

A black and white photograph of a parent holding two babies. The parent's face is partially visible on the right, looking down at the babies. One baby is lying on the parent's chest, and the other is being held in their hands. A white rectangular frame is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the title text.

Mitigating the impact of parental leave

Career Continuity Grant Guidelines 2026

Internal Grant Program (Research Continuity for New Parents)

The Career Continuity grant aims to support early career researchers to maintain their research excellence, before, during and following a period of parental leave.

Our faculty leadership recognises that periods of high parental responsibilities and periods of research inactivity can have a significant impact on research momentum, especially productivity and outputs for early research careers. This year, as part of the *Advancing Health 2030 - Inclusive Communities* strategy, we are launching a pilot program to assist eligible research staff to maintain their research activity and trajectory, when taking or returning from parental leave. Flexible funding will enable our future research leaders the opportunity to plan their time away, to maintain research momentum while taking the time needed with their family.

This new research continuity initiative aligns with faculty's strategic focus of retaining talented academics, and enabling a culture where health and medical research can flourish.

The program provides flexible funding up to \$40,000 per applicant, for research-related activity during their parental leave, or as they transition to and from parental leave.

In 2026, the faculty is offering the scheme to Level A, B and C academic staff that are research focussed, teaching and research, and academic specialists who have active research underway; who take a period of parental leave of 3 months or greater, from June 2026 - June 2027.

1. Objectives

The purpose of the grant is to enable eligible staff to maintain their research performance during or after a period of parental leave. In addition, the grant aims to:

- Alleviate the impact of parental leave on research activity and career progression
- Support research capability and momentum
- Create a supportive culture where academic careers can flourish
- Ensure a diversity of researchers succeed within MDHS

2. Key dates

- Applications open: 31 August 2026
- Applications close: 26 October 2026
- Applicants notified: start of December 2026

3. Funding

- 3.1 The grant provides up to \$40,000 per applicant in flexible funding to support the continuity of a research program during the allocated period of leave, when transitioning to or from parental leave.
- 3.2 The funding guidelines are not prescriptive about what specific support can be requested, and staff are encouraged to consider their unique circumstances and goals when tailoring the funding request.
- 3.3 Types of support may include but are not limited to:
- Salary funding for a Research Assistant or Postdoctoral Fellow (part-time or full-time) to manage a grant or large contract commitment or assist with PhD student projects.*
 - Open access publication fees, conference registration, data access or other direct research costs.
 - Professional development courses, training, leadership courses or coaching.
 - Travel costs for a carer/family member to accompany the researcher, or to pay for additional caring costs incurred whilst the primary carer/parent is attending a conference, workshop or symposia. An amount of up to \$4,000 in conference funding is available as part of the overall grant allocation per applicant.**

Other reasonable and relevant costs will be considered and assessed on a case-by-case basis.

*Consideration is to be given to how staff members will be managed and supervised. Formal arrangements for the proposed research continuity (staff member and supervisor) will need to be discussed with supervisor before applying.

**Note that travel and child-care costs attract FBT which is why this is capped at \$4000 per application (so that penalties don't apply to the individual applicant).

4. Eligibility

To be eligible for the grant, applicants must:

- Hold or have a confirmed salaried (fixed-term or continuing) academic appointment of at least 0.5FTE at Level A, B or C in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, University of Melbourne – prior to taking leave.
- Hold or have confirmed salaried research-focussed or teaching and research role, or a role with a minimum 40% research allocation.
- Be applying for or currently taking at least 3 months parental leave or have returned from parental leave between 1 June 2026 to 1 June 2027.
- Hold or have a reasonable expectation at the time of application of an appointment until 31 December 2027.

5. Grant Assessment

Applications will be considered based on the following criteria:

- Capacity and potential of the applicant (career stage and trajectory) to deliver high quality research outcomes
- The feasibility, resources and benefit of the proposed project and support, eg. is it practical to implement?
- Compelling need to maintain research eg. field work or data collection to maintain samples, progress longitudinal studies, complete publications/presentations, research with an external organisation, etc.
- Clarity of objectives and alignment with Faculty strategy [Advancing Health 2030](#)

6. Application process

Staff members apply via SmartyGrants and include the following:

- An up-to-date CV (4 pages maximum)
- A Research Plan (1 page maximum) outlining how the grant will support your research continuity/momentum
- The timing of your leave and return and amount of funding requested
- A budget outlining how the funding will be used
- Support from your supervisor (include the formal arrangements for how an interim staff member will be supervised)

Definitions

- **Parents:** inclusive of all forms of a new parenthood including newly adopted/fostered child, a birth child (including a surrogacy arrangement).
- **Additional care costs** refer to expenses incurred by the staff member that are directly related to the cost of care during the time the staff member is travelling. For example: babysitting, access to childcare at conference venue, after school/day-care costs
- **Researcher:** Academic staff with a 40% minimum allocation in their role



Frequently Asked Questions

Career Continuity Grant Guidelines

1. I have a teaching role with a research component that I would like to continue during my leave, can I apply?

While typically teaching responsibilities will need to be reallocated or backfilled directly, the research portion of your role could be applied to this grant. For this grant, “researcher” means an academic staff member with a research allocation at a minimum 40%, including staff who undertake teaching and research, those in research-only positions, or specialists with a substantial research allocation.

