

## **Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research in Australia**

### **Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery (Australia & New Zealand) (CDNM)**

This submission is made on behalf of the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery (Australia & New Zealand) (CDNM) (or the 'Council'), formerly known as the Australian Council of Deans of Nursing (ACDN), is the peak organisation that represents the Deans and Heads of the Schools of Nursing in universities that offer undergraduate and postgraduate programs in nursing and midwifery throughout Australia and New Zealand.

The Council is committed to preparing nurses and midwives to work in collaborative, interdisciplinary contexts in innovative practice models that promote the health and well being of individuals, their families and communities. This goal is contingent on being able to access a robust body of research to develop effective interventions and methods for translation to ensure that best practice principles are integrated into clinical settings, whether in primary, secondary or tertiary care.

The health care sector in Australia is under relentless pressure. The increased demands of an aging population with a rising burden of chronic conditions, increasing expectations for interventions and an ageing workforce and technologies underscore the importance of developing and testing innovative practice models that are relevant and appropriate to the funding models and structure of the Australian health care system.

Not only do these practice models have to consider evidence-based therapies but implementation and translational issues that promote equity and are culturally and ethically acceptable to the cultural diversity and pluralism of contemporary Australian society. We are encouraged by the growing numbers of cross-institutional, cross-disciplinary research initiatives in Australia. We would like to see that these were not adhoc and dependent on individuals and opportunistic funding, rather than strategic and applied based upon population need.

We provide written submissions on the following questions:

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

It is not only in Australia's interest but an imperative for Australia to have a viable, internationally competitive health and medical research sector. This is critical on a number of levels: firstly to allow

Australians access to state of the art therapies and interventions to improve health and well-being; secondly to leverage the benefits financially and in other ways of building productivity and capacity in health and medical research sciences. We also need to be able to retain world class academics and researchers in Australia.

Investment in research should span basic and applied methods. In particular Australia needs to position itself internationally as a leader in health and medical research. The latest Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) exercise has demonstrated the capacity of nurses and midwives to lead internationally relevant research with a potential to leverage impact in improving health outcomes. Despite significant investment, compared to international opportunities, research in Australia is underfunded and cross-subsidised through a range of funding models. Increasing formalized methods of collaboration with larger bodies such as the European Union and National Institutes of Health may leverage benefit.

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

The duality of the two major funding schemes, the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Australian Research Council increases the complexity of management of research. Recent changes have increased the potential silos between scientific approaches. This is challenging given that many of the challenges facing Australians will require the collaboration of scientists in health, medical, biomedical, basic and social sciences. There is also the potential that the critical importance of translational research may be lost within the metrics of assessment of traditional research approaches. A national consensus approach to the priorities of health and medical research, aligned to National Health Priority Areas, to create a blue print for Australian research over the next 10 years may serve to increase the synergy and interface across what is often seen to be a disparate approach to funding opportunities. It is also important on the basis of equity that all sectors of the population have access to the research and health dollar and that prominence be less susceptible to swings in popular views and opinions. Ensuring parity between wages in the clinical and research settings are critical in ensuring that health and medical research is undertaken by the best people. Recent efficiencies in the NHMRC review process, involving a range of funding bodies, is a useful approach to decreasing the burden on individual researchers and decreasing administrative costs.

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

Ensuring consumers are involved in developing health care priorities is important in ensuring not only are we addressing the right questions but also focusing on the best ways of implementing evidence. There is an increased need on the emphasis for an increased on strategic research priorities and alignment across funding schemes. Promoting the interface and collaboration between funding bodies, including non-government organizations and the private sector is critical in promoting a strategic focus on problems facing contemporary Australian society. Ensuring metrics of assessment, such as ERA, are aligned with promoting interdisciplinary research with impact is an important consideration. We also need to ensure we have a cadre of scientists who are prepared to work with innovative, collaborative

groups. Increasing capacity in biostatistics, health economics and health informatics will be critical. We also need to ensure research focuses on the emerging issues of population ageing, chronic disease, healthcare workforce and critical issues of patient quality and safety in our health care system.

## **How can we optimise translation of health and medical research into better health and wellbeing?**

### **(Terms of Reference 4, 8, 9, 10 and 11)**

Implementation science should be recognized for the importance in leveraging health outcomes. In parallel there will be a need to promote the rigor, metrics and methods of implementation science. This will require a hybrid of approaches and collaboration across traditional disciplinary silos. In order to ensure that translation of knowledge equates into better health and well-being there is a need to ensure translational research with strategic importance has the same competitive advantage as other types of research. This will require a cultural change across the sector. Promotion of initiatives, such as Academic Health Science Centres will be important. Ensuring metrics of governance that promote inclusivity and allocation of resources will be critical in ensuring a multidisciplinary perspective. It is also critical to consider policy and politics in the highly contested and politicized domains of health and medical research. All investigator and strategic research should consider issues of implementation and relevance and this should be weighted accordingly in the research assessment.