



Research. Evidence. Action.

HRB Strategy
2016-2020

We will lead and support excellent research, and we will generate relevant knowledge and promote its application in policy and practice.

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Our mission: to
improve people's
health and to enhance
healthcare delivery

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1 Introduction

The Health Research Board (HRB) is a statutory agency under the aegis of the Department of Health. As the lead agency in Ireland responsible for supporting and funding health research, information and evidence, we are motivated and inspired by **our vision – Healthy people through excellent research and applied knowledge.**

Between now and 2020, our mission has two complementary aspects: to improve people's health and to enhance healthcare delivery. To achieve these aims, we will lead and support excellent research, and we will generate relevant knowledge and promote its application in policy and practice. We are determined to see the research that we fund translated into real benefits for people, to see significant transformation in the system of healthcare delivery, and to see economic returns arising from healthcare innovation and economic development.

Over the past five years, we have achieved the major goals set out in our *Strategic Business Plan 2010–2015*¹. This was confirmed by an international panel of experts

who carried out a review of progress at the end of 2014. These experts examined the outputs and impacts of that strategy in consultation with the HRB Board and staff, the Department of Health, key health and social care stakeholders, and the research community. The recommendations that emerged from their review are incorporated in this document, the *HRB Strategy 2016–2020*.

This document also takes into account the policies, strategies, plans and priorities of the Department of Health, as set out in the *Action Plan for Health Research 2009–2013*², the *Statement of Strategy 2015–2017*³ and *Health Priorities for 2015–2017*⁴. The Department is keen to ensure that its work

is evidence-informed, and that research, information and innovation are fully exploited to improve the wider health system and to support the delivery of the Programme for Government.

The HRB's strategy is fully aligned with and supportive of these objectives, and we will focus on achieving them in all our research support, health information and evidence activities.

1.1 The Irish health system

The overall purpose of the health service is to improve the health and well-being of people in Ireland

1 http://www.hrb.ie/uploads/tx_hrbpublications/HRB_Strategy_2010-2014_01.pdf

2 http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/action_plan_health_research.pdf

3 <http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Statement-of-Strategy-2015-%E2%80%93-2017-PDF.pdf>

4 <http://www.merriestreet.ie/en/ImageLibrary/20150123HealthPriorities.pdf>

by keeping them healthy, providing the healthcare they need, delivering high-quality and safe services, and getting best value from health system resources.

In common with health systems around the world, the Irish healthcare system is facing significant societal, economic and organisational challenges. These include demographic change, an ageing population, an increase in the number of people living with chronic disease, and rising costs. New technologies and advances in the understanding and treatment of disease offer the possibility of providing cures, personalised care and prevention strategies that were previously unimaginable – but at a significant financial cost. A shift in the model of care from acute to primary, community and self-managed care also creates demands and challenges for the system, which is necessarily large, complex and interconnected.

Government has recognised these challenges and is committed to fundamental reforms and developments in the health services to address them. Government strategy is outlined in the 2012 document *Future Health: A Strategic Framework for Reform of the Health Services 2012–2015*⁵.

Significant progress has been made in implementing this reform programme, including the introduction of revised governance and management structures, the establishment of primary care teams and hospital groups linked to academic centres, and the integration of services for delivering primary, social and mental healthcare at local level. A number of clinical care programmes have been established to improve and standardise patient care. At national level, the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee is developing a suite of prioritised National Clinical Guidelines which, when implemented, can improve health outcomes, reduce variations in practice, improve the quality of clinical decisions, and influence health service policy.

In parallel with reforming the healthcare system, Government recognises the importance of adopting a more holistic approach to health and wellbeing. With the *Healthy Ireland*⁶ initiative, Government aims to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Ireland, focusing on prevention and keeping people healthier for longer, in line with the World Health Organisation's description of health as more than just the absence of disease, but 'a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being'. Research evidence and information will be critical enablers of the Healthy Ireland strategy.

5. <http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/future-health-a-strategic-framework-for-reform-of-the-health-service-2012-2015/>

6. <http://health.gov.ie/healthy-ireland/>



1.2

Our core principles

The HRB operates to a number of core principles that guide all our activities:



Integrity
Independence and objectivity
Quality and professionalism
Transparency, fairness and accountability
Collaboration and cooperation
Focus on outcomes and impact
Value for money

These principles are reflected in the strategy for the coming five years. In particular, we will strengthen and develop our efforts in the following areas:

- **Strategic partnerships** – we will develop strategic partnerships across a number of our stakeholder groups, including academia, practice, and policy spheres. We expect that these partnerships will maximise the benefits of research for health nationally and internationally.
- **Patient and public involvement** – people are at the centre of health research. Over the next five years, we will develop initiatives aimed at strengthening the involvement of patients and the public in health research in Ireland.
- **Data** – we will advance the exploitation of data in health research to yield information that contributes to improvements in health.
- **Leadership** – as the major funder of health research in Ireland, the HRB will strengthen its leadership role. We will do this by promoting and influencing national and European agendas relevant to the work that we do, and by facilitating the translation of research and evidence into better health outcomes and better healthcare services.



We will develop initiatives aimed at strengthening the involvement of patients and the public in health research.

2 The importance of health research

Health research is key to achieving the objectives of the health system. It delivers knowledge, insights and evidence to address key challenges in our society. It can be used to improve the quality and efficiency of our health services, and enhance the quality of life of people throughout our society. Research enables us to develop more effective preventative strategies, better health care practices and treatments, more sensitive models of care, and more efficient ways to use human, infrastructural and financial resources.

Great ideas are
the basis for
many advances
in healthcare.

Health research involves a very wide range of scientific, academic and clinical disciplines, from biology to mathematics, from chemistry to population studies, from physics to statistics, from psychology to engineering, and from management to computing. It involves academic researchers, healthcare professionals, the education sector, the life sciences industry, and numerous charitable groups.

Advances in biomedical and clinical sciences have made substantial contributions to the healthcare industry worldwide. They offer opportunities to develop new tools, prototypes, processes, and services for the healthcare system, all of which need to be validated in 'real life' situations as part of their development process. Clinical trials are needed for medicines and medical devices to assess safety, tolerability, and pharmacokinetics; equally, diagnostics need rigorous testing and comparisons before they are approved for marketing. A well-organised health research system with a strategic focus can not only make a difference to health and the healthcare system, but also make a significant contribution to economic growth and the country's attractiveness as a location for health and life sciences industries.

2.1 The Irish research system

Ireland has, over the past 15 years, built a credible, internationally-recognised, research base across the medical and life sciences, engineering and technology, and the humanities and social sciences. This includes skilled people capable of generating and applying new knowledge in the academic, health, enterprise and other sectors, committed research funding across the full range of scientific activity from the most basic to the most applied, and a world-class research infrastructure (including facilities, equipment, IP management, research governance, and technical support). Irish society is already benefiting from this effort in important areas such as health, education, the environment, enterprise, agriculture and the marine.

The health system both drives and benefits from innovation.

