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Business case to employ an
anaesthesia research co-ordinator:
Guidance for research
departments

August 2025

Purpose of document:

This document provides guidance on developing a business case to support the employment of a research co-ordinator in an anaesthesia and pain management department. The research co-ordinator will facilitate research activities in anaesthesia, perioperative and pain medicine.

Acknowledgements:

The development of the Anaesthesia Research Coordinator Network (ARCN) and ANZCA CTN toolkit is being led by the CTN office team, in collaboration with the ARCN sub-committee and the CTN executive. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the ANZCA CTN members, CTN office, ARCN sub-committee, and CTN executive in the creation, preparation, development, and review of this document.

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DOI:

10.60115/11055/1316

Suggested citation for this document:

ANZCA Clinical Trials Network. *Business case to employ an anaesthesia research co-ordinator: Guidance for research departments*. Melbourne: Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists; 2025. doi.10.60115/11055/1316.

Document history:

Version	Contributors	Reviewed/Approved	Date Approved by ARCN Sub-Committee & CTN Executive	Changes
14.0	Karen Goulding Gillian Ormond Allison Kearney	Tara Williams Louise Cope Prof Tomas Corcoran	1/8/25	Addition of new sections, updates to current clinical trials

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Business case to employ an anaesthesia research co-ordinator: Guidance for research departments

1. Introduction

The ANZCA Clinical Trials Network (CTN) aims to be a world leader in delivering high quality trial evidence that translates into safe and effective practices in anaesthesia, perioperative medicine and pain medicine. Employing a research co-ordinator within a Department of Anaesthesia, Perioperative medicine and Pain Medicine serves to achieve the following objectives:

- Enable the participation of patients in CTN clinical trials.
- Support the site Principal Investigator (PI) in ensuring that ethics and governance processes are fully complied with.
- Preparation of departments for accreditation for research activities ([The Australian Council on Healthcare Standards \(ACHS\)](#)).
- Ensuring that all research activities are compliant with the [International Council for Harmonisation of Good Clinical Practice \(ICH GCP\)](#).
- Enhancing the visibility of academic activities within departments.
- Promotion of a high standard of clinical trial conduct, analysis and reporting.
- Building a capable network of research co-ordinators, leaders, emerging leaders, sites and collaborations.
- Strengthening the ANZCA CTN brand and its portfolio of endorsed studies.
- Supporting the sustainability of the CTN infrastructure by increasing the full-time equivalent (FTE) employment of research co-ordinators across the network.

An appropriately qualified research co-ordinator addresses many of the challenges associated with conducting clinical trials in Australia and New Zealand. Working closely with the site PI and other clinical staff, the research co-ordinator ensures clinical trials are conducted effectively and in compliance with study protocols, ethical and regulatory requirements. Research co-ordinators also engage directly with study participants and their families and play a vital role in the successful participation of departments in research and the CTN's multi-centre trials. This advice is offered by the ANZCA CTN to ANZCA fellows and department heads who wish to employ an anaesthesia research co-ordinator in their group.

2. Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists Clinical Trials Network (ANZCA CTN)

The ANZCA CTN fosters investigator-initiated, multi-centre research, all of which are designed to answer important clinical questions and to deliver high-quality evidence to guide practice in anaesthesia, perioperative and pain medicine. Our clinical trial investigators are global leaders in clinical trial methodology and delivery, having secured over AUD \$73 million in competitive research funding. For more than 25 years, the CTN has successfully conducted numerous, large, international, multi-centre trials across more than 130 sites worldwide.

The CTN aims to strengthen research capacity and institutional culture, drive patient recruitment, and share resources and infrastructure with anaesthesia departments to become sustainable in delivering research. The CTN aims to widely engage departments of anaesthesia, fellows, trainees and research co-ordinators in its trials, so that they and their patients can enjoy the many benefits of participating in clinical research. The ANZCA CTN continues to develop research capacity among fellows, trainees and research co-ordinators that can be applied to studies beyond CTN-endorsed trials.

