



Submission to the

**Australian Medical Research Advisory Board's consultation for the
development of the related Priorities for the Australian Medical
Research and Innovation Strategy for the disbursement of the
Medical Research Future Fund**

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1. What is the gap in Australia's health system to be addressed by this priority?

The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) has identified health policy and services research¹ including healthcare system integration, prevention and better management of chronic disease, health workforce adaptability and sustainability, effective and economic use of new high and low cost technologies and optimised end of life care as priority health issues for research to be funded through the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF).

2. How does your area of priority address either an existing or a new health or health system challenge?

Australia faces major challenges as it evolves to cope with the burden of disease associated with rising rates of chronic and multi chronic conditions and an ageing population - it is vital to ensure that the healthcare system innovatively adapts for our evolving needs by identifying and implementing an effective strategic policy framework supported by enabling health services strategies for better integrating patient care, managing increasing chronic disease, developing a more flexible and adaptable health workforce, developing and effectively deploying new technologies and improving care towards the end of life.

3. Which aims and objectives is your priority likely to meet?

- **An excellent and responsive health and medical research system that improves lives**
- **A health policy framework that will drive transformation of the current system is required**
 - Research that develops and tests innovative models of care that take a whole of system approach to service delivery and funding mechanisms aimed at improving people's lives through better and more timely care that is focussed on achieving optimal health outcomes rather than the delivery of episodic and uncoordinated contacts with disconnected care providers. Such integrated care focusses on the journey a person takes as they navigate the healthcare system to receive the treatments that they need with a focus on desired health outcomes and system efficiencies.
 - Research that develops and tests innovative models of healthcare that recognise the diversity of settings and lived experiences across the Australian population and the need to be innovative and adaptive to local needs and circumstances. For example, effective models of care in an urban setting may not be appropriate elsewhere, while disadvantaged groups will have their own unique needs.
 - Ways in which high and low cost technology can be utilised to ensure better patient care, such as through telehealth services or a well-implemented and supported electronic health record.
 - Developing innovative and flexible approaches to end of life care can enable patients and their families to better control the circumstances of their death, easing suffering and allowing patients to die with dignity.

¹ In both 2014 and 2015, only 4.25% of total National Health and Medical Research Council grants were allocated to health services research.

- **Preventions and cures of tomorrow**

- Innovative research into effective preventive health programs that will provide lasting population benefits to address the already high and steadily growing prevalence of chronic and multi chronic disease
- Innovation in service delivery that provides more effective healthcare across the life course for Australians with reduced access to needed healthcare and among disadvantaged groups.

- **Economic benefits**

- Better system integration leads to increased efficiency as resources are coordinated and targeted more effectively and service overlap is reduced
- Preventive health programs, earlier disease identification and intervention, and coordination of an individual's healthcare will all achieve both immediate health system efficiencies and avoid more intensive and expensive healthcare interventions in the medium and long term.
- Understanding the ways the health workforce can be more adaptable and responsive to evolving models of care and patient needs will improve productivity within the healthcare system.
- Economic use of both high and low cost technologies where patient needs will be effectively and safely met.

- **Sustainable, high-quality, cost-effective health care**

- An effective and strategic whole-of-system health policy framework supported by enabling health services strategies lays the foundation for sustainable, high-quality and cost-effective public health care. Informed by international best-practice, the Australian health system would benefit from Australian tailored, evidence-based health policy.
- Better system integration leads to increased efficiency as resources are targeted and coordinated more effectively and service overlap is reduced while meeting patient needs.
- Understanding how the health workforce can be used more flexibly and innovatively to provide healthcare will contribute to both system and economic sustainability, in addition to enhancing the quality of patient care provided.

- **Leveraging and enhancing collaboration and integration**

- Prioritising research that identifies methods to ensure better system integration that ensures enhanced collaboration within the health system and across care sectors to coordinate patient care.
- Health providers working cooperatively with enhanced scope of practice to improve patient care and increase the productivity of the health workforce.

- **A balanced and appropriately skilled workforce**

- Prioritising research that examines factors and challenges to ensure a robust and resilient workforce that is responsive to evolving models of care and patient needs.
- Effective changes to scope of practice among health practitioners that provide innovative, flexible, efficient and safe patient care.

- **A research engaged workforce**

- Prioritising research that identifies opportunities to better engage the health workforce with the research sector to develop innovative and responsive health service delivery approaches that is informed by the experience of frontline healthcare providers.
- Embedding translational research practices as standard when developing innovative models of care.

4. Mandatory considerations – which of the mandatory considerations set out in the Medical Research Future Fund Act (2015) does your priority proposal address?