In their 2012 report⁷, the Research Prioritisation Steering Group – representing the relevant Government departments and State agencies – identified fourteen priorities for public investment in research, five of which are in the health area:

- Medical Devices
- Connected Health
- Food for Health
- Formulation and Delivery of Therapeutics
- Diagnostics

These priorities are intended to provide focus for the portion of national research investment that is oriented towards the Irish enterprise base. The report also acknowledges the importance of policy- and practice-oriented health research that sits outside these priorities, but that can benefit both the economic and the societal/health agendas. The HRB will, therefore, in the first instance align its clinical, population health, health services research and health information portfolios with the policy and clinical practice agendas of the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive, but will also continue to take into account the broader aims of Government science, technology and innovation policies and in particular the priorities identified by the Research Prioritisation Steering Group.

7. [HTTPS://www.djei.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Research-Prioritisation.pdf](https://www.djei.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Research-Prioritisation.pdf)

2.2 Health research and the health and social care system

The increasing complexity and scale of our health system – on which the State spends approximately €13 billion annually – and the widening gap between healthcare demands and the availability of resources create significant challenges both for the Irish exchequer and for healthcare providers.

High-quality research evidence, and timely and relevant health information are key to achieving the Department of Health's goals.

Meeting Ireland's health and social care needs will require substantially increased innovation in clinical practice and in health service design and delivery. High-quality research evidence, and timely and relevant health information are key to achieving the Department of Health's goals and those of Irish health and social care organisations. This has been recognised for some time, and several policy documents in recent years have acknowledged the need to embed research in the health system.

The health system both drives and benefits from innovation. The healthcare sector is the biggest employer in Ireland – the Health Service Executive employs approximately 100,000 people, and many more work in the private sector, from general practitioners and physiotherapists, to pharmacists and dentists.

Their work puts them into contact with – literally – millions of clients and service users each year. This illustrates the immensity of the opportunity for research and innovation to transform the interactions, to improve health outcomes for individual patients, and to provide clinical care more efficiently.

Many of the actions identified in the *Action Plan for Health Research* are designed to create a coherent health research system that can effectively translate and apply research to developing new diagnostics, treatments or therapies, to improving patient outcomes, to changing the way in which healthcare is practised and delivered, and, ultimately, to improving the nation's health and wellbeing. These priorities formed an important part of our previous strategic plan, and they continue to inform the strategy set out in this document.

Apart from its important role in delivering the evidence base for the policies and practices of the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive, health research is also germane to many of the priorities set out in the Programme for Government, such as mental health and disability, primary care reform, care of older

people and community care, integrated care, cost control and value for money, drugs and addiction, poverty and homelessness, and health and wellbeing.

The goals of prevention and health promotion, supported by a functioning system of acute and primary care, cannot be achieved without a strong evidence base. Research needs to be embedded within the healthcare system, so that researchers can engage in a meaningful way, at system level, with all stakeholders, including patients, patient organisations, healthcare staff and industry.

The appointment of a Chief Academic Officer to the management team of hospital groups will ensure that research is high on the agenda of the healthcare system. This, along with the Department of Health's willingness to make decisions based on research, evidence and data analytics, will help to ensure that HRB-supported research outputs and the data from the HRB's health information systems and evidence reviews are used to develop and improve the healthcare system.

Meeting Ireland's health and social care needs will require substantially increased innovation in clinical practice and in health service design and delivery.



We will support the training and career development of researchers through a number of mechanisms and at many different levels – from Ph.D. students and postdoctoral fellows to investigators and leaders.

2.3 Linking to European research and expertise

Collaboration with colleagues internationally has many benefits for Irish health researchers. It gives them access to high-quality facilities, expertise and research ideas elsewhere, and affords them the opportunity to develop long lasting networks and collaborative relationships with peers abroad.

This adds value to Irish investment in health research. International collaboration and networking help to address the scale of many health challenges that cannot be funded or solved by Ireland alone. These challenges require the integration of the wide range of expertise, facilities and innovations that internationalised research supports.

Collaboration with colleagues internationally has many benefits for Irish health researchers.

Such integration allows us to produce work of international significance, while at the same time gaining knowledge and insights from research work carried on elsewhere in our extended network.

International programmes are also an important source of research funding. Irish health researchers succeeded in obtaining some €80 million under the EU Research Framework 7 Programme 2007–2013 (FP7). The latest Framework Programme, Horizon 2020, presents further opportunities to deepen our engagement in collaborative European and international research.

3

Scope of the HRB's strategy

In recent years, the HRB has placed more emphasis on patient oriented and clinical research, population health sciences, and health services research. This change in emphasis was reflected in the HRB's previous strategic plan, and it continues to be a key element in the strategy set out in this document.

The strategy for the next five years is to consolidate, nurture and build on this progress.

Over the past decade, Government investment in biomedical research has had a significant impact on the quality and reputation of Irish research, with a number of teams in key areas now producing results of international significance.

As the investment in research grew and delivered results, there was in parallel a growing awareness that the value of that investment is realised only when the results are translated and applied effectively to develop new diagnostics, treatments or therapies, to improve patient outcomes, and to change the way in which healthcare is practised and delivered.

Recognising this, the HRB has, since the late 1990s, broadened its investment beyond biomedical research and placed more emphasis on patient oriented and clinical research, population health sciences, and health services research. This change in emphasis was reflected in the HRB's previous strategic plan, and it continues to be a key element in the strategy set out in this document.

This focus on research that is directly relevant to Irish society has resulted in a significantly enhanced landscape for clinical research in Ireland, much of it driven by the development, with HRB funding, of three clinical research facilities (CRFs) on hospital campuses.

The CRFs support clinical trials and interventions, from design and regulatory compliance, through the accrual and follow-up phase, to data analysis. CRFs now enable many projects to be conducted in a safe and high-quality environment – projects that would previously not have been feasible. Over the coming months and years, HRB-funded CRFs will be networked with two pre-existing clinical research centres, with the specific objective of facilitating multi-site intervention studies in Ireland.

Over the past decade, the HRB has reinforced its commitment to supporting researchers in population health sciences and health services research at all stages of their careers, from Ph.D. candidates to research leaders. As a result of this investment:

- There is now greater capacity across the career continuum at every level in population health sciences and health services research
- There are more partnerships and alliances between institutions and across sectors
- There are more clinicians engaging in population health sciences and health services research
- There are greater numbers applying to design and evaluate interventions
- There is greater use and analysis of existing data and cohorts.

The strategy for the next five years is to consolidate, nurture and build on this progress.

Over the next five years, we will pay particular attention to developing new and innovative partnerships and collaborations in areas such as patient safety and quality, chronic disease management, quality improvement, health and wellbeing, data infrastructure and evidence synthesis and guideline development.

We also aim to encourage greater levels of user involvement in the design and conduct of our research activities, and to engage in more effective knowledge exchange and dissemination activities that will influence decision-making, adoption and/or scale-up of healthcare interventions.

