

# Platform Needs for Participant and Researcher Engagement



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## Executive summary

As the University grows its suite of endorsed research technology platforms, we seek to better understand the types of platforms needed for contemporary Melbourne School of Population and Global Health (MSPGH) research. Specifically, we wish to understand the demand for, and unmet needs around, online platforms for participant and researcher engagement. Our focus is platforms for bulk email and SMS communications, online appointment bookings, and gift card distribution. To address these questions, the MSPGH conducted an anonymous online survey of its staff and Graduate Researchers in October-November 2025.

The survey results provide a clear picture of substantial unmet needs in communication and remuneration platforms to support MSPGH research. Across bulk email/SMS, appointment booking, and gift card systems, researchers reported ongoing challenges in accessing platforms that are reliable, supported, and suitable for large-scale studies. These gaps are significant — the studies requiring these platforms are typically University led, underpinned by major Category 1 funding schemes, and contribute tens of millions of dollars to University income. Effective platforms are essential infrastructure to maintain research excellence and future grant competitiveness.

Comparing unmet and met needs, the results indicate major challenges in researchers’ access to bulk email (25 unmet, 9 met) and SMS (25 unmet, 2 met), appointment booking (19 unmet 3 met), and gift card (20 unmet, 9 met) platforms. While recent availability of University endorsed SMS platforms largely addresses bulk SMS needs, other gaps remain. For bulk email, only one

respondent used the endorsed platform (Sendy), with more preferring Mailchimp — suggesting possible dissatisfaction or limited awareness of Sendy. Sparse training and support further reinforce the need for a thorough reassessment of email platform requirements and University offerings.

Appointment booking platforms showed particularly low uptake of Microsoft Bookings, the endorsed solution. Significant performance issues and minimal vendor support render it unsuitable for many researchers. Although SimplyBook.me is nearing University approval (with these efforts spearheaded by the Px4 project), concerns persist regarding its broader affordability under a user pays model.

Gift card platforms generated substantial dissatisfaction, with researchers perceiving current University mandated suppliers as difficult to use and ill-suited to research. Reported issues include a lack of vendor neutrality, poor configurability and reporting, and limited consideration for participant accessibility. Researchers identified researcher friendly alternatives such as Prezzy but faced uncertainty about permitted suppliers and usage rules.

Across all platform types, respondents strongly emphasised the need for integrated, secure systems capable of storing participant data and automating communication workflows. Existing EDC platforms, e.g., REDCap, were viewed as limited research databases without such integrations. Importantly, researchers are using non-standard third-party platforms (e.g., Mailchimp, Humanitix, Prezzy, SMS Broadcast) that may not have undergone Privacy Impact Assessments. This exposes potential privacy risks, particularly for the platforms that store data overseas.

The findings highlight a pressing need for secure, University reviewed, approved, and supported engagement platforms. Given a lack of representation from Onemda and the Melbourne Disability Institute, further consultation is required to ensure their needs are also captured.

## 1. Introduction

Modern population and global health studies rely on effective, research-appropriate technology platforms for success. While much focus is placed on research data storage, sharing, and analysis platforms, it is equally important to consider engagement platforms that meet the expectations of participants and researchers. For most studies, modes of communication have advanced beyond paper letters and telephone calls. Participants and researchers often *expect* to be engaged via email or SMS, and when appointments are involved, expect to have the option of self-managing their booking online. Similarly, remuneration is expected to be receivable in physical and electronic forms (e.g., physical or electronic gift cards), with sufficient flexibility and accessibility to be practical for the recipient.

To better understand these needs, and the degree to which they are met/unmet, the MSPGH conducted an anonymous online survey of its staff and Graduate Researchers. The survey, titled “*Platform Needs for Participant and Researcher Engagement*”, opened on 14 October 2025 and closed six weeks later. The survey was advertised in the MSPGH e-news, with multiple reminders. We limited the scope of the survey to the research context and excluded administrative usage.

The information presented in this report aims to steer the efforts of central University groups, helping ensure that MSPGH researchers are considered key stakeholders in broader platform plans

and strategy. Results of the survey are summarised in Section 3, with discussion and conclusions provided in Sections 4 and 5, respectively.