- Burden of disease on the Australian Community
- How to deliver practical benefits from medical research and medical innovation to as many Australians as possible
- How to ensure that financial assistance provides that greatest value for all Australians
- How to ensure that disbursements complement, enhance other assistance provided to the sector

5. Outline of priority proposal

The MRFF has the opportunity to support research that will provide long term benefits to all Australians through reduced burden of disease, innovative healthcare service delivery and sustainable economic efficiencies.

Achieving healthcare system integration

Integrated and coordinated healthcare systems and funding approaches can deliver a seamless transition between sectors and providers of care. Providing comprehensively integrated care across the entirety of the patient journey and over the life course is necessary to optimise outcomes for both patients and providers, in addition to providing efficiency gains. Yet the current system of care across sectors is fragmented and duplicative with respect to service delivery and funding responsibilities. This results in unclear lines of accountability and a system with perverse incentives in the delivery of patient care often focused on minimising own costs and shifting responsibilities between levels of government. Innovative research conducted with support from the MRFF will contribute to identifying models of care and solutions that will ensure that the Australian health system is better integrated at all levels and able to meet the diverse needs of the Australian population.

Prevention and management of chronic disease

35% of Australians have a chronic condition, and 20% have two or more chronic conditions, making care increasingly complex and requiring input from a number of health providers. Chronic conditions have a significant burden of disease with a range of potential impacts on a person's individual circumstances, including quality of life and broader social and economic effects. The health system will face additional pressures as the population continues to age and as chronic and multi chronic disease becomes more prevalent. The prevention and management of chronic disease should be a priority issue for the MRFF to both improve quality of life and to reduce the burden on the health system.

A flexible and responsive health workforce

Australia's healthcare system relies heavily upon the skills, knowledge and professionalism of its health workforce comprising a large and diverse mix of participants, including 610,000 registered health practitioners working across 18 professions, and large numbers of support staff and volunteers. Adequate health workforce supply is necessary to ensure that consumer needs are met and this can in part be achieved with research into how scope of practice changes can improve health workforce productivity while ensuring safety in patient care and maintaining or improving quality of outcomes. A global health workforce shortage has been recognised by the WHO, with calls for countries to actively strengthen their health workforce through adequate measurement, forecasting, planning and funding. As demand for services increases and models of care evolve, research must be directed toward training and retaining a strong, resilient and flexible health workforce.

Innovative use of technology for health service delivery

Innovations in health and communications technology have dramatically changed the health system and had a significant impact on the provision of care. For example, access to medical services via telecommunications technology has taken a step towards addressing service discrepancies in rural and remote areas, and the push for a well-integrated, national electronic health record has been long overdue. In order for Australia to continue innovating and improving the quality and accessibility of care, research priorities must be directed towards how the deployment of health technologies can be used to support innovations in the delivery of health services and models of care.

Better choices and responsiveness towards end of life care

In the next 25 years the number of Australians dying each year will double. 70% of people express a desire to die at home, but only about 14% do so. The vast majority of deaths occur in hospitals/residential care, despite people's contrary wishes. Failure to plan effectively for death leads to confusion and distress for the person dying and their family. Research should be focused on investigating the issues and challenges surrounding end of life care to ensure that optimal patient outcomes are reached and that the health system is adequately supported. This research should also extend to better understanding considerations around low value care, futile care, patient choice and the associated system implications.

6. What measures of success do you propose and what will be the impact on health care consumers?

Success in health policy and services research is characterised by: improved patient care, access, satisfaction, safety and quality of life; reduced burden of disease and improved population health; system efficiencies being achieved; improved productivity and responsiveness of the health workforce; and the demonstrated capacity of the sector to adapt to a changing health system environment. As these elements are achieved, consumers can receive a better patient experience and health outcomes, improved access to timely health services and reduced costs either directly through out-of-pocket expenses or indirectly through reduced government expenditure.

7. Please outline any linkages your proposal has with stakeholders, policy agendas and other health and medical research funding agencies.

The AHHA is the independent peak membership body and advocate for the Australian healthcare system and a national voice for universally accessible, high quality healthcare in Australia. The AHHA is a national body, with members that are mostly comprised of public hospitals, primary health networks, state and territory health departments, universities and other health service providers. The AHHA consulted with its university members during the process of preparing this submission. The submission also reflects the views of the AHHA's independent research body, the Deeble Institute for Health Policy Research. The principles and issues discussed in this submission are consistent with AHHA's public position on the challenges and opportunities facing the Australian healthcare sector and also reflect statements made in submissions to other Government processes. The AHHA does not receive any funds from medical research funding agencies.