

Medical Research Funding — Our Challenge

ASMR needs your help during 2005, to ensure that medical research in our country remains competitive and translates to better health and economic outcomes for all Australians.



Associate Professor Bronwyn Kingwell, ASMR President and Associate Professor Andrew Sinclair, immediate past-President

The much welcomed doubling of the NHMRC budget (\$613.7 million over five years) instigated by the Howard Government in response to the 1999 Health and Medical Strategic (Wills) Review, is now complete. The Investment (Grant) Review of Health and Medical Research released in December of last year is the first report card on performance flowing from this investment and has been extremely positive. The Government's decision to invest in this sector has been validated by both health and economic returns to the Australian community and they should be congratulated.

The Investment Review recommended a number of reforms to the medical research sector and further strategic investment to develop better health outcomes. Currently neither the Government nor the opposition has committed support for these recommendations. It is now the responsibility of the Australian community to present a coherent case to both Government and the private sector (industry and philanthropic), pinpointing the precise details of how further medical research expenditure will make a difference.

ASMR believes that every organisation committed to a healthy medical research endeavour in Australia must come together in a bipartisan campaign to create awareness of the critical significance of this issue. The agenda for the 2006 Federal Budget is set in October 2005. Between now and October, ASMR aims to stimulate a political campaign including both patient groups and medical researchers. The primary aim of this campaign is to impress the importance of medical research on our politicians and to articulate the case for further investment. In this newsletter (page 2), Prof Warwick Anderson presents a lucid and well-considered view of where investment is required and how it can be better delivered. Other useful references include the Access Economic report, Exceptional Returns and the Investment Review,

both of which can be accessed through the ASMR webpage (www.asmr.org.au/Campaign/campaign.html). I commend these documents to you and suggest you use them as a basis to engage with our politicians. Together we need to inform our politicians of how further investment should be spent and how it will make a difference.

You need to act now:

Visit your local member twice in 2005. Once before June and again before October.

Before September, write to:

- your local member
- the Health Minister
- the Treasurer
- the Prime Minister

Points of focus:

- Medical research is vital to Australia's future, it underpins the health of all Australians
- delivers exceptional returns on investment
- creates knowledge-based jobs (use examples from your field)
- Further investment is required by Government (Federal and State) as well as the private sector (industry and philanthropic) to build on our current success and strategically develop and translate medical research into improved health and economic outcomes.
- Support implementation of the Investment Review

The future of health and medical research in Australia is at stake!

Associate Professor Bronwyn Kingwell, ASMR President

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Ten Challenges for Australian Health and Medical Research

By Professor Warwick Anderson
Monash University

1 Developing health research as needed for the 21st century

The rate of increase in knowledge in human health has never been greater. The internationalisation of research has never been a more powerful force. The need for stronger public health approaches to prevention of ill-health has never been more accepted. The need for reliable research into effective delivery and uptake of health care changes has never been more urgent. Smart countries and industries throughout the world have realised that knowledge, intellectual resourcefulness and the ability to take up new knowledge rapidly is essential to future good health and to prosperity. Will we have the courage and dash to improve how we do research in this country, to further increase our public and private investment, to respond to the national and international health needs and to back the best people and ideas? Or will we muddle along and just be a bit player?

2 Linking up for more strategic approaches

As knowledge of the factors determining health and disease grows deeper and research methodology grows more complex, we need to link up approaches across disciplines from molecular sciences through public health, to achieve ambitious and worthy aims. We can envy the coordinated approaches available in the USA through the NIH institutes, in the Canadian Institutes of Health, in some charitable funding bodies, and in the EU's 5th and 6th Frameworks, for example. We must develop more strategic programmatic approaches here too.

3 Addressing the most important issues

New approaches are needed to bring targeted research to bear on the nation's most important health and research issues, such as how we can be well and productive as we age or how to combat growing levels of obesity in our community, requires a new approach here. The biggest challenge is to do better in research and policy partnerships to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health; so far, we have little of which to be proud. In some countries, research bodies use the "Request for Proposals" methods to address questions that the community and policy-makers pose. They have in place systems that ensure that research priorities are properly identified and then the questions developed and refined by research leaders. Other countries use other approaches; e.g. the New Zealand HRC's Partnership Program. Whilst we have taken some early steps, we have not developed this

system to the sophisticated extent that has occurred in Canada, Europe and the USA.