## 2. Survey results

The survey recorded 45 responses in total, however two were flagged as spam and consequently excluded from subsequent analyses, leaving 43 valid responses. Five of the School’s seven Centres were represented in response data, spanning 16 different Units. No responses were received from Onemda: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing, nor the Melbourne Disability Institute.

### 2.1 Bulk email platforms

In the research context, an effective bulk email platform would allow researchers to prepare and send study advertisements, updates (e-newsletters), reminders, and promotional emails to potentially thousands of recipients. Table 1 shows a strong demand for University supported bulk email platform across the five Centres represented. The majority (65.8%) of researchers who could benefit from bulk emailing capability do not have a working solution. The greatest demand for this capability exists in the Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics (CEB) and Centre for Health Policy (CHP). All represented Centres had greater unmet needs compared to met needs.

**Table 1: Could your research benefit from a University supported bulk email platform?**

Centre	Proportion of respondents by platform needs/usage			
	Yes, and we don’t have one to use (n = 25)	Yes, and we have one that we use (n = 9)	No (n = 4)	Total (n = 38)
Onemda	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics	9 (36.0%)	6 (66.7%)	3 (75.0%)	18 (47.4%)
Centre for Health Equity	3 (12.0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (10.5%)
Centre for Health Policy	7 (28.0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (21.1%)
Centre for Mental Health and Community Wellbeing	4 (16.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (10.5%)
Nossal Institute for Global Health	2 (8.0%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (25.0%)	4 (10.5%)
Melbourne Disability Institute	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

The following bulk email platforms were noted as presently used: Mailchimp (4), Sendy (1), REDCap via Twilio (1), and the email function of Qualtrics (1).

The potential benefits of a bulk email platform were identified for active projects funded by: NHRMC (10), MRFF (5), ARC (1), UOM (2), and Other (3, e.g., Australian Red Cross, Natural Hazards Research Australia, McCoy Seed Fund, etc.). Combined, these grants span 2026 to 2029. One respondent described value in a bulk email platform for their PhD project, and four respondents identified value for their work in a general use context.

Key features requested for a bulk email platform were:

- Successful delivery of emails to inboxes (i.e., not flagged as spam).
- Ability to handle newsletters that can be distributed to external and internal partners.

- Ability to schedule email batches.
- Ability to configure sub-lists within distribution lists, i.e., multiple tags associated with an individual.
- Ability to see which emails were opened, and which bounced.
- Ability to report on which links in the email were clicked.
- Ability to embedded images.
- Unsubscribe button/link functionality.

The survey did not ask about the acceptability of a user-pays model for bulk emailing because it is plausible that such a platform may be provided without cost to researchers.

## 2.2 Appointment booking platforms

An appointment booking platform would help researchers coordinate studies that involve in-person visits, e.g., for participant focus group discussions or clinical measures, or for researchers attending workshops. Booking telephone or videoconference sessions would also be possible. Table 2 illustrates that 57.6% of respondents have an unmet need for this platform type. Of the 22 respondents who need appointment booking capabilities, only three reported having a platform that they use. The number of respondents who do not need appointment booking capabilities (11) suggests that this is a more specialised research requirement.

**Table 2: Could your research benefit from a University supported appointment booking platform?**

Centre	Proportion of respondents by platform needs/usage			
	Yes, and we don't have one to use (n = 19)	Yes, and we have one that we use (n = 3)	No (n = 11)	Total (n = 33)
Onemda	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics	6 (31.6%)	1 (33.3%)	7 (63.6%)	14 (42.4%)
Centre for Health Equity	2 (10.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (18.2%)	4 (12.1%)
Centre for Health Policy	7 (36.8%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (24.2%)
Centre for Mental Health and Community Wellbeing	2 (10.5%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (9.1%)
Nossal Institute for Global Health	2 (10.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (18.2%)	4 (12.1%)
Melbourne Disability Institute	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

<sup>1</sup> Percentages might not total 100% due to rounding.

The following booking platforms were noted as presently used: Microsoft Bookings (1), Humanitix and Mailchimp (1), and a bespoke system (1).

Of the 22 respondents who currently use or could potentially use an appointment booking platform, only 63.6% indicated that they would accept a user-pays model. This was based on indicative pricing of \$60-70 per study, per month, and assumed the University would cover the cost of enterprise licensing, support, etc.

