

SRHMRA Submission 64 — Monash Institute of Medical Research Advisory Board

This submission is made by the Advisory Board of the Monash Institute of Medical Research. Our experience in the commercial sector and understanding of the challenges of the research sector has prompted the following comments.

The current funding models applied to the research sector compromise the effectiveness of funding and the capacity of the research sector to operate effectively over the long term.

Because funding is short term, long term stability of projects is disrupted. There is consequent difficulty in encouraging graduates, postgraduates and early career researchers to choose medical research as a profession. It makes it difficult to retain these people of talent and vocation to fulfil outcomes which in most cases are achieved over the long term. Researchers are typically funded on one year cycles and are required to apply individually for the grants necessary to fund their salaries. This is very time and capacity consuming as a 20% success rate is seen as acceptable despite the fact that the majority of submissions are deemed worthy of funding by NHMRC. This success rate needs to be much higher if we are to gain more productivity from our researchers. (Studies have shown that 35% minimum is necessary to create effective research outputs.)

We recommend funding should be over a period of a minimum of 5 years to enable the appropriate translation to benefit patients and provide the continuity essential to achieve successful health outcomes.

Our concern is not just about money - it is about the effective use of Government funding, the efficiency of research and the strengthening of the sector by attracting and retaining the most talented and highly motivated young research people.

We believe the current model is compromised by the uncertainty of continuity, which makes effective planning very difficult. A change to the model to address these issues would be a very effective contribution to better outcomes across the medical research sector and better long term outcomes for health.