

ASMR SUBMISSIONS TO THE 2020 SUMMIT

The future of the Australian economy:

The investment by the Australian Government in health and medical research (HMR) has resulted in significant economic and social benefits for Australians. In terms of a positive economic benefit to Australia, the 2003 Access Economics Report (Exceptional Returns The Value of Investing in Health R&D in Australia¹) indicated that for every \$1 invested in Health and Medical Research, an average of \$2.4 is returned to Australia's economy. ASMR has commissioned an update of the 2003 report that is indicating continued exceptional returns (released mid-2008). Despite increases, government funding for HMR in Australia ranks in the middle of similar OECD countries and we face escalating competition from those investing heavily in biomedical science. It is vital to capture the returns on current investment and maintain the momentum with a long-term commitment. The Australian Society for Medical Research suggests the following key issues for discussion at the Australia 2020 Summit:

A sustained funding mechanism for HMR: Funding for HMR in Australia is cyclical and vulnerable to fluctuation, placing at risk key investment and creating the potential for significant economic loss. To ensure the sector continues to deliver strong economic returns it needs insurance against decreases in funding. The European Union in its recent 7th Framework model has ³locked-in² 3% of GDP to R&D, including that for HMR. A similar process should be considered for Australia providing a base level of growth and support for HMR funding, as a % of GDP or the health budget, with the provision for responsive additional funds for targeted projects.

Ensure a strong and diverse HMR workforce: A strong highly skilled HMR workforce is the basis of impressive advances in Australia's health and wealth. A number of indicators, including the results of a recent survey commissioned by ASMR on issues related to employment and funding opportunities, have suggested there is considerable anxiety among Australian HMRs due to a lack of funding and employment insecurity². This has major implications for attraction and retention of its best and brightest. Australia is at risk of diminishing the HMR workforce, losing the substantial investment made in creating it as well as losing future health and economic benefits. The provision of adequate resources for an attractive and sustainable career structure for Australian medical researchers is a national imperative.

The necessity to fully fund HMR: A major restrictive factor in the sector is that research salaries and infrastructure are not fully supported. The NHMRC is the primary funding source for HMR in Australia. Provisions for supporting research staff on NHMRC grants is significantly below the actual cost of salaries at host institutions (up to 30% shortfall). This shortfall is crippling the ability to fully perform research projects. Similarly, funds for research infrastructure have not kept pace with that required to adequately perform the research. Mechanisms to provide additional funding to cover the salary ³gap² and infrastructure deficiencies are needed desperately.

1. <http://www.asmr.org.au/Campaign/campaign.html>
2. Kavaliris. In-press. MJA

A long-term national health strategy

Australian Health and Medical Research (HMR) delivers outstanding benefits to the health and economy of Australia. Our translational outcomes are impressive and have positioned us a world leader in HMR. There are many future challenges for the health and wellbeing of Australians, particularly the increasing prevalence of lifestyle-related diseases and an ageing population with associated chronic disease. A strong and diverse HMR sector will be critical for Australia to meet these challenges that threaten the social and economic fabric of the nation. The Australian Society for Medical Research suggests the following key issues for discussion at the Australia 2020 Summit.

A sustained funding mechanism for HMR: Funding for HMR in Australia is cyclical and vulnerable to fluctuation, placing at risk key investment and creating the potential for health and economic losses. To ensure the sector remains strong to meet future health challenges it needs insurance against decreases in funding. The European Union in its recent 7th Framework model ³locked-in² 3% of GDP to R&D, including that for HMR. A similar process should be considered for Australia, providing a base level of growth and support for HMR funding as a % of GDP or the health budget, with the provision for responsive additional funds for targeted projects.

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Future focus on reducing disability: An increasing proportion of Australia's burden of disease in the future is predicted to be due to disability. The chronic conditions associated with aging such as dementia, cancer, cardiovascular disease and arthritis are expected to place unprecedented demands on the health system. A focus of health R&D in the future should include reducing the disability within the Australian population.

1. <http://www.asmr.org.au/>

2. Kavaliris. In-press. MJA