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Sustainable Health Review Secretariat
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Dear Sustainable Health Review Panel

We write to highlight the importance of research as an essential and integral element of the WA health care system. Over the past five years, the health and medical research sector has expanded its capacity and productivity in WA, strengthened by excellent facilities constructed with the support of the WA Government. The emergence of the Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre and Fiona Stanley Hospital (FSH) sites as “super-campuses”, co-locating new hospitals such as Perth Children’s Hospital and FSH with new research facilities including Telethon Kids Institute, Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research and Lions Eye Institute, positions WA to cement a position as a national and international leader in both discovery and translational research. It is critical to the future of the WA Health System, and to the health of the WA population, that we make the most of this opportunity, recognising the benefits of a seamless integration of research with clinical care.

Excellent health care requires a system that incorporates the latest advances and ensures that everything it does is based on the best available evidence. The world’s best health care systems take a further step to ensure that they continually contribute to the broadening knowledge base of health care, by being research-active. This has many benefits including:

- Ensuring the highest quality as well as safety of health care, resulting in better outcomes for patients
- A significant reduction in the cost of health care to the WA community
- Enabling recruitment and retention of the best clinical staff, in the knowledge that clinical staff are attracted by environments that encourage and support research
- Improving staff morale, both by supporting staff involvement in research but also by creating a culture of excellence
- Improving the status of the WA Health Care system, and of WA as a state, and thus giving enormous confidence to Western Australians that they have among the best health care systems in the world

- Ensuring the implementation of evidence-based health care, delivering effective and efficient health care
- Creating a rich research environment which becomes a destination of choice for the training of medical and allied health staff

Indeed, the McKeon Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research highlights that Australia needs a stronger connection between health and medical research, and the delivery of health-care services to ensure better health outcomes and the greatest economic value. The Efficiency in Health paper by the Australian Productivity Commission identified opportunities for efficiency gains, including routinely trialling and evaluating prevention initiatives, strengthening incentives for cost-effective investment in preventive health care, and providing researchers with greater access to government held data sets.

We believe that WA has all the ingredients to become the national leader in research-led health care. With excellent, co-located facilities, superb researchers as well as clinicians, and a highly collaborative environment (exemplified by the WA Health Translation Network and its recent accreditation as an NHMRC Advanced Health Research Translation Centre), the remaining requirements are largely cultural.

The Sustainable Health Review should clearly state the critical importance of integrating research as an essential element in health care, not an “optional extra”. This needs then to translate to leadership from the very top of the Government – Minister and Director General – through the Health Boards and into the health services themselves. The Boards and the Chief Executives of Hospitals and other health services should be champions of a research-intensive culture, and should hold themselves accountable for this through suitable research key performance indicators. The research institutions should also be asked how they could provide suitable support to research in health care environments – our Institutes stand ready to help, and we are sure that Universities and other Institutes would be similarly disposed.

A critical component of reshaping the landscape to a more research-intensive clinical care environment relates to embedding a research commitment and requirement KPI into each and every new appointment into the WA health care system. With time, the culture will undergo a fundamental shift towards the aspirational goal we are seeking, extending from hospital CEO to intern and medical student. Consideration could also be given to introducing this to all current appointments as well, although this may be more difficult to successfully implement.

Ultimately, there will also need to be resources provided to support a more research-intensive culture in health services. Currently, many Health Boards and senior managers in services are positive about research, but insist that research should not happen on “their paid time” or use funding provided by the service. The result is that Institutes like ours and the universities are asked to help researchers source Fellowships, research grants and philanthropy to support research projects in clinical environments. We have done this with great success but there is a limit to the sustainability of this approach; it can lengthen the time to commence clinically relevant research projects and it also does not send a message to clinical staff that senior management truly values research. We therefore also request that the Review consider how the funding for “Teaching, Training and Research” is allocated

by services, and how they are held accountable for how it is spent and what the results of that spend are. We believe that a minimum quantum of TTR funding should be allocated to pre-specified research activities and that this should be carefully monitored.

There are other aspects of the health system that are necessary for the highest quality clinical care. This includes the information systems that are used to run health care systems. Currently health information systems are all-too-often disconnected from research, so that research projects require duplication of effort to collect data that are routinely collected by the system. This could be made much simpler with an investment in unified technology approaches such as Integrated Health Solutions that would enable much better monitoring of safety and quality, as well as allowing for clinician-instigated research projects. Coupled with implementation of the findings of The Review of Western Australia's Data Linkage Capabilities, such an approach would also re-position WA as the Australian leader in using routinely collected data to answer critical questions to improve the health and wellbeing of its population.

Therefore, we believe the WA Sustainable Health Review report should include the following among its recommendations:

1. That the Review recognises the value of integrating research as an essential element in health care at all levels including: population-based research uncovering unmet clinical needs; designing interventions; assessing treatment options and evaluating programs.
2. That each Health Service Board and its Chief Executive be accountable for championing a research-intensive and research-informed culture, including: establishing and reporting on research-based KPIs and establishing Research Advisory Committees for each service with appropriate external experts drawn from Research Institutes and Universities.
3. That Health Service clinical staff research activities be considered a component of their regular duties where possible, with funding drawn from that currently allocated to "Teaching, Training and Research" and reported on regularly to ensure appropriate time allocation and accountability for research outputs.
4. That Integrated Health Solutions be implemented as soon as possible in as many parts of the health system as possible, starting with Perth Children's Hospital.
5. The findings of the recently released The Review of Western Australia's Data Linkage Capabilities be implemented.

Medical Research Institutes stand ready to engage even more closely in promoting health service quality and safety and thereby improve health outcomes in our community. We commend the intent of the Review and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to its further development and implementation.



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