The potential benefits of an appointment booking platform were identified for active projects (2026 to 2029) funded by: NHRMC (7), MRFF (2), and Other (4, e.g., Victorian Government, Cancer Council

Victoria, Department of Education and Training, etc.). Three respondents noted value in such platforms for general research use.

Key features requested for an online bookings platform were:

- Integration with Outlook calendars and shared calendars.
- Live update to calendars to avoid double-bookings.
- Ability to configure branding and researcher details in participant facing content.
- Ability to book group sessions.
- Ability to book a sequence of appointments for each participant, with configurable intervals.
- Ability for the study team and participant to reschedule bookings without invalidating links.
- Ability to receive email notifications about appointment booking events, e.g., confirmation, cancellation, rescheduling, etc.
- Ability to add file attachments to bookings.
- Automated slot booking via a single link, like HotDoc appointment bookings.

### 2.3 Gift card platforms

The University's [Prepaid/Gift Card Policy Framework](#) describes Corporate Prepaid Cards (CPCs) and Coles Gift Cards as preferred domestic suppliers. However, consultation with MSPGH researchers during the survey design phase revealed that these are not participant or researcher friendly. CPCs have short activation and expiry periods (6 and 12 months, respectively), activation and usage is difficult to track, and recipients report difficulty in using them. CPC fees are high, especially for physical cards, and special approval is required each time physical cards are requested. Coles gift cards require the recipient to shop at Coles which is impractical for recipients who do not live close to a Coles (or affiliate) store. Recipients report that some Coles cards can only be used in-store. Our survey asked about unmet needs for a gift card platform that addresses these problems. A research-appropriate platform would offer a secure dashboard for researchers to self-manage the issuance (email/SMS/physical) and tracking of gift cards, including bulk distribution. The costs of using a gift card platform are typically included in the purchase price of the gift cards and this was assumed to remain the case, as noted in the question text.

Table 3 indicates a strong unmet demand for a research-appropriate gift card platform, with 60.6% of respondents reporting that they do not have a platform to use. These responses were lodged despite the existence of the Prepaid/Gift Card Policy, suggesting that respondents do not view the University-endorsed suppliers as fit for research. Approximately 27% of respondents indicated that they have a gift card platform to use, however this was accompanied by mentions of six platforms that sit outside the Policy Framework. Dissatisfaction was reflected in the comments of those who use approved suppliers (see Section 3).

The following gift card platforms/vendors were noted as presently used: Corporate Prepaid Cards/Zenith (5), Readings Bookstore (2), Coles Gift Cards (1), Prezzy (1), GiftPay (1), and Visa (1).

The potential benefits of a research-appropriate gift card platform were identified for active projects (2026 to 2029) funded by: NHRMC (9), MRFF (5), and Other (8, e.g., Department of Health, Cancer Council Victoria, Medibank, etc.). Four respondents identified value for their work in a general use context.

**Table 3: Could your research benefit from a University supported gift card platform that is compatible with research?**

Centre	Proportion of respondents by platform needs/usage			
	Yes, and we don't have one to use (n = 20)	Yes, and we have one that we use (n = 9)	No (n = 4)	Total (n = 33)
Onemda	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics	10 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (100%)	14 (42.4%)
Centre for Health Equity	1 (5.0%)	3 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (12.1%)
Centre for Health Policy	4 (20.0%)	4 (44.4%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (24.2%)
Centre for Mental Health and Community Wellbeing	2 (10.0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (9.1%)
Nossal Institute for Global Health	3 (15.0%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (12.1%)
Melbourne Disability Institute	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

<sup>1</sup> Percentages might not total 100% due to rounding.

Key features requested of a gift card platform were:

- Vendor neutrality / access to a range of retailers.
- Physical and electronic gift card options.
- Ability to configure the redemption value to specific dollar amounts, rather than set increments.
- Ability to see who has received, opened, and activated gift cards as three individual steps.
- Ability to pre-purchase gift cards without knowing recipient details since they cannot always be known *a priori*.
- User-friendly activation process, not reliant on online methods.
- Transparent and detailed back-end tracking.
- Accessibility
  - For people who do not have computers or email accounts or smartphones.
  - For people who do not live in cities with many shops.
  - For people with disabilities.
  - For people with lower literacy or English reading ability, or who cannot read English.
  - For families with primary school aged children, or young people, such that the issuance of gift cards will be approved during ethics review, e.g., redeemable for books and other educational materials.
- Ability to resend the gift card if the recipient loses it.
- Ability to cancel a gift card or edit the recipient email address if an error occurs.
- Low fees per card.

