



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NEW SOUTH WALES



DR FRANCES CUNNINGHAM  
BA, Dip Ed, ScD, FAICD, FACHSM  
SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW  
Centre for Clinical Governance  
Research in Health  
Australian Institute of Health  
Innovation  
Faculty of Medicine

Mr Simon McKeon  
Chair, Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research in Australia  
PO Box 4226  
MANUKA ACT 2603

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Dear Mr McKeon

**Submission: Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research in Australia**

I am pleased to make a submission to the Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research in Australia. This submission addresses the first term of reference of the Review (*The need for Australia to build and retain internationally competitive capacity across the research spectrum, from basic discovery research through clinical translation to public health and health services research*).

Under the Australian government programs of funding for health and medical research there is a gap in the current research funding of the NHMRC to foster and support health services research, including health policy analysis, and the implementation and translation of research into delivery and practice. Such research should be targeted at addressing how we can evaluate and improve aspects of the Australian health care financing and delivery system so that we can have a sustainable health system for the future.

This research effort should focus on assessing and evaluating aspects of our current health system, and should also examine overseas experience with their health systems so that Australia can learn from such experiences, draw on such international experience where relevant and contribute to the international body of work. This would also allow Australia to support work with partners within Australia and international collaborations in this field of research. It is vitally important that such health services research funding should be strategic in addressing critical issues in the financing and delivery of health care so that the health system can be more efficient, more equitable, and more affordable, with improved health outcomes.

At present there is no program of research under the NHMRC, with an adequately established annual allocated budget, which would appear to encourage such research. It is important that the standards and rigour of research funding through Category 1 type grants should also be applicable to this domain of research. Under this area of research, the scope of research should lend itself to having:

1. specific ongoing targeted health services research programs for work to be undertaken on a competitive tender basis, but with the status of Category 1 type research funding; and
2. funding for health services research (including health policy analysis) grants on an open application basis, also with the status of Category 1 type research funding.

It is recommended that the McKeon Review should look to some of the excellent examples of such research funding programs that currently exist in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Both countries have highly successful examples of how such health services and systems research

funding programs should be structured and managed. In the United States, the main grants program for health services research is administered through the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). Further information is available on the website of AHRQ: <http://www.ahrq.gov>

In brief, the mission of the AHRQ is stated as follows:

“The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's (AHRQ) mission is to improve the quality, safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of health care for all Americans. Information from AHRQ's research helps people make more informed decisions and improve the quality of health care services. AHRQ was formerly known as the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research.”

AHRQ is committed to improving care safety and quality by developing successful partnerships and generating the knowledge and tools required for long-term improvement. The goal of their research is measurable improvements in health care in America, gauged in terms of improved quality of life and patient outcomes, lives saved, and value gained for what is spent.

The overall focus of the AHRQ is:

- “Safety and quality: Reduce the risk of harm by promoting delivery of the best possible health care.
- Effectiveness: Improve health care outcomes by encouraging the use of evidence to make informed health care decisions.
- Efficiency: Transform research into practice to facilitate wider access to effective health care services and reduce unnecessary cost.”

In the United Kingdom, there is a new Health Service and Delivery Research programme which is a merger of the former SDO and HSR programmes. The main role of this agency is in commissioning new research. The aims of both programmes are being carried forward into the HS&DR programme. Details of the programme are available at: <http://www.netscc.ac.uk/hsdr/>. The Health Service and Delivery Research (HS&DR) agency is part of the NHS National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The HS&DR programme funds research to improve the quality, effectiveness and accessibility of the NHS.

The HS&DR programme aims to produce rigorous and relevant evidence on the quality, access and organisation of health services, including costs and outcomes. The programme is directed at enhancing the strategic focus on research that matters to the NHS including research on implementation and a range of knowledge mobilisation initiatives. The HS&DR agency is keen to support ambitious evaluative research to improve health services.

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Review. I would be pleased to provide further information to the Review, should you so require.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Frances Cunningham**