

Submission 225 — Leigh Coultas

How might health and medical research be best managed and funded in Australia?

My motivation as an Australian health and medical researcher comes from the loss of my mother to breast cancer and my grandmother to lymphoma. The value of health and medical research in Australia to me lies in preventing other Australians experiencing their fate, or their families the same loss. This is possible because Australian researchers lead the way in breast cancer and leukemia research and discoveries made in Australia give Australians access to emerging therapies sooner than if they were made elsewhere (for example through clinical trials). My research focuses on basic biology relevant to cancer suppression, however my productivity as a researcher (and others like me) is eroded by the burden of the current peer review funding system. Preparation of an application for funding alone is a 2-3 month process and the requirements of each application are lengthy and repetitive. Obligations to participate as a peer reviewer impose additional significant time burden due to the number and length of applications we are required to review. I consider the peer review process valuable and my participation as a reviewer important, however the current system is burdensome and offers little return in terms of feedback or funding success for the time commitment it requires. Above all else, I would value a leaner, more efficient peer review process that reduces the time commitment I have to make to it. This would enable me to spend more time undertaking the kinds of research activities that improve my productivity and thus provide a greater return on the public money invested in me.