2. I am in an Academic Specialist, am I eligible to apply?

If you have a substantial research component in your role that comprises 40% of your time, then you are eligible to apply.

3. I have a fractional appointment in the faculty and work in a faculty partner organization (research institute/hospital), am I eligible?

To be eligible for the grant, you need to be employed at a minimum 0.5FTE within MDHS at Level A, B or C, with a Department/School of the University of Melbourne, or based at an affiliated medical research institute or a non-medical research institute.

4. I am an honorary fellow in the faculty, am I eligible to apply?

Eligible staff must have an appointment in the faculty at 0.5FTE.

5. Can I use this funding to top up a fellowship or extend my contract?

No. The funding is to be used for the approved expenses as outlined in the guidelines.

6. Can the funding support an extension of an RA's contract?

Yes, if they are specifically working to maintain your proposed research.

7. If I am employed at 0.5FTE, can I employ a full time RA to progress my research while I am on leave?

Yes. If successful, you will be awarded the amount based on your application requirements.

8. Can I apply if I am on a casual contact?

The grant is available to MDHS staff on a fixed term, continuing or a continuing research- contingent contracts.

9. What happens if my contract finishes during my leave?

You will need to raise this with your Centre or Department Head before applying for the grant.

10. If I am 0.5FTE, can I apply for the full amount or am I eligible for a pro-rata amount based on my time fraction?

If you are part-time you are still eligible to apply for the full amount as the funds available are not based on your pro-rata work hours. The funding is to enable your research to progress during a parental leave period.

11. If I am attending a conference, do I have to be an invited speaker to be eligible?

You need to describe the benefit of attending, the nature of the event, your participation in the forum and its relevance to your career and research program. Staff travel must be conducted in accordance with University's [Employee Travel Policy](#).

12. Can this grant be shared parental leave? ie. paid leave that can be taken by either parent, includes shared leave entitlements that can be transferred to the father or the mother's partner?

No. The grant is available to individual parents/primary carers whose careers will be directly impacted by extended leave.

13. Is the grant available to men?

The grant is available to parents, irrespective of gender identity, sexual orientation, gender expression, biological sex or if you are transitioning. If you are the primary carer and your research career is impacted by a parental leave break, and you fulfill the criteria then you are eligible for the grant.

14. I've just started with the University less than 6 months ago, am I eligible?

If you have just started in the role, you are eligible for parental leave entitlements that are centrally funded. We suggest you discuss the timing and logistics of your leave with your local HR Business Partner and work out your entitlements from there. You can apply for the grant if you fulfill the criteria and can demonstrate your commitment to the faculty and your research continuity at the University.

15. How do I know what level of support I will need when I return from parental leave, can I apply and work out the details later?

You can apply now and draft a budget for anticipated costs.

16. How do I organise a backfill staff member to continue my research?

When preparing for parental leave you and your supervisor meet to discuss how you would like to approach the period of leave, how your work will be covered while on leave (for example, there may be grant implications) and set out the expectations.

As a staff member, you do not need to recruit a replacement for yourself; the HR Assist / Talent Acquisition teams can support your supervisor with managing the continuity of your research and the most appropriate person to do this.

A formal arrangement that outlines how the research will be supported, and how project milestones and progress will be communicated is to be confirmed with your supervisor and HR Business Partner.

17. What costs does the grant cover?

The funding is flexible and can be tailored to the research requirements of the applicant. Consider costs that are critical to the continuity of the research, or costs that can reinvigorate a research project when returning to work. These costs include but are not limited to: salary for

RA/Postdoctoral fellow to continue field work, undertake literature reviews, support preparation of publications and presentations, undertake tasks in preparation for the researcher's return to work. Other costs include: direct research costs and conference support including child-care while away.

18. How does the conference support work?

As a faculty we value collaboration and recognise the value of networking and career development events such as conferences. We understand that caring costs are only a small factor affecting attendance at these events, but if it would help relieve the pressure in some part to attend, you can apply for conference travel support or child-care support* for someone to assist you while attending the conference. * Attracts Fringe Benefits Tax.

19. What is Fringe Benefits Tax and how does it work?

Some expenses incur additional tax, please refer to [ATO website](#) for details on reportable fringe benefits and thresholds. The amount is capped in the grant budget so that you are not taxed above the allocated amount.

20. How are grants reviewed?

Your application is reviewed by the Associate Dean, Diversity and Inclusion, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences. It is essential that you have a conversation with your supervisor before applying for the grant to ensure they are supportive of the leave arrangements.

21. What do I need to provide in terms of my supervisor's support?

Applicants are encouraged to discuss their plans with their supervisor, and it is expected that the applicant's department will provide supervision support, or other support, specific to the needs of the applicant. An email or letter of support outlining the applicant's formal leave arrangements will be requested from the Research Office if successful.