

the Australian Society for Medical Research



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Federal Budget 1999

“GOVERNMENT FAST TRACKS RESEARCH TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE NEXT MILLENIUM”

The Federal Government’s decision to increase Health and Medical Research funding by doubling the NHMRC budget over the next six years was overwhelmingly supported by the Australian Society for Medical Research. The increased funding permits Australia to maintain its pre-eminent position internationally in Health and Medical Research and to increase commercial opportunities of Australia’s inventions by nurturing and protecting our intellectual property.

Australia provides 2.5% of world’s medical research but rarely enjoys its commercial benefits. The injection of funds to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the incentives announced to forge links between the Medical Researchers and industry will further enhance our international position. The NHMRC controls the direction of Australia’s research in cancer, heart disease, AIDS, public health and training programs.

By international standards it has always been under funded and undervalued by Government. These measures championed by Dr Michael Wooldridge will redress this previous neglect in an unprecedented manner.

The NHMRC faced a funding crisis this year, which was rescued by an immediate injection of \$16.7M for 1999-2000 plus another \$20M for research institute infrastructure over the next two years.

In parallel with the Budget, the final report of the Health and Medical Research Strategic Review commissioned by the Minister for Health, Dr. Michael Wooldridge, and Chaired by Mr. Peter Wills AO was announced. This most comprehensive Review documented the invaluable contribution the Australian Health and Medical researchers, while identifying areas which should be enhanced to build Australia’s Biotechnology industry and to provide first world health care.

The implementation of the Health and Medical Research Strategic Review, and the commitment to ensure funding of Medical Research in Australia, demonstrates this Government's vision for the opportunities that Biotechnology will deliver in the next Century.

Federal Budget commitments will ensure that Australia can participate in the Biotechnology and Informatics Revolution. As a result Australia will benefit financially, intellectually and in the long-term experience better health. The Government has now set in place the framework for better health outcomes of future Australians.

The Review recommendations that have been endorsed by the Government with genuine budget allocations will arrest the brain drain of scientists leaving Australia. It should also encourage highly skilled researchers to return. In addition the support will greatly enhance our ability to protect Australian intellectual property, develop links between research and commercial partners and provide valuable infrastructure support to research facilities. Finally the measures will provide management expertise and bring together smaller institutions by the construction of virtual institutes. The concept of "Virtual Research Institutes" has been championed by Mr. Wills and is likely to be the way of the future.

Health and Family Services Minister Dr. Michael Wooldridge, Treasurer Mr. Peter Costello and the Prime Minister should be acclaimed for their timely and decisive commitment to invest in Australia's future in Medical Research and healthcare.

Dr. Matthew Gillespie, President
Mobile: 0409 139 728

Tel: 03-9288-2480 (H: 03-9416-2676) Fax: 03-9416-2676

Dr. Rob Ramsay, President-Elect Tel: 03-9656-1863 (H: 03-9386 4551) Fax: 03-9656-1411

Ms. Cath West, Executive Officer Tel: 02-9256-5450
Fax: 02-9252-0294

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