital's patients and also contribute to the Eye and Ear's reputation as a leading research active specialty hospital.

The Eye and Ear does have some several Specific Purpose Funds available to fund researchers and research activities, and will support and encourage research on campus by developing a more transparent and targeted approach to utilising these funds to support research. The Eye and Ear will review how research funds will be allocated for the support of research, and this will be coordinated by the Research Committee as supported by the Research Manager.

Strategy Element 4 - Enhance translation of research into practice

The Eye and Ear, in collaboration with its campus research partners, has been successful in supporting translational research, particularly through the conduct of drug and device clinical trials. CERA, the Bionics Institute, Cochlear Ltd, the University of Melbourne and HEARnet are all active participants in the conduct of clinical research studies involving patients of the RVEEH and are integral in helping facilitate research discoveries into treatment options.

There is also a significant level of quality assurance and evaluation activities, including clinical audit, undertaken on the Eye and Ear Campus. Dissemination of clinical audit findings is occasionally achieved through peer reviewed journal publications but this does not necessarily address their subsequent implementation into clinical practice at the hospital and more broadly.

Similarly, the need to provide broader dissemination of clinical audit findings across the hospital's departments and other health services needs to be considered, and a process by which uptake can be encouraged and monitored needs to be carefully explored. As part of its research strategy, the hospital will provide greater visibility and guidance to the type of quality assurance and evaluation activities being undertaken, informed by areas of clinical need, rather than being driven by the requirement to meet Continuing Professional Development (CPD) obligations.

Strategy Element 5 - Infrastructure and Resources to support the Eye and Ear Research Strategy

There are 2 major mechanisms for the RVEEH to support research on campus.

1. Infrastructure Support

The Eye and Ear provides a Research Office to support the secretariat and administration of the RVEEH Human Research Ethics Committee and various research governance functions. Support is also provided through the provision of space on campus allocated to research partners. There are also shared areas available for general use by campus partners, such as meeting and seminar.

2. Funding Support

Funding support is provided via a number of Specific Purpose Funds, e.g., the Wagstaff Fund and the Research Fund. Funding will be provided through a combination of Fellowships and Early Research Career Support Grants to support researchers, and project funding.

The Eye and Ear will develop and periodically update a Research Funding Plan to establish the scope, terms and conditions relating to how funding is made available to support research across the hospital. The plan will set out, for a set period (e.g., three years), the expected funds available and how those funds will be distributed.

The implementation of the National Clinical Trials Governance Framework in early 2023 has brought into focus several important governance issues including research data management. These will need to be addressed as they become a part of the hospital accreditation process. In addition, it has become obvious that there is a need for hospitals engaged in research activities to provide increased support to clinician researchers as they develop their research proposals in an increasingly complex governance environment as well as the tools to manage their research projects (e.g., electronic data capture and data management systems).