3. Anaesthesia Research Co-ordinators Network (ARCN)

The [Anaesthesia Research Co-ordinators Network \(ARCN\)](#) is an informal network of more than 180 research co-ordinators supporting and facilitating anaesthesia research in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. Established in 2012, the ARCN aims to strengthen and support the wider network and grow a professional community. ARCN members meet annually at the ANZCA CTN Strategic Research Workshop and remain connected through a dedicated mailing list. The sub-committee organises regular online education sessions and the CTN office coordinates a [mentoring program](#) available to research co-ordinators. Anaesthesia research co-ordinators are integral to the CTN and bring a wide range of experiences and skills to the research team. The ARCN links through the ANZCA CTN Executive via the ARCN sub-committee chair, who represents the ARCN at ANZCA CTN Executive meetings. The aim of the ARCN is to support and promote the role of the anaesthetic research co-ordinator.

4. ANZCA CTN multi-centre trials

The ANZCA CTN currently has endorsed and is involved in a number of multi-million dollar clinical trials. These trials focus on clinically relevant questions that will provide high quality evidence to guide practice.

<https://www.anzca.edu.au/research/anzca-clinical-trials-network/our-clinical-trials/clinical-trials-underway>

4.1 Non-cardiac trials

- [LOLIPOP Trial](#)
- [MASTERSTROKE](#)
- PROMPT-O₂

4.2 Cardiac trials

- [TRICS-IV trial](#)
- [CALIPSO trial](#)
- [DECIDE study](#)

5. Benefits for participating in multi-centre research

The importance of participating in CTN endorsed multi-centre trials and research in general is well established. These include:

- Helping to provide high quality evidence that improves patient care.
- Establishing a culture of robust scientific enquiry among Fellows and trainees.
- Building research capability amongst Fellows, trainees and co-ordinators through experience and training.
- Supporting and encouraging good quality locally initiated research and quality assurance projects.
- Enabling collaboration in national and international studies and with other research groups.
- Accessing reliable research income for the hospital/department from CTN NHMRC/MRFF grants in Australia and HRC grants in New Zealand.
- Improving competitiveness of local Fellows and trainees in future grant applications.
- Raising the research profile of hospitals and departments at local, national and international levels.
- Improving the competitiveness of the hospital/department in recruiting trainees and specialists with an academic interest, and high quality research co-ordinators.
- Facilitating staff retention by increasing engagement and fostering collaboration in the workplace.
- Providing an opportunity for patients to be partners in research, providing evidence that may improve care for other patients.
- Improving outcomes for patients enrolled in research (a well-recognised benefit of clinical trial participation).
- Improving patient and family satisfaction through visible support for research excellence.
- Embedding research into standard care delivery and decision making.
- Exposure of trainees and Fellows to research drives a culture of embedding research into routine healthcare.
- Trials conducted by networks influence clinical guidelines, identify ways to improve safety and quality and identify opportunities for more efficient resource use.
- There is a benefit-to-cost ratio for networks of 5.8:1, or a return of \$5.80 for every \$1 invested.

Reference: Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care 2017.

6. Justification for employing an anaesthesia research co-ordinator

a. The need for a dedicated research co-ordinator

Effective clinical research requires consistent processes, meticulous data management, and sustained recruitment efforts. These demands are difficult to meet when research responsibilities fall solely to clinicians in dual roles—such as fellows, trainees, or acute pain team members—who are already stretched with clinical duties.

A dedicated and appropriately qualified anaesthesia research co-ordinator is essential to ensuring the successful conduct of CTN-endorsed multi-centre trials. Research co-ordinators provide continuity, follow trial protocols, manage ethics and governance submissions, and liaise with trial teams and clinical staff. Without this dedicated role, sites risk poor recruitment, suboptimal data quality, and lost opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and patient benefit.

b. Alignment with Clinical Trials Governance Frameworks

The importance of the research co-ordinator role is further underscored by the integration of clinical research into Australia's National Clinical Trials Governance Framework. This framework aims to embed research into standard health service delivery and strengthen its alignment with clinical and corporate governance structures.