As well as a better approach to priority driven and policy and practice focussed research, we need a continuing strong independent discovery research activity. This must be a government-funded to ensure its independence from vested interests and researchers must have the freedom to pursue questions that they develop from their own expertise and knowledge. In fact, researchers' priorities actually closely align with the broad priorities of the community, since we are members of the community!

Finally, Australia has also long recognised the need for more industry and private sector research here, but we have not yet found the answers for how to achieve it.

4 Ensuring that Australia benefits

We need stronger industry and capital sectors to support commercialisation, a health care system funded for and focussed on implementing new findings, health care providers knowledgeable and dedicated to the best evidence-based care. Again, partnerships between researchers and public agencies are needed. There is certainly good news in biotechnology, where there has been a massive change in attitude and increase in activity since the late 1990s but there is much more to do. Researchers need to also recognise that this is the responsibility too of governments, when they supply public funds – how to get the greatest benefit from all the public investment in direct research funding, in health and other sectors, in research infrastructure, Universities and research institutes and in schemes to boost research-intensive industries.

5 Increasing flexibility and building our capacities

To meet the rapid changes in research world-wide, we need to have even more flexible funding arrangements and institutional systems here. Not without pain, NHMRC recently increased the flexibility for researchers – breaking down the inflexible block funding walls, increasing the flexibility of funding for Research Fellows, introducing a major new flexible funding Program Grant scheme, and flexible vehicles to fund growth in Population Health Research Capacity. Researchers are now more mobile and funding arrangements can be made more easily across institutions. Australian health and medical research flexibility is assisted by the diversity of research institutions of the sector – Universities, medical and health research institutes, and health care organisations. Further dynamism in our national effort can be gained by lowering barriers to

the best researchers being able to work together; better IP policies, stronger infrastructure support and flexible employment conditions.

6 Developing a “wide and deep” workforce

We simply cannot afford to have gaps in our health research effort. Who would propose that we could leave a whole health area to other countries – eg we will study cancer and cardiovascular disease but not mental health or infectious diseases (the “we are a small country with limited resources” point of view)? Can we afford not to have more researchers undertaking health delivery research itself, or more researchers capable in biotechnology, or willing to tackle socio-economic aspects of ill health, or helping train and collaborate with our regional neighbours who face all our causes of ill health and then some? And we have a special challenge, hardly yet being taken up, of a wide and deep aboriginal research workforce.

7 Honouring the trust of the Australian people

The money for the NHMRC, ARC and charitable organisations comes from the Australian people. They trust us to act ethically and with scientific rigour, to help the country prosper in health and to build wealth for the future, to feel proud of our achievements. We must never dishonour this trust. We need also to remember that this is a partnership — our interests are dependent on their support.

Scientific research has a strong ethic built on accuracy, total honesty and rigorous and even pitiless self-examination of techniques, results and process. It is collegial too, with respect for the role of all involved a key feature. Lose these values, and we have lost the heart of the enterprise. Cutting corners, speculative disclosure, and dishonest authorship must not be tolerated, it damages us all. Australia’s system to deal with scientific malpractice needs further evolution!!

8 Being a good international citizen

Many Australian researchers feel a special obligation to work in partnership with researchers and health systems in our region, from molecular biology through the spectrum to preventative health approaches and health care delivery questions. Our research organisations too can help mentor the growth of excellence in research in Eastern Asia and the Pacific.

9 Finding more financial support for health research.


In the 21st century, research is becoming rapidly more expensive. Some of the increasing support will need to come from government, some from private sources. Large clinical trials are needed to answer many of the nation’s most important health questions. Health services research requires data acquisition, analysis and implementation approaches that are complex and time consuming. Clinical and fundamental research can be

advanced often only with the aid of expensive technologies. There is salary competition for Australia from other countries that are aggressively investing in research, and between health care practice salaries versus research salaries. Our ability to undertake research therefore requires that we convince the people of Australia and their governments that our work is crucial to their futures.

We need to identify more clearly how we are addressing the major health, knowledge and innovation needs of the country, and document the resources needed to achieve them. Our funding schemes need to resonate with the public and with government of national interests, not our own self interests.

The last major increase in public funding from the Australian Government was the result of showing that national wealth will flow from increased research investment. Now, we need to formulate better how national health too would be boosted from further investment, how this would improve national productivity and well-being, and improve the health care system. We need to frame our arguments around real commitments to the future of health in this country. But, we must also find increasing support from the private sector and we need to be parts of the solution to Australia’s chronically low level of private sector investment in research.

