



Driving prosperity and improving lives through health and medical science

Global advances in health and medicine, when combined with Australia's strengths in the sciences and in medical research, offer the Government an exceptional opportunity to improve the health of the nation, reduce health inequalities, and drive economic growth and productivity.

Australians consistently rank health, including health research and innovation, among the most important areas for public investment.¹ At the same time, Australia punches above its weight in the health and medical sciences: global data from Clarivate Analytics show that we rank seventh globally for the number of highly cited researchers in clinical medicine, and 79% of Australian research outputs in the medical and health sciences are above or well above world standard, according to Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) data.^{2,3} Discoveries and innovations here in Australia have had profound impacts on health at home and across the world, and successive governments have rightly recognised the value of health and medical research to Australia in driving economic growth, creating jobs and delivering societal benefits.

In short: we have an edge.

However, these endeavours are increasingly competitive, with more and more countries choosing to invest substantially. **We must act decisively to retain and improve our competitive edge, and deliver the advances in health and productivity that Australians rightly expect.** If our pace of innovation slows, we will rely on innovations developed elsewhere – and lost ground takes years, if not decades, to recover.

The Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences has therefore identified **five priorities that will enable the Government to drive prosperity and improve the lives of all Australians through health and medical sciences, and we have specified nine goals that will help deliver them.**

1. Invest in health and medical sciences as part of a comprehensive research and innovation strategy to drive health, productivity and prosperity

- To maximise efficiency and impact, the health sector needs a long-term, stable R&D funding commitment. To remain competitive, Australia must return gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) to a positive trajectory as a percentage of GDP, at a level competitive with other developed nations – we suggest a target of 3%. We also endorse a sector target of 3% of total Australian Government health expenditure on R&D.
- The Government should continue to invest and improve coordination between the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) – to underpin a strong pipeline across discovery, translation and clinical research and deliver the very best improvements to health and lives.
- The MRFF must be built in line with current capital projections – to ensure it reaches \$20 billion by 2020-21, so that it has the stability and capacity necessary to improve the health of all Australians as promised.



2. Foster a vibrant health and medical research environment that promotes cross-sector collaboration and attracts industry investment

- Strong government investment underpins a thriving health and medical research environment, which in turn leverages further investment, attracts industry and creates high-value jobs. We must create an environment in which responsible collaborations flourish and where smart investments through mechanisms such as the MRFF continue to support and bolster cross-sector interaction and commercial development.

3. Embed research in the health system and streamline regulation to drive health outcomes and efficient services

- Research, to improve health outcomes, must be seen as a priority objective across the health system. Federal Government should use innovative incentives to encourage service providers to increase their commitment to health research. Facilitation of research should be a core objective of an electronic health record system, in which there is secure access to aggregated data for legitimate research purposes.
- Health professionals must be trained in the skills necessary to participate in research as an integral part of health delivery. Alongside this, we must ensure that clinician scientists are able to follow training and career advancement pathways that are clearly defined and appropriately funded. Health delivery, training and research funding mechanisms must enable them to balance their clinical and research commitments – to the mutual benefit of both.

4. Harness the outcomes of health and medical science to improve the lives of all Australians and address health inequalities

- Australia must reverse the current trend of rising health inequalities. There is an opportunity for Government, in partnership with the community, to develop policies that address social determinants of health, a key driver of inequalities. An evidence-informed inter-governmental approach is key to understanding causes, developing effective solutions and implementing preventive strategies.

5. Cultivate a skilled, diverse and mobile workforce, fully equipped to embrace new technology and tackle future health challenges

- The Government should oversee a coordinated effort to build a workforce able to meet the interdisciplinary demands of the future. Australian research and innovation will be stronger if we embrace global mobility and the Government should sustain and grow a policy environment that attracts and enables high quality clinicians and scientists to work in Australia.
- The Government must not only maintain, but accelerate, the momentum gained from recent investments in diversity programs and should set ambitious goals in other areas including opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers. We would urge the Government to use all levers at its disposal to drive broader cultural change in Australia, which will ultimately benefit all sectors.

The Academy is committed to supporting Australia's health and medical research environment and throughout this document, we outline the ways in which we will continue to support those endeavours