To comply with these national expectations and deliver research that is safe, high-quality, and efficient, institutions must ensure they have the necessary infrastructure in place. Employing a research co-ordinator supports these goals by providing dedicated oversight of all aspects of clinical trial activity, enabling hospitals to meet accreditation standards and foster a sustainable research culture within anaesthesia departments.

7. When should departments employ a research co-ordinator

Despite the invaluable contribution, skills and expertise that research co-ordinators bring to departments, a recent survey conducted by the CTN indicated that 30% of departments actively recruiting in CTN trials do not currently have a research co-ordinator. It is the opinion of the CTN that ideally sites that participate in CTN trials should have a full time research co-ordinator. It is important to assess whether it is feasible to employ a research co-ordinator and determine the appropriate timing for recruitment. The timing may differ from site to site. For sites that are starting to participate in CTN trials for the first time, if they do not currently employ a research co-ordinator, then this would be an opportune time.

8. Position description

The following are some of the personal attributes, roles and activities of a research co-ordinator:

- Preparation of ethics and research governance submissions.
- Review of protocol to assess feasibility.
- Management of study budgets.
- Screening of patient's eligibility.
- Consent and recruitment of patients.
- Provision of education and support to staff, patients and their families.
- Demonstrated understanding of confidentiality, privacy and information handling laws.
- Excellent communication and stakeholder engagement skills.
- Ability to work effectively and independently in a team environment.
- Exercises sound judgement in sensitive or complex situations.
- Collect and enter accurate and timely trial data.
- Protocol development.
- Active participation in Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Australia) /Health and Disability Ethics Committee (HDEC) (New Zealand) meetings.
- Collection and processing of biological samples.

The CTN office has a collection of position descriptions available on request.

Reference: Roberts et al 2011.

9. Job titles for research co-ordinators

Research co-ordinators involved in anaesthesia trials across ANZCA CTN sites hold a variety of titles based on their qualifications, institutional norms, and responsibilities. Nursing-qualified staff may be titled as research nurses, nurse researchers, clinical nurse specialists, or nurse consultants with anaesthesia or perioperative focuses. Non-nursing roles often include titles like research co-ordinator, clinical trials co-ordinator, or study co-ordinator, sometimes tailored to specific trials. More senior or specialised roles may carry titles such as research manager, clinical trials facilitator, or research fellow. It is recommended that employers are advised to carefully consider job titles, as they may influence pay scales, integration with clinical teams, and alignment with institutional structures. If hiring a clinical research nurse the Australian College of Nursing (ACN) has a document for Australian standards clinical research nurses that may assist with the job title and level of remuneration.

Reference: Australian College of Nursing 2022.

10. Training pathways for anaesthesia research co-ordinators

Research co-ordinators within the ANZCA CTN are primarily trained through on-the-job experience. This includes shadowing experienced staff, participating in supervised handovers, and gradually taking on more responsibilities. Many co-ordinators begin with a transition period to build confidence and familiarity with research processes, often in the absence of formal pre-employment training.

While most co-ordinators receive Good Clinical Practice (GCP) training through online modules, workshops, or intensive short courses, only some pursue additional academic qualifications like honours, master's degrees, or postgraduate research certificates. Informal and peer-led education, through mentoring, in-house sessions, and ANZCA CTN workshops, play a key role in ongoing development. However gaps exist in accessible, funded, and structured training options, with co-ordinators often relying on self-teaching and voluntary learning opportunities to gain essential skills.

11. Funding models for research co-ordinators

Funding for research co-ordinators is often derived from a combination of sources, the most common of which are trial per patient payments or departmental/hospital funds.

Per patient payments (PPPs)

A spreadsheet can be requested that can be modified to estimate potential income from participating in the CTN's current endorsed trials. Research salaries and on-costs are based on Victorian awards but investigators should determine local costs when developing their business case. Estimates on the spreadsheet are based on recruitment rates.