10 Having a 21st century support structure — a new NHMRC.

Finally, the structures that support medical research need to be of the highest calibre. The international benchmarks are NIH, CIHR, many European organisations, and some international charitable funding organisation (notably Wellcome Trust, JDRF). There, research- and health-savvy professionals provide expert and knowledge support to the national research effort. They are in touch with the major health and research developments locally and world-wide, help develop research initiatives, and maintain good relationships with Universities and other research organisations, governments and the private sector. The Australian Research Council has undergone re-modelling. In contrast, NHMRC has remained little changed over the last three decades and now the NHMRC model is superseded. The NHMRC has excellent means of identifying the best discovery research and most talented researchers. But what is the role of the NHMRC in ensuring research questions are defined and answered, to ensure health programs that are implemented maximise community benefit, in integrating research across multiple sectors, in developing a robust research sector capable of meeting future public health threats, of co-ordinating research between multiple research agencies nationally and internationally, and ensuring fast public access to better ways to prevent, treat and manage disease. A number of changes and new models have been discussed in recent years, most recently by the Investment Review of Health & Medical Research. Now is the time for debate and resolution so we have the NHMRC Australia needs for the next 20 years!! 



Amgen Medical Researcher Award

This highly prestigious award recognizes excellence in medical research by a postdoctoral person working on translational studies in Australia. Selection will be based on demonstrated independence, excellence, innovation and achievements in medical research with evidence of translation from bench to potential for application during the last 10 years, but with an emphasis on the last 2 years.

Further details:
<http://www.asmr.org.au/news/Awards/Index.html>
 or contact
b.loveland@ari.unimelb.edu.au

Closing date: April 22, 2005

The ASMR 44th National Scientific Conference 2005

Hormones, Fertility & Cancer

The ASMR National Scientific Conference for 2005 will be focused on the areas of fertility and reproductive/hormone-dependent cancer, and will be held at Couran Cove Resort, Queensland, on November 20–23. This island resort is a unique and isolated venue, which will allow maximal networking and interaction between participants. The structure of the meeting will be modelled on the Gordon style of scientific conference pioneered in the USA, with a strong emphasis on high quality science, discussion and registrant participation, while maintaining the ASMR's priority for development of early-career scientists. The theme "Hormones, Fertility and Cancer" will form the basis of all program sessions throughout the meeting. The scientific programme of the conference has been developed by a national committee of researchers; under the direction of Kate Loveland and Chris Ormandy. An impressive array of prominent international speakers in the field have already been confirmed.

For further information contact the conference Convenors, Lisa Butler (lisa.butler@imvs.sa.gov.au), or Moira O'Bryan (moira.obryan@med.monash.edu.au), or see

www.asmr-nsc.org.au

Confirmed international speakers:

Niels Skakkebaek

Copenhagen University Hospital, Denmark

Mary-Claire King

University of Washington, Seattle, WA

Ken Korach

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Research Triangle Park, NC

Lance Miller

Genome Institute of Singapore, Singapore

Ed Liu

Genome Institute of Singapore, Singapore

Nancy Hynes

Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research, Basel, Switzerland

Bernd Groner

Institute for Biomedical Research, Frankfurt, Germany

Michael Griswold

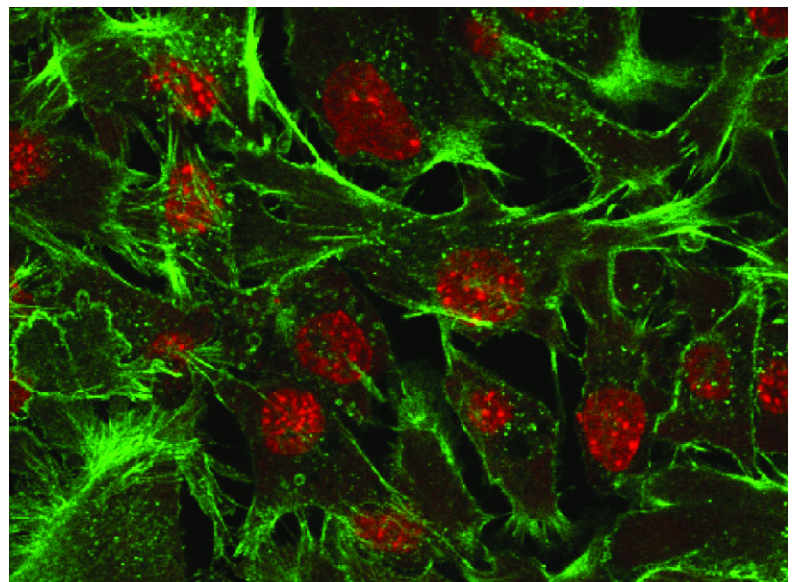
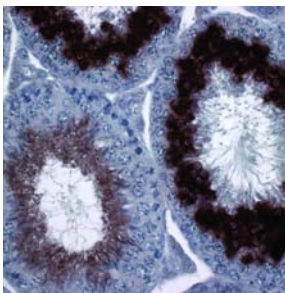
Washington State University, Pullman, WA