## 2.4 Bulk SMS platforms

A bulk SMS platform would allow researchers to contact participants/collaborators in ways more responsive than email, e.g., to issue survey invitations and reminders, or confirm an appointment. Prior to and during the survey period, the University did not have endorsed SMS platforms. However, in December 2025, the Enterprise Technology team announced Twilio and Optus SMS Suite as two [University-endorsed platforms](#). We have nonetheless elected to include coverage of

bulk SMS platforms in this report. The information provided here reinforces the need for bulk SMS capabilities in the research context and summarises the key features requested by respondents.

Table 4 highlights substantial demand for University supported bulk SMS platforms, with 73.5% of respondents reporting an unmet need in this area. Only two respondents reported having an SMS platform to use. As with other platforms, CEB and CHP indicated the highest levels of unmet need.

**Table 4: Could your research benefit from a University supported bulk SMS platform?**

Centre	Proportion of respondents by platform needs/usage			
	Yes, and we don't have one to use (n = 25)	Yes, and we have one that we use (n = 2)	No (n = 7)	Total (n = 34)
Onemda	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0.0 (%)
Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics	9 (36.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (71.4%)	14 (41.2%)
Centre for Health Equity	3 (12.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (11.8%)
Centre for Health Policy	8 (32.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (23.5%)
Centre for Mental Health and Community Wellbeing	3 (12.0%)	1 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (11.8%)
Nossal Institute for Global Health	2 (8%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (28.6%)	4 (11.8%)
Melbourne Disability Institute	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

SMS Broadcast (1) and ClickSend (1) were noted as presently used. Accompanying comments indicated that ClickSend is a largely manual and extremely time-consuming process, not suitable for large studies. ClickSend was also flagged as being limited by human ethics with respect to the export of contact information.

The potential benefits of a bulk SMS platform were identified for active projects (2026 to 2029) funded by: NHRMC (8), MRFF (6), and Other (3, e.g., Victorian Government, Cancer Council Victoria, etc.). Four respondents identified value in an SMS platform for general use.

Of the 27 respondents who currently use or could potentially use a bulk SMS platform, 96.2% would accept a user-pays model. This was based on indicative pricing of \$40-60 per 1000 SMS messages sent, and assumed the University would cover the cost of enterprise licensing, support, etc.

Key features requested for a bulk SMS platform were:

- Two-way messaging, linked to an individual.
- Ability to use an existing phone number, or a new number, with configurable branding (e.g., sender displays as the study name or University of Melbourne).
- Ability to receive email notifications for SMS replies.
- Ability to see who received and read messages.
- Ability to see which messages bounced.
- Ability to record recipients who opt-out.
- Integration with Qualtrics, e.g., for survey invitations and reminders.
- Data stored confidentially in Australia.

## 2.5 Future platform needs

Respondents were asked to briefly describe planned studies that will involve bulk email, SMS, appointment booking, and/or gift card platforms. 18 respondents identified future needs for such platforms, including 10 NHMRC and 4 MRFF projects, and 1 PhD project. Research plans involving these platforms were identified across a span of MSPGH Units:

- Allergy and Lung Health Unit
- Disability and Health Unit
- Disaster, Climate and Adversity Unit
- Equity and Mental Health Unit
- Evaluation and Implementation Science Unit
- Indigenous Epidemiology and Health Unit
- Infectious Disease Dynamics Unit
- Migration and Health Unit
- Malaria and Infectious Disease Epidemiology Unit
- Population Mental Health Unit
- Sexual Health Unit

## 3. Discussion

The survey response rate was sufficient to derive a meaningful understanding of communication and remuneration platform needs for MSPGH research. Directly comparing unmet and met needs, the results reveal substantial challenges in researchers' access to bulk email (25 unmet, 9 met), appointment booking (19 unmet, 3 met), and gift card (20 unmet, 9 met) platforms. Bulk SMSing exhibited the highest unmet-to-met needs ratio (25 unmet, 2 met), though this will have been largely addressed by the introduction of University-endorsed SMS platforms in December 2025. The key features requested of a bulk SMS platform are mostly available in the [University-endorsed platforms](#).