In the area of health information, the HRB currently manages five national health information systems that were established at the request of the Department of Health (and, in the case of one system, the Department of Justice and Equality) to meet specific needs in the areas of drugs, disability, and mental health. The HRB systems are specifically included in a number of national strategies and policy documents. Over the next five years, these systems will be streamlined, and the secondary analysis of their data will be supported.

4

What we will do

Over the past five years, the HRB has significantly increased its investment in population health sciences and health services research, transformed the infrastructure for clinical research in Ireland, supported service planning with its national health information systems, and developed an evidence service for the Department of Health to support the formulation of policy.

Over the period of this strategy, we will continue to focus on those areas and activities with the greatest potential to bring benefits to patients and the Irish population.

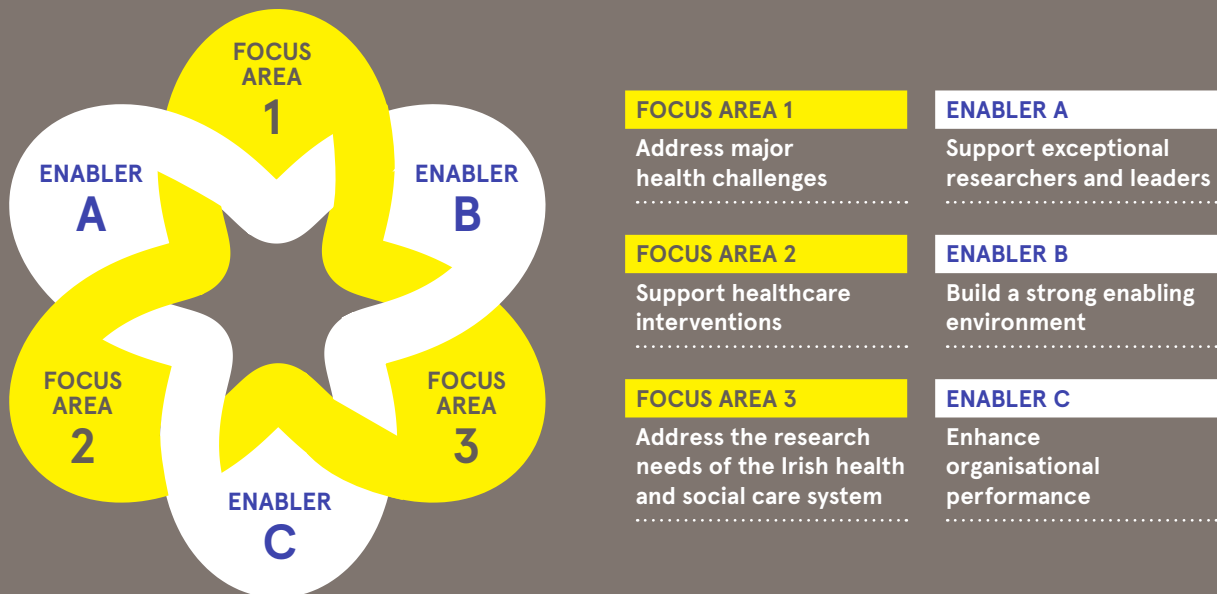
We will consolidate and build on the progress we have made in constructing a coherent and integrated clinical research infrastructure nationally (including facilities, equipment, coordination, research support, and networks), seek to enhance data environments, and increase the capacity for high-quality patient oriented, clinical, population health, and health services research.

At the same time we will work with our partners nationally and internationally to ensure that the important area of biomedical research continues to be adequately supported.

We have a responsibility to invest in the future as well as to meet the needs of today's health system.

Our three focus areas and enablers are complementary and interdependent, and we will pursue them simultaneously throughout the period of the strategy.

Figure 1: HRB strategic activities 2016–2020



4.1 Focus areas

As the lead national agency for health research in Ireland, we have a responsibility to invest in the future as well as to meet the needs of today's health system. Great ideas are the basis for many advances in healthcare. We have defined the following three distinct but complementary areas of focus that we consider to be the most appropriate to lead the HRB and its community over the period 2016–2020 and beyond:

- Address major health challenges
- Support healthcare interventions
- Address the research needs of the Irish health & social care system

4.2 Enabling themes

Progress in the three focus areas will be enabled and maximised by policies and actions that affect all three:

- Supporting the exceptional researchers and leaders we need to undertake high-quality health research and generate evidence
- Building a strong enabling environment for health research in Ireland and ensuring that we understand the outcomes and demonstrate the impacts of our investments
- Ensuring that our policies and governance are robust and founded on best practices


Focus areas and Enabling themes

FOCUS AREA 1	FOCUS AREA 2	FOCUS AREA 3
<p>Address major health challenges</p>	<p>Support healthcare interventions</p>	<p>Address the research needs of the Irish health and social care system</p>
<p>Innovative, investigator-led and internationally competitive research to address major health challenges in society</p>	<p>The design, conduct and evaluation of healthcare intervention studies to improve health outcomes and health service delivery</p>	<p>Partnership-driven research, information and evidence that meet the needs of the Irish health and social care system</p>
<p>In this focus area, we aim to create new knowledge that, over time, will help to address the major health challenges in society and have an impact on tomorrow's healthcare. This research will be innovative and investigator-led. It may be in any area within the HRB's remit but must be internationally competitive, with excellence being the key driver. In this focus area, we will be flexible in considering support for a broader array of topics and issues than those prioritised by the national system and policymakers, so as to encourage the development and refinement of fresh ideas, new techniques and methodologies.</p> <p>This research represents a long term investment in our future, providing the seed-corn of intellectual and human capital that will be needed for future generations.</p>	<p>This focus area will support the design, conduct and evaluation of healthcare intervention studies to improve health outcomes and health service delivery. The HRB's investment in infrastructure over the past decade means that it is now possible for researchers in Ireland to conduct high quality intervention studies and trials. The focus of this area is on the practical translation of research discoveries and knowledge into new ways of treating patients, delivering care or changing behaviour. Healthcare interventions, including trials, are an essential step in translating research discoveries into improvements in health and health services. Intervention studies may be hospital or community based, and may include medicinal products, procedures, devices, behavioural treatments, preventive care or service change.</p> <p>Where appropriate, intervention studies supported by the HRB will incorporate cost analysis and data on implementation.</p>	<p>The third focus area will concentrate explicitly on the research and evidence needs of the Irish health and social care system. Activities in this focus area will have both a shorter term and a more applied perspective than activities supported in Focus Area 1. In addition, work in this focus area will be designed and delivered in a way that considers the needs of stakeholders in the health system. Partnership-driven research, information and evidence generation will address short- to medium-term evidence gaps and health system needs. Research and information users in the health services will play a key role in defining and prioritising questions and topics, as well as in the conduct of the research and dissemination of the results.</p> <p>Research projects funded in this focus area are likely to be of shorter duration than those funded in Focus Area 1, and will take into account the context for implementation and adoption including, where appropriate, analyses of cost, workforce and acceptability. Although research must be of a high quality, the main driver in this focus area will be the needs of the health system today, rather than the generation of new knowledge for tomorrow.</p>