Orla Conneely

Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX

Shuk-Mei Ho

University of Massachusetts, Worcester, MA



2nd Australian Health & Medical Research Congress

— An outstanding success!

By Maria Kavallaris

An initiative of ASMR, the 2nd Australian Health and Medical Research Congress (AH&MRC) held in November 2004, fulfilled the fundamental goals of the meeting, bringing together national and international experts from various disciplines to promote interactions, sharing of ideas and collaborations. The Congress featured:

- A record 28 participating medical research societies
- 50 invited international scientists
- Daily plenary talks by eminent international scientists
- 160 invited national scientists
- 780 presentations over the 100+ sessions that were scheduled over five days.
- Cross-disciplinary sessions
- 1400 delegates

Congress topics covered a diverse range of research interests reflecting the involvement of many different scientific organisations. The exciting mix of disciplines promoted the cross-fertilisation of ideas and provided a forum to inspire collaborative process. Delegates took

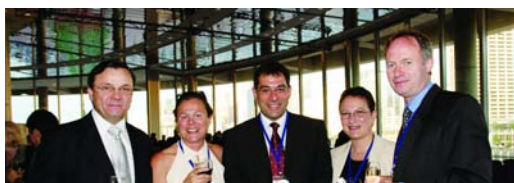


Top left: Judah and Paula Folkman

Mid left: Michael Milton, Gold Medal Para Olympian and Guest Dinner Speaker

Below right: Moira Clay and Professor Michael Reid, Director General of the NSW Ministry for Science and Medical Research

Bottom: Minister Frank Sartor, Fiona Wood, Levon Khachigian, Maria Kavallaris and Andrew Sinclair



the opportunity during the week at the trade/poster/meals area to engage in active and energetic research discussions and bolster collaborations.


Numerous highlights throughout the meeting included daily plenary talks by eminent international scientists and sessions featuring distinguished Australian scientists.

The AH&MRC was officially opened by the NSW Minister for Science and Medical Research, Mr Frank Sartor. Professor Fiona Wood, Australian of the Year 2005, gave the opening address.

The participating societies and local organising committee shared their vision and collaborated to organise an excellent program. Scientific Program Convenor, Professor Levon Khachigian, worked tirelessly with the various society convenors to co-ordinate the integrated program. Once again the marvellous organisational skills provided by Mike Pickford and Maree Overall and their team from ASN Events contributed to the success of the meeting.

An event the size of the AH&MRC requires considerable support. The Congress was backed by participating societies, State and Federal government and many of Australia's academic and research institutions. Industry support was critically important and the large trade display complemented the scientific presentations.

Extensive media coverage was generated by the Congress with more than 60 hits covering radio, television, newsprint and web media. Media coverage such as this is crucial for promotion of health and medical research in Australia as we continue to lobby government for increased research funding.

The congress provided a unique environment for innovative collaborations and the development of partnerships with the private sector. This distinctive and exciting event showcased Australian health and medical research to the world. Plans are already underway for the 3rd AH&MRC that will be Convened by Dr Sandra Nicholson and held in Melbourne on 26-30 November, 2006. 