The projects that require these platforms are large, most frequently led by the University, and funded by Category 1 NHMRC, MRFF, and ARC schemes. Combined, the University income for these projects sits in the vicinity of tens of millions of dollars. A strong argument can be made to support the success of these studies with effective research platforms; it not only benefits the research teams, but also the School, Faculty, and University holistically. World class research outcomes boost the chance of future grant success and elevate University esteem.

Of the seven respondents who provided information about bulk email platforms in use, only one reported using Sendy, the University-endorsed platform. Mailchimp was the most popular named bulk email platform, perhaps suggesting a lack of awareness of Sendy and/or dissatisfaction with its feature set/performance. Sparse University support and a lack of available training for Sendy are ongoing issues noted by the MSPGH Informatics Team. A detailed exploration of bulk email platform needs is recommended. From this, the appropriateness of Sendy can be reevaluated and compared to other bulk email solutions, with the outcomes driving a strategic, long-term platform choice.

Across the four types of platforms considered, appointment bookings had the fewest reported solutions in use (3), despite strong demand. Only one respondent reported using Microsoft

Bookings, the University-endorsed booking solution, suggesting that it is not fit for purpose in the research context. This is confirmed by feedback from the MSPGH Informatics Team, who have encountered a dearth of Bookings support from Microsoft, with major bugs that remain unresolved for years.

In 2025, [Engageware](#) (formerly TimeTrade) was explored as a possible appointment booking solution, having been reviewed and approved by the University for student/teaching use cases. These efforts ultimately found that Engageware was not cost-effective, nor sufficiently scalable or flexible for broad adoption across research studies. More recent efforts have been led by the [Px4/OMIX3 project](#) (Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences) to establish [SimplyBook.me](#) as a University-endorsed bookings platform, with enterprise licensing capable of supporting multiple studies across Faculties. A shared user-pays model is proposed. At the time of writing, the approval process and license agreement for SimplyBook.me (initially for Px4 but with broader scope included) are nearing completion.

Respondents signalled relatively low acceptance of a user-pays model for appointment booking platforms. This may be due to the indicative per-study pricing (\$70/month; \$840 per annum) that was displayed with the survey question. The estimate was derived from the SimplyBook.me agreement and assumes that the annual enterprise license fee would be University-funded. Whether the University would fund the enterprise license remains unknown. Thus, it is unlikely that a user-pays booking platform will be *less* than \$70 per month, per study, if it is based on SimplyBook.me. Reluctance to accept the user-pays model may be driven by 1) the fact that funded studies have not budgeted for this level of ongoing expense, and/or 2) an assumption that the capability would/should be wholly provided by the University as core research infrastructure.

Respondents expressed deep dissatisfaction with University's current [recommended gift card suppliers](#), Corporate Prepaid Cards and Coles digital gift cards. Responses indicated that recommended suppliers are used because they are mandated by University policy, rather than by choice. University-endorsed platforms were criticised as inaccessible for researchers and study participants alike. Lack of support, lost research funding, and lost working hours were highlighted as major problems stemming from faulty gift cards not being replaced. The ongoing resource drain incurred by ineffective platforms was also highlighted. One respondent expressed confusion about the suppliers permitted for use and how to use them. Researchers wished for easy access to reporting features, providing visibility over who has been issued a gift card and subsequently activated it. The ability to set gift card values with fine granularity was also requested, along with expiry dates that meet consumer laws (minimum 36 months). Prezzy was noted as a gift card supplier preferred by researchers because it provides a more user-friendly and transparent experience than the University recommended suppliers.

Following questions specific to bulk email, SMS, bookings and gift card platforms, the survey provided respondents with an opportunity to describe other unmet platform needs. Systems integration was a recurring theme in the responses to this question. Respondents suggested integrating survey/data capture platforms with bulk email/SMS, bookings, and gift voucher platforms. This approach would allow researchers to store sensitive contact details for participants and track participation in a centralised dashboard, avoiding the need to copy/move participant data from one platform to another. Researchers emphasised the limitations of using electronic data capture (EDC) platforms such as Qualtrics and REDCap as research databases and reporting tools.