ENABLER A	ENABLER B	ENABLER C
Support exceptional researchers and leaders	Build a strong enabling environment	Enhance organisational performance
Support the exceptional researchers, talent and leadership we need to undertake high-quality health research and generate evidence	Build a strong enabling environment for health research in Ireland	Achieve and sustain outstanding levels of organisational performance
<p>Key to the successful delivery of each of the HRB's objectives is a highly skilled research workforce. Health research requires the talent, expertise and ingenuity of a wide range of people – clinicians, health professionals, scientists, social scientists, epidemiologists, health economists, statisticians, and many others. As well as generating ideas and undertaking research, a highly skilled workforce will ensure that research and evidence are integrated into policy and practice, thus improving decision-making and, ultimately, health outcomes.</p> <p>Between now and 2020, we will continue to invest in excellent Ph.D. training programmes, so as to attract the best people into health research. We will provide opportunities for postdoctoral researchers and new investigators to continue their research. We will support leaders who can promote research in the health system, and we will encourage our research community to develop international links. In recognition of the fact that responsibility for training and career development is shared and requires input from many stakeholders, we will work with the higher education system in Ireland, as well as with the Health Service Executive and professional training bodies, to develop a coordinated approach to building capacity in health research in Ireland.</p>	<p>Effective translation of health research into societal and economic benefits needs a positive enabling environment. The characteristics of this should include good coordination between the healthcare system and industry; excellent facilities and infrastructure; appropriate systems for data management; regulatory and policy support; a coordinated and credible approach to establishing research priorities; and a culture that recognises patients and the public as partners in the health research process. Moreover, an increased focus on synergies between European and national agencies makes it increasingly important that the HRB aligns and coordinates its activities with those of its European partners.</p> <p>Between now and 2020, the HRB will provide the strategic leadership required to shape the national health research agenda. We will continue to invest in the research infrastructure in order to promote excellence, critical mass and coordination across the system. At international level, we will continue to support and encourage our research community to participate in Horizon 2020 and other European research programmes, and we will continue to play our part in European initiatives that influence the environment for health research.</p>	<p>To deliver our strategy in a manner that maximises its impact and benefits, the HRB will build on its strengths to align its people, structures, skills and processes with our strategic objectives.</p> <p>It is not simply about what we do, but how we can do it better. We will continuously improve how we work – through strong teamwork, innovative problem-solving and responsive leadership.</p> <p>By addressing this priority effectively, we will create and maintain simple but effective processes, engage appropriately with stakeholders, take innovative approaches to planning and service delivery, and ensure decisions are made on the best available information. We will enhance and implement appropriate mechanisms to review and monitor what we do and how we do it. Achieving organisational excellence will ensure that the HRB is recognised as the leader in health research in Ireland and that Irish people develop an understanding of the impact that health research has on people's lives and the delivery of healthcare.</p>

5

Strategy objectives and expected outcomes



5.1

Focus Area 1:

Address major health challenges

Support innovative, investigator-led and internationally competitive research to address major health challenges in society.

Many of the advances in healthcare that we enjoy today are based on research. Recent improvements in life expectancy, in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease, and in healthcare delivery and outcomes have their origins in research that was carried out over many decades.

Researchers in Ireland have played their part in these discoveries, often working with international partners to create the knowledge needed to address major health challenges, and to find solutions. Despite these advances, considerable challenges remain.

Healthcare costs are rising; the incidence of chronic and infectious diseases is a burden in countries worldwide; an ageing population brings with it an increase in cancers and neurodegenerative disorders; the links between health and environment are poorly understood; migration patterns mean that health problems are increasingly globalised; rising inequalities threaten much of the progress we have made; and mental health problems are a cause for concern at all ages.

Between now and 2020, the HRB will support investigator-led, innovative and internationally competitive research aimed at addressing these kinds of major health challenges. We will encourage new and established groups to collaborate more effectively and, for those problems that can only be addressed on a larger scale, we will work with national and international partners to add value to the HRB's investment. In doing so, we will focus on research that is driven by excellence and originality, with the aim of informing the future development of innovative or novel therapies, treatments, prevention strategies, services and interventions.

Specific objectives

1.1 Support high-quality, investigator-led internationally competitive research.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fund excellent, investigator-led research awards. - Work with partners nationally to co-fund high-quality, investigator-led health research projects and programmes. - Incentivise HRB researchers to develop partnerships, collaborations and common research agendas.
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of academic and clinical principal investigators supported. - Additional exchequer and non-exchequer funding leveraged by principal investigators. - Number, type and value of HRB co-funded national research projects and programmes.

1.2 Develop and implement co-funding opportunities with international agencies and institutions.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and implement an approach to engagement in international co-funding partnerships that aligns with, and supports, HRB strategic research objectives. - Participate in international co-funding initiatives, in order to address major health challenges and to add value to existing HRB and national investment. - Work with partners to promote the HRB-SFI-Wellcome Trust Biomedical Research Partnership, in order to increase the rate of success for researchers in Ireland.
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Level of HRB investment in international co-funded programmes. - Number of Irish health researchers supported through HRB co-funded national and international programmes.

Expected outcomes =

- Production of high-quality research that contributes to the evidence base and thinking on current and emerging global health challenges.
- Leveraged expertise and coordination through increased networking of health researchers nationally and internationally.
- Enhancement of Ireland’s reputation for high-quality health research.
- Active contribution of HRB-funded research to new solutions, innovations and advances in tackling major health challenges.

Many of the advances in healthcare that we enjoy today are based on research. Recent improvements in life expectancy, in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease, and in healthcare delivery and outcomes have their origins in research that was carried out over many decades.



5.2

Focus Area 2:**Support healthcare interventions**

Support the design, conduct and evaluation of healthcare intervention studies, in order to improve health outcomes and health service delivery.

The benefits of health research can be fully realised only when the knowledge generated is tested and applied in practice. Intervention studies are essential for developing better treatments and improving healthcare. By testing the efficacy, cost and impact of new therapies, treatments or services, intervention studies have a significant part to play in changing the way healthcare is practised and delivered.

The HRB's support for clinical trials has played an important role in improving the outcomes for cancer patients in Ireland by enabling them to gain early access to new treatments and high-quality care. Between now and 2020, we will expand HRB support for clinical trials networks and interventions in other areas of health and health services.

In addition, we will invest in the structures and supports needed to coordinate multi-centre intervention studies in Ireland, to promote access to Europe-wide intervention studies, and to ensure that the intervention studies we fund are of the highest quality.

Specific objectives **2.1 Support the design, conduct and evaluation of intervention studies.**

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fund healthcare intervention studies. - Support the on-going performance and review of clinical trials networks. - Ensure continued relevance and impact of HRB investment in healthcare interventions.
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number and type of intervention studies supported through HRB funding. - Number of patients and participants in HRB-supported trials.

