

MEDIA RELEASE

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MRFF a step in the right direction but not a silver bullet for research sector crisis

The Government's flagship initiative of the Medical Research Future Fund passed the Senate yesterday following intense debate.

Speaking on behalf of the Australian Society for Medical Research (ASMR), President Dr Phoebe Phillips explained, *"ASMR is pleased that the MRFF Bill has passed the Senate. This initiative represents a valuable long-term strategy to increase investment into health and medical research. However, concerns raised in our submission to the Senate Inquiry into the MRFF Bill and subsequent Senate Hearing have not been addressed."*

Among these issues were clarifying the role of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in setting research strategies and priorities, the administration of the fund and the need for independent expert review in deciding which initiatives should receive support.

"The NHMRC has a long history in safeguarding and supporting health and medical research with an impeccable track record in distributing government funding to the most outstanding Australian health and medical research. Establishing a new Advisory Board to manage disbursements from the MRFF seems inefficient when NHMRC is already well placed to fill this role." Dr Phillips also emphasised the crucial role of independent expert review *to ensure the best possible health and economic outcomes.*

While the ASMR is excited about the benefits that can be derived from this initiative, it warns that, as the MRFF will not reach its target capital for around a decade, immediate additional investment into the NHMRC must be a priority if Government want to ensure that the health and medical research sector is positioned to capitalise on the MRFF.

At present, the Australian health and medical research sector is in crisis, losing expensively trained, highly skilled researchers to an extent that it may take years to recover the loss of intellectual capital. Dr Phillips explained. *"The success of the MRFF is heavily reliant on NHMRC investment, which has been declining in real terms over the last 5 years. If we are to take full advantage of the MRFF when it comes to fruition, it needs to be coupled with an urgent injection of investment into the NHMRC to get the sector through the current crisis."*

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