One respondent envisaged a unified data management platform serving as a research database where they could take notes, store data, and communicate with participants via integrated platforms. Multiple respondents identified the benefits of integrating existing EDC platforms REDCap and Qualtrics with external platforms for participant engagement, particularly if configurable, automated workflows were also available. One respondent described a strong preference for Qualtrics over REDCap, noting that it is more user-friendly, time-effective, and visually appealing to participants. This respondent wished for Qualtrics data to be stored on premises at the University, as per REDCap. Greater variety in available EDC platforms was raised, in addition to the need for an integrated electronic file management system. Seamless access for partners and clients who do not use the Microsoft software ecosystem was also requested.

Data privacy and security are critically important facets for any platform that stores sensitive data. This is eminently true of the platforms discussed here because, to perform their core function, they must store Personally Identifiable Information (PII). The University's [Privacy Policy](#) (MPF1104) requires a [Privacy Impact Assessment](#) (PIA) for any project, system, or activity that collects, handles, processes, or discloses PII. To encourage candid responses, our survey did not ask whether respondents have conducted a PIA for non-standard, third-party platforms they may be using. Response data indicated non-standard platforms are being used: Mailchimp for bulk emails; Humanitix for appointment booking; Prezzy and GiftPay for gift cards; and SMS Broadcast and ClickSend for bulk SMS. It is reasonable to posit that not all these platforms have undergone a PIA. If so, there exists a potential risk to participant/researcher privacy, particularly for platforms such as Mailchimp which store data overseas.

Researchers undertaking bulk SMS activities can now migrate their processes to University-endorsed platforms. The same *may* be true for bulk emailing, however training, local support, and maintenance for Sedy remain non-trivial issues to address, as does the robustness of its performance. The pathway forward is less clear for researchers who require appointment booking and gift card platforms for their studies. While SimplyBook.me promises to be a University-reviewed and approved booking platform by mid-2026, the question of affordability remains. Increased School, Faculty, and/or central University platform funding support may be required to offset the cost to researchers. Collective dissatisfaction with University gift card suppliers suggests that ground-up re-evaluation and academic consultation may be required to understand researcher needs in this area.

Overarchingly, low-cost platform access was a key issue for researchers, as funding can be limited and is often assumed/required by funding bodies to be provided in-kind. The issue of platform fees is particularly relevant to early career researchers, who often only have access to small budgets.

The discussion presented here is limited by a lack of representation in responses from MSPGH Centres Onemda and the Melbourne Disability Institute. To address this gap, Unit Heads and study leads within those Centres must be contacted for consultation about their research platform needs.

#### 4. Conclusion

This report has examined platform needs for participant and researcher engagement, with a view towards centrally endorsed and supported platforms for bulk email/SMS, appointment booking, and gift card issuance. The investigation has been undertaken in the research context, examining platform needs with respect to contemporary population and global health study designs.

Respondents expressed a strong need for these platforms to support their current and future research. Most respondents stated that the need is unmet. Challenges around bulk SMSing have been largely addressed by the introduction of University-endorsed solutions in December 2025. However, large gaps remain in the availability of suitable bulk email, appointment booking, and gift card platforms. Non-standard platforms are being used in ways that store sensitive information, raising questions about participant privacy and human ethics. Awareness of the PIA process, and researchers' willingness to undertake PIAs, are uncertain. Across MSPGH, platform gaps are negatively impacting >20 funded Category 1 grants, in addition to government contracts and projects funded by non-governmental organisations. The issue is not transient – respondents described 14 NHMRC/MRFF grant applications that are currently in development or planned, with methodologies that will rely on these platforms for success.

Awareness of University-endorsed platforms is essential for Academic and Professional research staff to choose an appropriate and secure platform. Therefore, it is vital to pro-actively socialise existing and new engagement platforms to research audiences. Moreover, efforts to raise awareness the PIA process (in particular, *when* a PIA is required) will help mitigate the risk exposed by researchers who choose to use non-standard external platforms, e.g., for specific features not available in University offerings. Data security and the preservation of participant privacy is paramount. Effective, secure, and research-appropriate platforms are critical for the University to meet researcher and participant expectations, and maintain a competitive edge in the Australian research landscape.

## 5. Acknowledgements

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