

31 October 2012

Mr Simon McKeon AO

Chair, Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research in Australia
via Online Submission

Dear Mr McKeon

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) strongly support the recommendations outlined in the Draft Summary Consultation Paper of the Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research (HMR). The paper provides a clear and comprehensive vision for the future of HMR in Australia.

The message of 'Better Health Through Research' provides a clear direction to government, universities, research institutes and the health sector to dedicate resources to improved health outcomes for all Australians. The paper thoughtfully links the formal university HMR to the need to ensure effective investment in related research within the health sector itself. The IRU endorses the proposed expansion of HMR funding over time.

The IRU provides the following comments to guide drafting of the final report.

The paper makes clear the importance of allied health, public health and health systems research to Australia's HMR framework. A key element of success will be in appreciating the significant variances in healthcare provision and delivery across inner and outer metropolitan regions and in regional and remote Australia.

The IRU has a unique and comprehensive footprint, with access and expertise across outer metropolitan, regional and remote Australia, with substantial research associated with our four medical schools (including seven rural clinical schools), our allied health and nursing faculties and significant health and medical research centres in all seven members.

Through joint appointments and centres with local health districts we are at the forefront of providing up-to-date clinical training and care in areas which lack many of the facilities of metropolitan centres. We can give many first hand examples where a joint university-hospital research centre has provided the catalyst for recruitment of first-class medical and allied research-oriented clinicians. The influence of such appointments on these communities is profound as they in-turn attract top clinicians. Some of these centres are now mature and performing at the highest level as shown in the recent NHMRC project grant and fellowship outcomes.

For these communities, a local research base improves diagnostic capabilities, provides an academic environment for local training and retention, and enables research to be better grounded in, and defined by, issues of relevance to the local environment and disease profile.

It is in the national interest to build HMR capacity in areas of significant population growth, particularly areas with significant health disparities. The proposed Integrated Health Research Centres (IHRCs) should be established consistent with this. The IHRCs will provide enormous benefit to the nation, and to the communities in which they are located.

To be effective the IHRCs should be widely distributed with an effective balance between the major inner city concentrations of older research hospitals and associated research groups and research hospitals and researchers working within rapidly growing outer metropolitan population areas and in regional and remote Australia. This will increase the impact of the centres in improving health outcomes for all Australians.

With regards to specific recommendations, the IRU:

- endorses tying HMR funding to overall health expenditure (Recommendations 1 and 20);
- cautions against the concentration of research funding implied by restricting Matching Development Grants to only 20 organisation (Recommendation 16). Such concentration stifles competition, and reduces access outside of capital cities;
- strongly endorses calls for enhanced, dedicated infrastructure funding (Recommendation 11); and
- is interested in the idea of a leadership role in HMR for the NHMRC (Recommendation 4), given the lack of sector-wide leadership currently. The proposal needs to be further developed with extensive discussions as to the specifics of the NHMRC's expanded role, the capability of the current organisation to take up such a role, and its implications for national health and medical research outcomes.

Yours sincerely



Conor King
Executive Director