

SRHMR Submission 10 — Magic Pudding Company PL

The NHMRC funds three very different beasts - high-quality curiosity-driven research; research into major Australian health challenges; and commercial development - but assesses and reviews all three in surprisingly similar ways: peer-reviewed research excellence plus track record, with a fleeting glance at potential impact. This doesn't work. We need three distinct pots.

1 High-quality curiosity-driven research projects should be selected solely on the quality of the researcher, without regard to possible but unknowable outcomes. New Zealand's Marsden Fund is a good model. Given that most smart ideas strike people under 35, a slice of this pot should be reserved for them, and assessed on promise rather than record, ideas rather than ideologies.

2 Australia's major health challenges - obesity, indigenous health, etc - all lie at the interface of the social and health sciences. They are the province of multidisciplinary teams, not individuals, and should be assessed accordingly, by panels that understand all of the relevant issues. Research excellence should take second place to anticipated outcomes. The European Commission's balance between frontier research and grand challenges is a good model.

3 Big Pharma has vacated the space between discovery and phase 1 clinical trials. Australia could take a lucrative slice of this action by leveraging its outstanding medical research workforce and high quality infrastructure into a virtual pharmaceutical company partially funded by private investors. Projects should be assessed commercially (market, IP, competition) and reviewed ruthlessly (against predetermined milestones) by full-time professionals. Research should be contracted to specialist laboratories (eg TetraQ, QCTN) rather than being undertaken intramurally. EATRIS and the BioPontis Alliance are interesting models.

I'd split the money 40/30/30, but the precise mix is less important than the need for entirely distinct assessment and review procedures.

I'm happy to discuss any of these issues further if required.