■ **Cass Foundation "Best of the Best" Award**
Daniel Ciznadija
 Peter Mac Cancer Centre
Nicole Verrills
 Children's Cancer Institute
 Australia

■ **ASMR Champion Ma Playoust Award**
Charlotte East
 Murdoch Children's Research Institute

■ **Merck Sharpe Dohme "Best of the Best"**
Charles Harvey
 University of NSW

■ **Cure Cancer Australia Foundation Award**
Nicole Verrills
 Children's Cancer Institute
 Australia

■ **Johnson and Johnson Translational Research Award**
Olgatina Bucco
 CSIRO & Flinders Uni

■ **ASMR New Scientist Poster Award**
Linda O'Sullivan
 Deakin University

■ **Quantum Scientific Research Award**
Dale Godfrey
 The University of Melbourne

■ **HBPRCA Young Investigator Awards**
 Winner: Oral – **Elisa Young**
 RMIT University
 Runner up: Oral – **Sophocles Chrissobolis**
 University of Melbourne
 Winner: Poster – **Jennifer Irvine**
 Monash University
 Runner up: Poster – **Emma Jones**
 Baker Heart Research Institute

■ **MEPSA Kumar Award**
Michael Stapelberg
 University of Sydney

■ **ASCC Best Poster Award**
Judith Field
 Monash University

■ **AVBS Student Award**
Michelle Bonello
 University of NSW

■ **AAS Student Award**
Anna Calkin
 Baker Heart Research Institute

■ **AGTS Student Award**
Janet Biady
 University of Sydney

ASMR Research Award

The Australian Society for Medical Research invites applications for The ASMR Research Award. This award (\$5000) will support a postgraduate student member of the Society nearing completion of their studies or a recently graduated postdoctoral member to undertake a short period of research in a laboratory outside their home city.

The award specifically excludes support for conference attendance and travel for an extended period of postdoctoral studies.

Applicants for The ASMR Research Award must have been members of the ASMR for at least 12 months immediately preceding the year in which the Award application is to be considered. Applicants must be not more than three years post their highest degree. The Award must be taken up during the first 6 months of the following year.

Applications forms available from <http://www.asmr.org.au>

ASMR Medical Research Week®

June 4–11, 2005



Professor Julian Savulescu

ASMR Medical Research Week®, is the flagship activity for the ASMR, communicating the benefits of health and medical research to the Australian public. ASMR Medical Research Week®, 2005 (June 4 to 11) will feature public outreach events (including expos and community lectures), career events in both capital cities and regional centres, scientific 'showcase' meetings, and medical researchers will have the opportunity be trained in "leadership and influencing skills" in professional development sessions held across

the country. This year we are thrilled to announce our ASMR medallist, Professor Julian Savulescu, Uehiro Professor of Practical Ethics, University of Oxford, who will be touring nationally speaking on the topic of "The Genetics of a Better Life". Tasmanian ASMR members will also conduct activities, making ASMR Medical Research Week® 2005 a truly national event. For further information on the ASMR medallist or ASMR Medical Research Week® events in your state please go to www.asmr.org.au

Beginners guide to 'Speed Networking' for Medical Science types

Notes By Dr Andi Horvath

What is speed networking and why are we running it?

It is like 'speed dating' except it is professional not personal.

Human interaction is still a great way to make sense of what is going on around you. It sets in motion information flows, fosters connections and leads to a rippling of opportunities.

Some of the outcomes of speed networking include picking up handy hints for experiment writing, grant applications or new job prospects..

How to run speed networking?

In 2004 we sat one hundred people (ASMR members and invited VIPs) on long tables with VIPs evenly distributed. Everyone got to chat to the person opposite them for around four minutes. The host signalled the crowd at the end of four minutes and then gave instructions to get to their next "date".

What am I going to say when I get there?

Believe me it will come to you. If you are really stuck maybe ask...

- "If we had to work together what would the hypothetical project be?"
- "Do you have science cartoons on your door or in your lab?"


What if we are not instantly connecting?

Look for the 'gem' in everyone. Those with lots of experience have the 'wisdom of hindsight'. They usually have grey hair. Those who are pups in the industry still have 'wisdom teeth' ask them what they are chewing over.

Do I always have to be 'selling' myself?

It seems like a tough 'dog eat dog' world out there. 'Always' may not be the best time and place for selling.

What if I'm too shy to 'sell' myself?

Making that first step is not easy. So... your task is to ask a question of someone you are keen to meet. Think of a question for them and just do it! 

Great story...

Medical scientist Carl Wood (before the days of heady IVF fame) was working on an artificial fallopian tube. He walked into the wrong lecture theatre but stayed because he was intrigued by Alan Trounson's work on infertility in farm animals. His mind was open to this chance event. The opportunity for the two to work together didn't happen for almost a decade but the ripple of ideas and actions led to IVF technology.

