

Australian Medical Research and Innovation Five Year Strategy

Title: Population Health Research Network Response to Medical Research Future Fund consultation for the development of the Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy and related Priorities

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INTRODUCTION

The Population Health Research Network (PHRN) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy.

Health and related data is collected by many different organisations and jurisdictions in Australia. For example, states and territories collect hospital admitted patient data and the Commonwealth Government collects the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme data. In order to understand individual patient pathways as well as how the Australian health system functions as a whole it is essential to be able to link these data collections and make linked data available for research.

The PHRN is Australia's national data linkage network which links population data from a wide range of sources including health data collections such as hospital admitted patients and cancer registries. The PHRN enables researchers to access linked population data for research of national relevance which results in improved policy making and service delivery. We use global best practice in maximising the benefits to the Australian community whilst preserving individual privacy.

The PHRN supports the linkage of data both within and between Australian jurisdictions. The PHRN also provides a number of national eResearch tools and services to assist researchers to access linked data efficiently and securely. Further information on PHRN is available at www.phrn.org.au.

The PHRN is funded by the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy, with significant additional cash and in-kind contributions from partner agencies.

COMMENTS ON FIVE YEAR STRATEGY

The PHRN supports the overall strategy as described in the Call for Submissions. Please find comments about the role of research infrastructure and data linkage infrastructure specifically in relation to the Australian Health and Medical Research Strategy below.

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Challenges

A world class health and medical research system must be underpinned by high quality, responsive and scalable research infrastructure. Australia has an excellent national research infrastructure programme – the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS). The NCRIS capabilities currently provide a wide range of infrastructure for health and medical research from eResearch tools to imaging and data linkage. For more information about NCRIS see <https://www.education.gov.au/national-collaborative-research-infrastructure-strategy-ncris>.

The Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) should work closely with the Australian Government Department of Education and Training and the NCRIS capabilities to ensure that the NCRIS funded infrastructure continues to meet the developing needs of Australia's health and medical research effort. It is likely that the MRFF investment will result in a significant increase in the volume of health and medical research conducted in Australia. It will be necessary to monitor the capacity of the NCRIS capabilities to meet the growing health and medical research needs. New strategies and additional resources may be required for NCRIS capabilities to respond to increased demand for services.

Aims and Objectives

Linked data can make a significant contribution to achieving most of the proposed aims and objectives in the Australian Health and Medical Research Strategy. In particular:

- Leveraging and enhancing collaboration and integration
Systematic linkage of health and health related data for research requires collaboration between government, not for profit, private and academic organisations as well as the support of the community.
- Healthcare policy and delivery have a strong evidence base
Linked data can be used to provide evidence for health policy and practice including:
 - Measuring incidence and burden of disease
 - Evaluation and monitoring of the use, cost and effectiveness of health services
 - Evaluation of pharmaceuticals, therapeutics and devices in real world settings
 - Follow up of participants in clinical trials and other research studies.
- Contemporary infrastructure that meets research needs
The PHRN is an internationally unique national data linkage infrastructure that addresses the challenges of linking data in a federated country. A strong relationship with the MRFF and the research community will be required to ensure that the PHRN can continue to understand and meet research needs.

Key interactions and stakeholders

Australia's health system and medical research sector comprises a wide range of organisations, institutions and groups. All participants in the health and medical research sectors should be recognised in the strategy as important stakeholders. This includes all government departments of health and human services; healthcare and social service providers including medical, nursing and allied health professionals and the organisations

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they work for both public and private; the pharmaceutical and device industry; universities and research institutes; research infrastructure capabilities and the Australian community. The strategy should clearly articulate the broad range of stakeholders in our large and complex health system.

Research infrastructure is clearly identified as an integral part of the Strategy and is mentioned explicitly in the Challenges and Aims and Objectives sections. The explicit recognition of research infrastructure within the Challenges and the Aims and Objectives sections of the Strategy is supported. Given the importance of NCRIS funded research infrastructure to health and medical research in Australia, the Advisory Board may wish to consider mentioning the NCRIS program in the Key Interactions and Stakeholders section of the strategy.

It may also be helpful to identify the policies and priorities relevant to health and medical research separately to the stakeholders.