

**NHMRC Partnership Centres of Research Excellence
to Improve Research Knowledge Transfer**

**Submission pro-forma
(Cover page)**

Name: The Australian Society for Medical Research, Submission prepared by Dr Paul Dawson (ASMR Director), Dr Andrew Laslett (ASMR Director), Dr Mark Hulett (ASMR President) and Dr Sarah Meachem (President-elect)

Institution (if appropriate): The Australian Society for Medical Research

Contact Details: Telephone 02 9256 5450

Mobile: 0415 928 211 (Cat West, ASMR Snr Exec Officer)

Email: asmr@alwaysonline.net.au

What is your interest in the proposed scheme?

The ASMR has a valued interest in new initiatives for medical research which have the capacity to enhance Australian health and health care.

Your comments on the following and any other relevant issues would be appreciated:

- Programs of work for the Centres;
- Issues of significant importance to the health system;
- The importance of selection criteria such as outstanding track records of the Chief Investigators, the capacity to work closely with policy agencies, and the ability to recruit excellent researchers nationally and internationally; and
- Knowledge exchange between researchers and the health sector

Please do not exceed the three page (A4) limit.

The Australian Society for Medical Research (ASMR) is the peak body representing health and medical researchers in Australia. Through more than 1,300 direct members and affiliations with 72 specialist societies, medical colleges and patient groups, the ASMR network reaches an additional 140,000 Australians involved, or having an interest in, health and medical research.

The ASMR strongly supports new initiatives for medical research which have the capacity to enhance Australian health and health care. The Partnership Centres initiative is an appropriate strategy for bringing together teams of national and international researchers with outstanding track records, to form large-scale programs of research excellence. This situation provides a platform for improving the translation of research outcomes into new health policies, which are aimed at benefiting the well-being of all Australians.

The programs of work for the centres will require substantial funding and financial flexibility from partner organisations. Accordingly, the NHMRC needs to be mindful of the potential vested interests of the participating partners, particularly the private sector, and needs to ensure that the most important health programs are addressed through both basic and applied research. In particular, there is a need to invest in research where there is likely to be the greatest burden of disease in the future. A recent report by Access Economics ("Exceptional Returns II", June 2008, commissioned by ASMR), identified cancer as the major burden of disease in Australia, as well as particular areas of disability burden which are likely to increase as a result of our aging population, including mental health, neurodegenerative diseases and musculoskeletal conditions. It is also important that the research priorities are balanced with both low and high risk investigations against major disease burdens. This approach is vital to ensure that a broad coverage of research is maintained.

The Partnership Centres initiative also provides the potential for increasing the translation of health research into Australian owned products. Historically, many Australian research outcomes have bled their financial gains to overseas entities. For example, only 13% of Gardasil royalties are returned to Australian entities (Exceptional Returns II, 2008). Accordingly, the selection criteria for collaborative partnerships should be carefully and strategically monitored to ensure that both health and financial benefits are focussed on Australia.

Importantly, research groups should have a strong capacity to attract the best of the best national and international researchers. Selection criteria should adhere to the current procedures used in the review of the NHMRC project grant applications. Ideally, NHMRC funding of the Partnership Centres should be independent and additional to the NHMRC-funded project grant and fellowship schemes, thus allowing additional funding opportunities for Australian researchers.

We thank the NHMRC for giving the ASMR this opportunity to comment on the Partnership Centres initiative. We would be delighted to provide clarification on the above or any additional information.

Dr Paul Dawson (ASMR Director) Dr Andrew Laslett (ASMR Director)

Dr Mark Hulett (ASMR President) Dr Sarah Meachem (ASMR President-elect)