2.2 Facilitate coordination, enabling mechanisms and national and international collaborations that improve the volume, quality, relevance and impact of trials and intervention studies in Ireland.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide support to strengthen the methodology and reporting of trials and intervention studies in Ireland. – Implement and develop HRB-Clinical Research Coordination Ireland (HRB-CRCI) to increase both the number and quality of multi-centre clinical trials in Ireland. – Promote the participation of Irish clinical researchers in EU-wide networks.
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Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improvement in methodological quality of HRB-funded trials and intervention studies. – Level of participation of HRB-funded researchers in European clinical infrastructure.
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Expected outcomes =

- Increased capacity, skills and methodologies to test and evaluate new models of healthcare delivery.
- More intervention-focused health research in Ireland, resulting in better outcomes for individuals, and increased quality and safety in the healthcare system.
- Availability of robust data on cost, feasibility and acceptability of proposed healthcare initiatives.

Healthcare interventions, including trials, are an essential step in translating research discoveries into improvements in health and health services.

5.3

Focus Area 3:

Address the research needs of the Irish health and social care system

Support partnership-driven research, information and evidence that meet the needs of the Irish health and social care system.

With healthcare becoming more complex – and with associated costs increasing – the Irish health and social care system has a growing need for timely, relevant, high-quality research, information and evidence to inform public health policy, health delivery and decision-making.

As the lead agency for health research in Ireland – and also as the agency responsible for five key national information systems – the HRB has an important role to play in generating the evidence to support the Irish health and social care system.

Over the period 2016–2020, we will grow our evidence synthesis and knowledge translation activities, in order to help policy-makers, service planners and providers make better decisions. The HRB will support research that addresses questions of national relevance for health services management and practice, and will work with the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive to develop new guidelines for clinical practice.

In recognition of the fact that implementing the results of research and changing practice are complex processes, a critical component of these initiatives will be strong collaboration and partnership between researchers, practitioners, decision-makers and knowledge users.



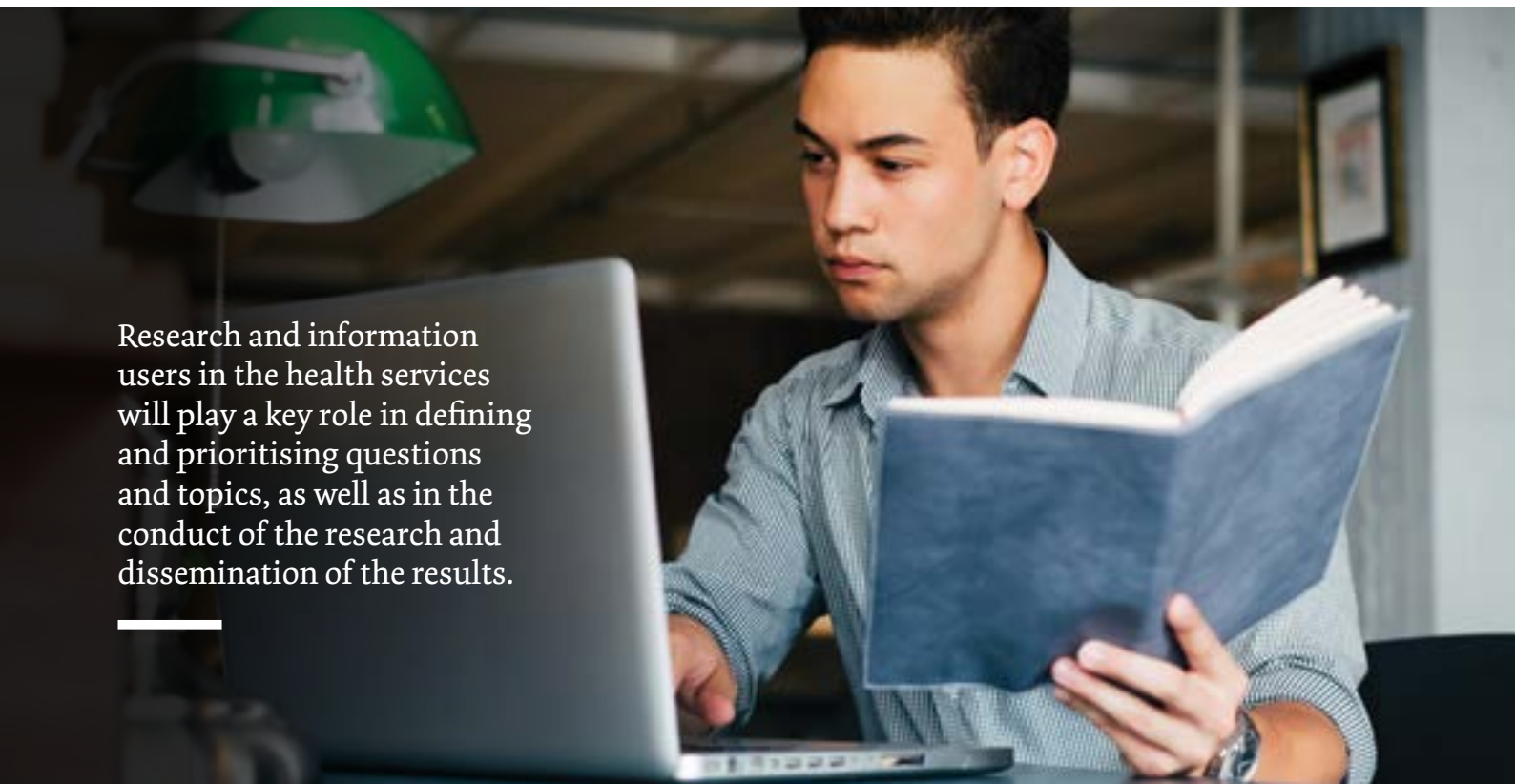
Specific objectives

3.1 Support research that addresses questions of national relevance for clinical and population health practice and for health services management, and translation of the research results into policy and/or practice.

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| Actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide support for new applied research projects that meet the needs of the Irish healthcare system using integrated knowledge translation approaches. – Manage existing initiatives in targeted and strategic health areas to optimise knowledge translation for policy and/or practice. – Promote integrated knowledge-translation approaches, including implementation research, in order to ensure optimal translation of findings into policy and/or practice. – Promote the secondary analysis and deeper exploitation of existing data sources, in order to deliver high-quality, high-impact evidence for policy and/or practice. – Commission research studies, as deemed appropriate or as requested by State bodies and other stakeholders. |
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| Key Performance Indicators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of applied partnership awards/principal investigators supported. – Number of demonstrable impacts on policy and practice. – Number of awards and initiatives with partners from the health and social care system. |
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Research and information users in the health services will play a key role in defining and prioritising questions and topics, as well as in the conduct of the research and dissemination of the results.



3.2 Provide high-quality, timely and relevant data for policy, service planning and research through the HRB's national health information systems (NHIS).

