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Memo

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From: Nick Goddard, Acting CEO, Statewide and Mental Health Services
Date Prepared:

Subject: SMHS Response to the McKeon Review - Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research in Australia

Why is it in Australia's interest to have a viable, internationally competitive health and medical research sector? (Terms of Reference 1 and 6)

- The Tolkien II report (Andrews, 2006) argues that about one third of the disease burden relating to neuropsychiatric disorders might be reduced by the application of effective (evidence-based) interventions. However, it also argues that one third of the disease burden reflects our lack of knowledge and cannot be reduced at this time (Andrews, 2006). Therefore, research is needed to address this information gap (Andrews, 2006).
- SMHS considers that research is needed to inform decisions about effective treatments. SMHS experience indicates useful research is formed from a collaborative relationship between researchers and clinicians. Effective and efficient clinical care is dependent on clinicians who are informed by research. As such, effective and efficient research activity is also dependent on researchers who are informed about, and mindful of, important clinical issues.
- The unique characteristics of the Australian population and Australian health services require viable and sustainable Australian research infrastructure to undertake this work. SMHS believes this could not be effectively undertaken by researchers from outside Australia without significant Australian input.
- SMHS believes it is not possible, or desirable, to attempt to segregate research activity from clinical activity. If Australia is to have a high standard health care system, it needs to have an internationally competitive health and medical research sectors.

How might health and medical research be best managed and funded in Australia? (Terms of Reference 2, 3 and 7)

- SMHS recommends a mix of government and privately funded organisations with the support of a lead agency, such as the National Health and Medical Research Council, to take a strategic role and ensure a good alignment between research funding and national health priorities.
- It is also recognised that research collaborations increasingly involve international and national linkages, in addition to a local or institutional focus. Further recognition and encouragement of this would be valuable. There is also merit in developing world wide strategies for research into human health. SMHS believes that Australia has benefited from the National Institutes of Health (NIH's)

lead in this area, as well as the World Health Organisation (WHO) collaborative initiatives, and private benefaction funding. Contributing to the development of research capacity in Asia would also have strategic merit.

What are the health and medical research strategic directions and priorities and how might we meet them? (Terms of Reference 5, 12 and 13)

- SMHS supports that research strategic directions and priorities should align closely with national health priorities. Determination of national health priorities should partly be informed by epidemiological evidence (especially evidence about the burden-of-disease) and the socio-political environment, which involves communities making informed choices about where effort and resources should be placed. SMHS believe it is essential that such processes are developed, implemented and evaluated to increase the equitable use of resources to the benefit of communities.

How can we optimise translation of health and medical research into better health and wellbeing? (Terms of Reference 4, 8, 9, 10 and 11)

- SMHS considers that special expertise and appropriate resource allocation is needed to ensure that translational research informs clinical practice. Within a national research framework, there needs to be funded research organisations that have the specific task of undertaking such "translational research". An example from overseas is the UK NICE (United Kingdom National Institute for Clinical Excellence) and SMHS recommends the establishment, with appropriate funding and governance, of an Australian equivalent, which would support the development of guidelines which reflect the current evidence base.