Science Meets Parliament Day 2005

March 8 and 9, 2005 were two busy days in Canberra. We had a visit from Crown Prince Frederick and Princess Mary from Denmark; the opening of the Australian Phenome Facility and an accompanying public lecture at the Academy of Science; and the 6th Science Meets Parliament day organised by FASTS. I drew the short straw and attended SmP, which, with more than 150 parliamentarians and some 220 scientists involved, was the biggest SmP ever. But I did manage to get a glimpse of Princess Mary in Parliament House!

The first day was held at the National Press Club and was used primarily to brief the participants, with tips on how to talk to politicians and the importance of being positive and enthusiastic about our science. FASTS represents a very broad spectrum of societies, and thus choosing a particular theme for lobbying is not an easy task, whereas ASMR has an obviously more focussed message for politicians. The Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon. Dr Brendan Nelson, spoke at the Press Club lunch, and outlined the Government's science policy, including plans for much closer interaction between CSIRO and the ANU, and the quality review of Australian universities. The afternoon consisted of more briefings for first-time SmP participants, or a concurrent session from Biotechnology Australia about public perceptions of stem cell research/technology. The take-home message on this issue (and perhaps most research issues) is that the public have many misconceptions and unrealistic expectations about our research, and that the best way to inform the public is through direct contact with researchers. So take part in opportunities like Medical Research Week whenever you can!

The first day concluded with the Science-Industry Dinner, held in the Great Hall of Parliament House. This was attended by more than 300 people (the biggest ever) with more than 50 parliamentarians and their science advisers. The dinner was wittily MC'd by Robyn Williams, and featured a keynote address by Dr. Caroline Kovac, General Manager of IBM's new Healthcare and Life Sciences business. Her approach is to blend life sciences with high-performance computers, and the current focus is "information-based medicine".

Wednesday was primarily devoted to meetings with politicians, along with fora on climate change, the global science and technology labour market, and a "hypothetical" on a viral pandemic. Scientists (in groups of three) met with two different politicians, who were generally (but not always) interested in a scientific field nominated by us. I met with Senator Sue Knowles (Lib, WA) and Bob McMullan MP (ALP, Canberra). They were enthusiastic to hear about our science and about our concerns, and it is a great opportunity to raise their awareness of science, while also building networks for further parliamentary input. Mr McMullan was also very interested in the facts and figures in the Access report and the Grant review (which he hadn't heard of), so being armed with such data makes a good impression.

We learned that follow-up is essential, so all ASMR members need to make contact with their local MPs and senators, make them aware of your science and how it will benefit Australia, and share your concerns about science policy and funding. Take every opportunity to inform the general public as well. More information on SmP is on the FASTS webpage: <http://www.fast.org/>

Rohan Baker, Treasurer, ASMR.



The Hon. Brendan Nelson addresses Science Meets Parliament 2005 at the National Press Club.
Photo: Terry Walsh, QUT

Calendar

4th Australasian Gene Therapy Society Conference 27-29 April, 2005

Melbourne

www.agts.org.au/conferences.asp

International Society of Thrombosis & Haemostasis XXth Congress 6-12 August, 2005

Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre,
Darling Harbour

www.isth2005.com

44th ASMR National Scientific Conference 20-23rd November, 2005

Couran Cove, Queensland

www.asmr-nsc.org.au

7th World Congress of Inflammation

20-24 August, 2005

Melbourne

www.inflammation2005.com

Heart Foundation Conference

Cardiovascular Disease in the 21st Century: Shaping the Future

23-24 March, 2006

Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre,
Darling Harbour

www.heartfoundation.com.au/2006conference

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Contact details from www.asmr.org.au/states/index.html

**For ASMR's response to the Joint NHMRC/AVCC
 Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice,
 see www.asmr.org.au/news/submissions/index.html**



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 Australian Vascular Biology Society
 Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand
 Clinical Oncological Society of Australia
 Endocrine Society of Australia
 Fertility Society of Australia
 Haematology Society of Australia and New Zealand
 High Blood Pressure Research Council of Australia
 Human Genetics Society of Australasia
 National Association of Research Fellows
 Paediatric Research Society of Australia and New Zealand
 Perinatal Society of Australia and New Zealand
 Society for Free Radical Research (Australasia)
 Royal Australasian College of Physicians
 Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
 RANZ College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
 The Society for Reproductive Biology
 The Australian Medical Students Association Ltd.
 Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand
 Transplantation Society of Australia and New Zealand
 Victorian Public Health Research and Education Council
 Western Australia Biomedical Research Institute

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