Actions

- Actively shape the national agenda for health information, and ensure that HRB data are used to develop and monitor policy.
- Ensure that HRB data are used for service planning and reporting purposes.
- Increase the use of HRB data for research purposes.
- Implement an integrated IT platform for all HRB health information systems – one that is both scalable and adaptable for future systems development.
- Ensure the relevance, timeliness and quality of HRB health information systems through improvements in data collection, validation, analysis, reporting and stakeholder engagement.

Key Performance Indicators

- HRB is actioned in national strategies for disability, drugs, mental health and health information.
- HRB data is identified in service plans as the basis for monitoring disability, drugs and mental health service delivery.
- HRB data is used to inform development of national policy and strategy.
- New research projects are initiated using HRB data.
- A stable, robust, high-quality and integrated IT platform is implemented.

It is not simply about what we do, but how we can do it better. We will continuously improve how we work – through strong teamwork, innovative problem-solving and responsive leadership.

3.3 Promote and support evidence synthesis and knowledge translation activities in order to help policy-makers, service planners and providers make evidence-based decisions.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promote access to the Cochrane Library, and support the training of individuals and groups to conduct high-quality and timely Cochrane Reviews, in order to inform healthcare decision-making. – Commission, in partnership with the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC), a clinical effectiveness review collaboration for Ireland to support the generation of NCEC-prioritised guidelines and their update. – Provide the Department of Health with an expanded portfolio of evidence services, and further develop our knowledge brokering activities. – In collaboration with the Department of Health and HSE, develop and introduce an evidence review service for health service planners. – Provide access to the HRB’s national drugs library to facilitate the use of research-based knowledge in decision-making by those working in the area of problem substance use in Ireland. – Collect, analyse and report factual, objective, reliable and comparable information on the drug situation, consequences and responses in Ireland to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). – Add value to the HRB’s role as National Focal Point to the EMCDDA by meeting the information needs of national and international stakeholders.
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of individuals who are trained in evidence synthesis and appraisal through Cochrane training initiatives. – All commissioned NCEC guidelines/updates from 2016 onwards informed by the work of the clinical effectiveness review collaboration for Ireland. – Increase in the number of products in the HRB’s evidence service portfolio provided to the Department of Health. – Number of evidence reviews provided to the Health Service Executive. – Fulfilled actions assigned to the HRB in the National Drugs Strategy.

Expected outcomes =

- Timely, relevant and high-quality research, data and information that address the needs of policy makers and decision makers in Ireland.
- Evidence to support the development of national clinical guidelines.
- Research data and evidence to support the transformation programme.
- Close liaison and cooperation between the research producers and evidence users, facilitating evidence-based decision making and robust evaluation of implementation.

5.4

Enabler A:

Support exceptional researchers and leaders

Support the exceptional researchers, talent and leadership we need to undertake high-quality health research and generate evidence.

Key to the successful delivery of each of the HRB's objectives is a highly skilled research workforce. Health research requires the talent, expertise and ingenuity of a wide range of people – clinicians, health professionals, scientists, social scientists, epidemiologists, health economists, statisticians, and many others. As well as generating ideas and undertaking research, a highly skilled workforce will ensure that research and evidence are integrated into policy and practice, thus improving decision-making and, ultimately, health outcomes.

The HRB currently supports the training and career development of researchers through a number of mechanisms and at many different levels – ranging from Ph.D. students and postdoctoral fellows to investigators and leaders. Between now and 2020, we will continue to invest in excellent Ph.D. training programmes, so as to attract the best people into health research. We will provide opportunities for postdoctoral researchers and new investigators to continue their research.

We will support leaders who can promote research in the health system, and we will encourage our research community to develop international links. In recognition of the fact that responsibility for training and career development is shared and requires input from many stakeholders, we will work with the higher education system in Ireland, as well as with the Health Service Executive and professional training bodies, to develop a coordinated approach to building capacity in health research in Ireland.

Specific objectives

A.1 Attract the best people into health research by supporting excellent Ph.D. training programmes.

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| Actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work with partners and other funders to expand and sustain structured Ph.D. training in population health research and health services research. – Develop and implement a structured approach to Ph.D. training in patient-oriented research. |
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| Key Performance Indicators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of Ph.D. students trained through multi-disciplinary structured programmes. |
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A.2 Provide opportunities for career development for postdoctoral researchers and emerging investigators.

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| Actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support existing interdisciplinary capacity enhancement awards for postdoctoral researchers in population health and health services research, and expand the scheme to include patient-oriented research and/or translational medicine. – Review and monitor support for postdoctoral researchers through existing funding mechanisms. – Ensure people in clinical positions are incentivised and facilitated to engage in research. – Work with higher education institutions and the health system to establish an emerging investigator scheme that will enable mid-career researchers to advance to senior investigator level and become independent researchers. |
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| Key Performance Indicators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of people supported through HRB awards at postdoctoral level. – Number of postdoctoral researchers trained in a multidisciplinary environment. – Number of new emerging investigators supported through dedicated mechanisms. |
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A.3 Work with higher education institutions, hospital groups and the Health Service Executive to identify, develop and support leaders in health research.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support existing and additional cohorts of senior investigators. - Explore mechanisms to promote and embed strategic research leadership in the health system.
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Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of senior investigators supported through HRB awards. - Number of HRB-supported senior investigators in leadership positions.
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A.4 Work with national and international partners to facilitate training and exchange opportunities that address skills gaps.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide international mobility and exchange opportunities for individual researchers. - Support structured research skills development and training through summer scholarships and through short courses or workshops in targeted areas. - Provide opportunities for recent graduates to develop research and information management skills within the HRB as part of their broader post-doctoral training.
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Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of exchanges supported at all levels of the career path. - Number of courses hosted, and level and type of participation. - Number of HRB interns given career-development opportunities.
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Expected outcomes =

- Strategic and coordinated approach to the production of a highly skilled research workforce to ensure that research and evidence are integrated into policy and practice.
- More people working in a healthcare setting are trained and active in research, resulting in better quality care and outcomes and a more attractive work environment.

5.5

Enabler B:

Build a strong enabling environment

Build a strong enabling environment for health research in Ireland

The environment for research in Ireland needs to be positive and supportive if health research is to be translated effectively into societal and economic benefits. The characteristics of a positive enabling environment include good coordination between the healthcare system and industry; excellent facilities and infrastructure; appropriate systems for data management; regulatory and policy support; a coordinated and credible approach to establishing research priorities; and a culture that recognises patients and the public as partners in the health research process.

Research today is an international enterprise, and international collaboration delivers many benefits to both research communities and individual countries. The HRB and its international partners have much to gain by working together on regulatory and legislative developments that impact on research. Moreover, an increased focus on synergies between European and national agencies makes it increasingly important that the HRB aligns and coordinates its activities with those of its European partners.

Between now and 2020, the HRB will provide the strategic leadership required to shape the national health research agenda. We will continue to invest in the research infrastructure in order to promote excellence and critical mass, and improve coordination across the system. At international level, we will continue to support and encourage our research community to participate in Horizon 2020 and other European research programmes, and we will continue to play our part in European initiatives that influence the environment for health research.