As of August 2025, funding for salary is derived from the PPPs for the following studies:

1. LOLIPOP trial - \$500 per patient
2. TRICS-IV - \$1500 per patient
3. CALIPSO - \$600 per patient
4. MASTERSTROKE - \$1000 NZD per patient
5. PROMPT O₂ - \$400 per patient (Will increase pending additional funding)
6. DECIDE - \$1250 per patient

Other funding sources for research co-ordinator salaries

A 2023 survey of 41 ANZCA CTN sites reveals that funding for anaesthesia research co-ordinators is highly varied, with most sites relying on a combination of sources. Only 15 sites use a single funding stream, most commonly departmental or hospital funds, while the remainder use two or more sources—frequently including PPPs. PPPs are the most common component but rarely used alone due to their vulnerability to fluctuations in trial volume and recruitment, making them particularly unsuited to rural or regional sites.

More sustainable models often combine PPPs with hospital support, departmental funds, private practice contributions, or research grants. Some sites have developed creative approaches to ensure ongoing funding, such as integrating co-ordinator roles with audit or clinical functions, or leveraging institutional infrastructure. The overall message is clear: diversified and flexible funding strategies are essential for maintaining and growing research coordination capacity in anaesthesia.

Investigators are encouraged to explore all potential sources of income sources to support their research co-ordinator,

including hospital audit, quality assurance and/or quality improvement projects, and internal and external research grants.

12. Other responsibilities of anaesthesia research co-ordinators within departments

ANZCA CTN research co-ordinators have highly varied roles, with FTE allocations to CTN-endorsed trials ranging widely. While a small group work exclusively on CTN trials, the majority juggle mixed responsibilities, with many allocating between 50–95% of their time to CTN work. A few have less than 50% allocated or no fixed percentage, reflecting the diverse and sometimes informal nature of research support across sites.

Beyond CTN trials, co-ordinators are involved in a wide range of activities. These include non-CTN research such as local investigator-led studies, audits, and commercially sponsored trials. They also play key roles in research governance and ethics, assisting with HREC submissions and supporting colleagues. Many co-ordinators contribute clinically in anaesthesia and perioperative services, and are engaged in education, administration, and departmental leadership. This multifaceted workload underscores the importance of recognising and supporting the blended nature of research co-ordinator roles within departments.

13. Limitations and threats to research

It takes time to establish a research culture and appropriate structures and processes in your department, and to train or orientate a new research co-ordinator. Once a decision has been made to participate in a trial, it takes time to recruit your first patient and your initial payments may not be received for some time after that (i.e. payment may be made after a certain number of patients have been recruited or at fixed intervals during the year).

In addition, there may be peaks and troughs in activity that may slow income from research funding. Periods of low recruitment are usually transient but can cause major disruptions to research and staffing if not mitigated. To maintain the research infrastructure during low activity periods or at start-up, it may be necessary to seek short term 'top-up funding' from the hospital. The level of funding sought would be the difference between the funding generated by per patient recruitment and research co-ordinator costs.

14. Sustaining a research department and the research co-ordinator position

14.1 On call and out of hour work by ANZCA CTN research co-ordinators

Research co-ordinators within the ANZCA CTN frequently participate in out-of-hours and on-call work to support trial activities. Of research co-ordinators we surveyed, 23 reported engaging in such duties, while 14 did not. The nature of these responsibilities includes patient follow-up visits during evenings or weekends, processing time-sensitive samples, managing infusions or interventions, and maintaining contact with participants or clinical staff after hours. Some co-ordinators are also on call around the clock to answer trial related questions, especially for critical care studies, often covering large departments or multiple sites.

Beyond direct patient involvement, out-of-hours tasks also include screening and recruiting participants outside of regular hours, adapting schedules around surgery lists, and attending after-hours meetings or preparing for departmental events. While many co-ordinators manage their time flexibly—offsetting early starts or late finishes with time in lieu—some report undertaking unpaid work. Concerns have been raised about lack of recognition and the need for formal compensation or structured allowances, especially for work funded through industry trials or involving significant out-of-hours commitments.

15. Contact

If you need help or further advice, please contact the ANZCA CTN at
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