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McKeon Review Secretariat

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To Mr Simon McKeon, Panel members, and all others involved in the McKeon Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research,

Thankyou for the opportunity to comment on this important review. This response is on behalf of The Institute for Breathing and Sleep (IBAS), an incorporated, not-for-profit research institute co-located with Austin Health in Heidelberg, Victoria.

Our response most directly relates to the third statement made in the Context section of the Terms of Reference, which reads:

Twenty years ago, individuals and small groups could initiate and carry out meaningful research. This has changed, and in most cases significantly larger groups, often interdisciplinary in nature, are now required. New and emerging technologies make it easier for larger groups to work together to achieve more meaningful outcomes, but also require new types of support.

We strongly disagree with this statement. This assumption has a strong anti-competitive flavour and, as it is being put into practice, is resulting in concentrating the administration of research into too few, very powerful hands which are often disconnected from the clinical questions they seek to answer. This approach to the structure of health and medical research organisations stifles the broad open playing field which has, until recently, characterised Australian medical research.

We strongly believe that research funding should be based on scientific merit and clinical relevance rather than on power bases which sometimes become too narrow in their focus. Allowing smaller groups and organisations to thrive and achieve success can be of profound clinical relevance. Collaboration within and across institutes allows for flexibility in interdisciplinary research utilising new technologies. This can be equally successful with, or more successful than that conducted by larger research conglomerates.

In its ultimate form, this type of principle will exclude the emergence of new research groups within Australia forever; a situation that would be extremely detrimental to Australia's potential to have a viable, internationally competitive health and medical research sector (Question 1 of the Review). This is particularly so in the areas of chronic disease (Context Statement 1), where researchers with close clinical affiliations are best placed to understand the complex needs of patients and therefore the complexity of thought required to underpin research in this area. Similarly, effective knowledge translation (Matter for Reviews 1+8) is predicated on close links between research and clinical practice. Organizations such as IBAS excel in these areas and we have published examples of rapid integration of research findings into improved clinical care for our patients.

IBAS has risen from its fledgling inauguration in 2000 to become a focussed, well regarded Institute, producing high-quality research in our areas of expertise. We ask the panel members of the McKeon Review to reconsider this contextual statement and recognize the role of small research groups as an important means of fostering novel and clinically relevant research. A strong and diverse research environment strengthens Australia's research capacity.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Christine McDonald
Chief Executive Officer



Dr David Berlowitz
Chair, Medical and Scientific Research Committee