Specific objectives

B.1 Work with the Department of Health and key stakeholders to shape the national research agenda in relation to health and social care.

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| Actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work with the Department of Health and key stakeholders to establish a process for identifying and reviewing national research priorities. – Champion the significance and relevance of public investment in health research in the wider national research and innovation ecosystem, in order to deliver health, societal and economic benefits. – Promote the importance of research evidence and information in national health strategies. – Work with government departments and agencies to foster collaboration and innovation, and to optimise the synergies and benefits of our collective investments in research. |
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| Key Performance Indicators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – System in place to engage with the Department of Health in relation to national health research priorities. – National strategies are informed by best available evidence and include research actions agreed with the HRB. – Increased level of collaboration with other agencies, departments and NGOs. |
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B.2 Provide leadership to shape the review, conduct and governance of research.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guide the development and adoption of best practice in policy areas that are relevant to health research. - Develop and promote public and patient involvement (PPI) within the HRB and in HRB-supported projects and programmes. - Ensure that HRB peer review and selection processes remain in line with international best practice and continue to drive quality, relevance and impact of HRB-funded research. - Support effective management of the HRB portfolio of active research awards in line with best practice processes and policies. - Ensure that HRB award evaluation mechanisms and metrics can effectively assess benefits, impacts and returns on HRB investment and support strategic decision-making.
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Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investment decisions informed by review and evaluation evidence. - Increased awareness and understanding of public and patient involvement among stakeholders. - HRB leads national discussion on a number of topics relevant to research conduct, governance and evaluation.
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B.3 Contribute to, and benefit from, international developments in policy, regulation and legislation relevant to health research and healthcare in Ireland.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influence research-relevant policy, regulation and legislative developments internationally by making submissions to, and/or participating in, relevant European policy-focused organisations and legislative bodies. - Support the Department of Health to participate in the EU Public Health Programme for policy development, and create awareness, highlight funding opportunities and provide support to health researchers to participate in this programme.
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Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of European health-relevant policy/legislative developments influenced to reflect Irish and HRB concerns. - Level of participation in, and funding leveraged from, the EU Public Health Programme by the Department of Health and Irish researchers.
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B.4 Invest in research infrastructure to promote excellence, critical mass and coordination, in order to support HRB strategic focus areas and the wider health community.

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| Actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continue the development of Clinical Research Facilities (CRFs), with the aim of supporting research in the health system. – Lead in developing the national capability for biobanking in Ireland. – Facilitate access for Irish researchers to European research infrastructures. – Support, in partnership with others, activities that enhance the national capacity for access, sharing and linkage of routine administrative and/or research related datasets. – Conduct a review to provide a map of Irish cohort studies – in particular those with longitudinal data. |
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| Key Performance Indicators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – CRFs fully functioning, effectively run and integrated into the health and academic systems to deliver excellence and innovation. – Research community and industry are aware of and access CRFs appropriately. – Sustainable mixed funding model for CRFs in place, based on core HRB funding and other income. – Irish host institutions accredited to emerging ISO Bioprocessing standard. – Contact point for linkage of routine data-sets in place in the Central Statistics Office. – Shared understanding developed regarding national needs in relation to linkage of routine administrative and research related datasets. – Review of population-based research cohorts in Ireland completed and published. |
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Health research involves a very wide range of scientific, academic and clinical disciplines, as well as academic researchers, healthcare professionals, the education sector, the life sciences industry, and charitable groups.

B.5 Support Irish health researchers to participate in Horizon 2020 and other European research programmes

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contribute to the strategic development of the Horizon 2020 work programme, and facilitate linkage and synergies between the European and Irish research environments. - Create awareness, highlight funding opportunities, and provide support to – and increase participation of – Irish researchers in Horizon 2020 across academia, the clinical environment and enterprise.
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Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Horizon 2020 work programmes amended to enable Irish participation. - Increased participation in, and funding leveraged from, Horizon 2020 by Irish and HRB research partners and coordinators. - Increased interdisciplinary applications to, and funding through, Horizon 2020.
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Expected outcomes =

- Quality and excellence, critical mass, and coordination within the health family, and for health within the wider R&D ecosystem, both in Ireland and at a European level.
- Improved collaboration with other agencies and departments ensuring that the value of health research is recognised.
- Clinical research infrastructure embedded in the health system.
- A culture that recognises patients and the public as partners in the health research process.
- Research and data are included in all new national health-relevant strategies.

Horizon 2020 is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme ever with nearly €80 billion of funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020). It promises more breakthroughs, discoveries and world-firsts by taking great ideas from the lab to the market.

5.6

Enabler C:

Enhance organisational performance

Achieve and sustain outstanding levels of organisational performance

To deliver our strategy in a manner that maximises its impact and benefits, the HRB will build on its strengths to align its people, structures, skills and processes with the objectives set out above. It is not simply about what we do, but how we can do it better. We will continuously improve how we work – through strong teamwork, innovative problem-solving and responsive leadership.

By addressing this priority effectively, we will create and maintain simple but effective processes, engage appropriately with stakeholders, take innovative approaches to planning and service delivery, and ensure decisions are made on the best available information.

We will enhance and implement appropriate mechanisms to review and monitor what we do and how we do it. Achieving organisational excellence will ensure that the HRB is recognised as the leader in health research in Ireland and that Irish people develop an understanding of the impact that health research has on people’s lives and the delivery of healthcare.

Specific objectives

C.1 Ensure a high-performing working environment built on innovation, adaptability and teamwork.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify, establish and maintain appropriate organisational structures, skills and competencies, and communication/consultative mechanisms to successfully deliver the HRB strategy. – Identify and implement initiatives to nurture trust and openness, enhance change resilience, and optimise the work environment. – Implement a workforce planning framework, to include review and change mechanisms and appropriate succession planning.
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Structures, skills and processes support staff to optimise their ability to deliver the HRB strategy. – Staff trust the people they work with, have pride in what they do, and work together effectively. – Structure and resource levels are provided to deliver strategic and organisational goals and objectives effectively.

C.2 Enable transparent and accountable decision-making based on the best possible information.

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| Actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuously review progress in implementing the HRB strategy; manage its operational delivery and monitor its on-going appropriateness; amend it as necessary in response to changes in the external environment. - Support informed expenditure decisions on HRB research and information investments. - Utilise financial information streams, evaluation metrics, value for money initiatives and other relevant data to ensure informed decision-making. - Integrate national initiatives/changes in corporate governance practices into HRB processes and policies. |
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| Key Performance Indicators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic direction, scale and/or priorities amended in the context of continuous review. - HRB strategic decisions informed by financial, evaluation and other data. - Level of HRB compliance with corporate governance practices. |
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C.3 Ensure that HRB systems and processes are robust, flexible and scalable.

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| Actions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benchmark HRB processes against national and international good practices and revise as appropriate. - Support ongoing development and management of key external facing business systems (including GEMS and LINK), in order to achieve their objectives internally and to ensure they meet stakeholder needs externally. - Verify that IT infrastructure, systems and processes are in line with good practice, in order to ensure the security and appropriate availability of critical data, and that the HRB's physical environment and services meet operational needs. - Review and support the performance of the Board and its committees. - Conduct a review of financial management processes, in order to identify opportunities to further optimise the use of available financial resources. - Ensure the continued provision of the financial services necessary for the day-to-day operation of the HRB and the financial management of research awards. |
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| Key Performance Indicators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HRB-managed commissions of large-scale studies and evidence reviews conducted via quality assured, compliant commissioning processes. - GEMS and LINK delivering appropriate functionality, reliability and flexibility. - ICT infrastructure and processes verified to be in line with best practice. - ISO accreditation and enhanced data management reputation. - Business information system positively embedded into the decision-making processes of the HRB. - Improved effectiveness of the HRB Board and its committees. |
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C.4 Enhance recognition of the value of health research and the HRB’s role nationally and internationally.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Enhance the HRB’s reputation as a leader in the provision of relevant, high-quality research, data and evidence. – Build and sustain strong relationships with all HRB stakeholders to enhance engagement and effect positive change in relation to health research. – Maximise awareness of HRB-funded research, information systems and evidence reviews.
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Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Level of recognition of HRB brand as synonymous with high quality research and evidence. – Level of awareness of the work of the HRB among stakeholders and the wider public.
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Expected outcomes =


- A high performing, innovative, adaptable and well-governed organisation capable of delivering on its strategy.
- The HRB represents good value for money from public investment in its activities.
- The HRB is outcomes-focused, with a credible and trusted reputation in health research, data and information.

Achieving organisational excellence will ensure that the HRB is recognised as the leader in health research in Ireland and that Irish people develop an understanding of the impact that health research has on people’s lives and the delivery of healthcare.

6

Implementing the HRB Strategy 2016–2020

HRB Strategy 2016–2020 is a five-year strategic plan that defines the aims, activities and outcomes of the organisation at a high level. As with most state agencies, the HRB operates on a calendar year basis, with resources provided annually by central Government. Accordingly, the strategic plan will be implemented through five successive annual plans from 2016 to 2020.



At the outset, using key planning assumptions, we have defined our strategy and five-year implementation plan at a high level. Using the five-year strategic plan and the five-year implementation plan as guides, the HRB will produce detailed annual operational plans that identify the activities to be undertaken by the organisation. Some activities will take place annually, others less frequently, as required by their nature and/or available resources.

The Board of the HRB will oversee implementation of these annual plans, as well as ensuring regular oversight of the HRB strategy. In doing so, the Board will maintain the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances or take corrective action should the need arise. In addition, the Board will continue to monitor expenditure in different areas of our portfolio and adjust the balance where necessary.

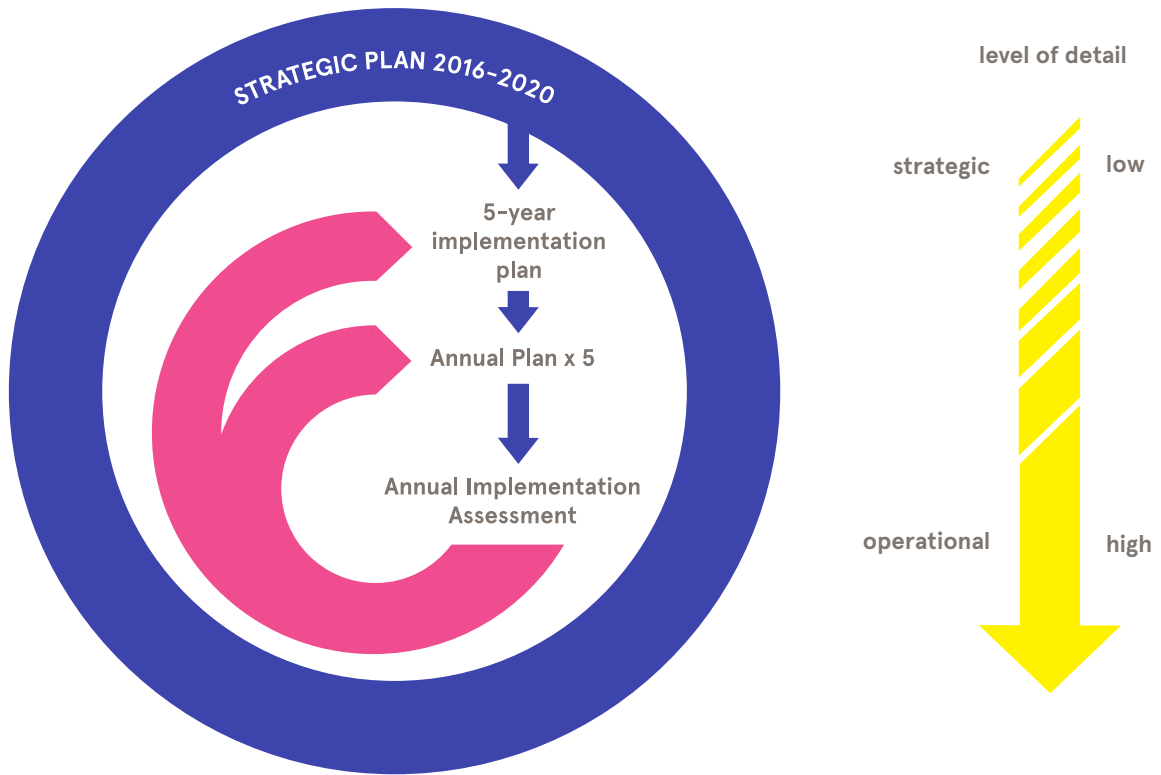
This mechanism ensures an implementation process that is dynamic and responsive and therefore maximises the chances of a successful implementation of HRB Strategy 2016–2020.

Over the next five years, the HRB will regularly review and publish information on the key outputs, outcomes and impacts arising from its investments and activities. It is anticipated that this data will facilitate tracking of changing trends in the types of outcomes and impacts linked to the strategy and enable a process of continuous improvement in the services we provide.



Health research involves a very wide range of scientific, academic and clinical disciplines, as well as academic researchers, healthcare professionals, the education sector, the life sciences industry, and charitable groups.

Figure 2: Planning, Implementation and Assessment



7 Glossary

CRF	Clinical Research Facility
EMCDDA	European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
EU	European Union
FP7	EU Funding Framework Programme 7 (2007–2013)
GEMS	Grants Electronic Management System
Horizon 2020	EU Funding Framework Programme 2014–2020
HRB	Health Research Board
HRB–CRCI	HRB–Clinical Research Coordination Ireland
HSE	Health Service Executive
ISO	International Organisation for Standardization
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IT	Information Technology
LINK	The name for the integrated health information platform for all five of the HRB’s national health information systems
NCEC	National Clinical Effectiveness Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHIS	National Health Information Systems
PPI	Patient and Public Involvement
SFI	Science Foundation Ireland
SSTI	Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation



The research that we fund
will be translated into real
benefits for young and old.

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