

10 July 2015

Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Children's Cancer Institute (CCI) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in response to the Inquiry into the Medical Research Future Fund Bill 2015 and the Medical Research Future Fund (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2015 conducted by the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs.

CCI is the only independent medical research institute in Australia dedicated to research into the causes, prevention, better treatments and ultimately a cure for childhood cancer. More than 30 years of scientific effort and achievement have seen CCI build an enviable national and international reputation as a leader in childhood cancer research. This has enabled us to build an extensive network of collaborations with universities, hospitals and research institutes across Australia and globally, which have made it possible for us to make significant advances in improving survival of children with cancer. Our particular strengths are in drug discovery and translating research discoveries to the clinic giving hope for Australian children affected by cancer and their families.

This research-driven approach to treatment and care developed by CCI and like-minded organisations in the USA and Europe has resulted in a dramatic improvement of survival of children with cancer from the dismal survival rates pre-1960, to the present time, when over 80% of children with cancer are cured - in many ways making it a model for an innovation driven, evidence based, self-improving health system. For example, our research efforts have underpinned the development of a novel and ground-breaking molecular diagnostic technique called Minimal Residual Disease Testing that has dramatically improved survival of children at high risk of disease relapse. CCI researchers led the development and use of this technique, and were recognised for this achievement with the 2012 NSW Premier's Award for Excellence in Translational Research, and were profiled in the *Lancet* in 2013 as international exemplars of how true translational research should be conducted and implemented.

One of the most challenging aspects of our work is the lack of funding to drive innovation along the translational continuum from invention to eventual clinical implementation. Funding bodies such as the NHMRC cannot adequately support the innovation system in its full complexity beyond the invention phase, which, combined with a lack of industry investment, has resulted in a dramatic gap in the volume of Intellectual Property generated in the medical research field and the capacity for its commercialisation and translation in Australia.



We are therefore pleased to see that the remit of the MRFF includes both supporting medical research (defined as research into health) and medical innovation (including commercialisation, and the translation and application of research findings) and we do view the proposed provision to allow disbursement of funds within the MRFF through diverse pathways as a positive step to enable a more flexible and effective enhancement of the innovation system. While the NHMRC undoubtedly has considerable expertise and capacity to administer and award funds in certain areas we do not believe it would be the most suitable body to administer funding that is aimed at the more translational and commercialisation end of the research spectrum.

For example, we strongly advocate that Health Departments should be included as part of the broader distribution network with a specific view to enhance research – clinical interactions and drive translation into clinical practice. We, together with our clinical partners, are of the firm view that research is an integral part of 21st century health care that needs to be recognised and supported as such within the health system. This is currently not the case and efforts are too often reliant on the good will of time-poor and under-resourced clinicians, which is clearly not conducive to a systematic shift towards a self-improving health system.

Hence we would support the implementation of a flexible model for MRFF disbursement that can take advantage of existing grant mechanisms and expertise where appropriate, such as the NHMRC framework, as well as utilising other Government bodies with relevant capabilities and remit, provided that there remains a mechanism that ensures transparency of the disbursement of funding. We believe that the proposed amendment to the bill, requiring that the Health Minister reports to Parliament every two years on the financial assistance provided from the MRFF is a valuable provision to that end.

We also welcome the proposed establishment of a skills based Australian Medical Research Advisory Board to provide expert guidance to the Health Minister in determining the disbursement of funds through the MRFF and we fully support the inclusion of the NHMRC Chief Executive Officer on the Advisory Board. We also support the transfer of the balance of the Health and Hospitals Fund to the MRFF to enable the MRFF to have a sufficient balance to start providing modest but much-needed financial assistance to medical research and innovation in 2015-16. There is no doubt that we are currently experiencing an era of unprecedented medical discoveries and we are excited about the prospect of the establishment of the MRFF and its impact in realising the full potential of this scientific revolution. We are also cognisant that there is more than ever an urgency to commence with this investment as soon as possible and we welcome the proposed flow of funding as of 2015-16.

In concluding let me assure you that we share the vision expressed in the Bill that Research is an integral part of 21st century health care that plays a key role in driving improvements in diagnosis and treatment across major disease areas. By creating a world class research sector, Australia can establish a platform for an integrated, vibrant translational research enterprise within the country, as well as enhance opportunities to be seamlessly linked to the latest research efforts in the field on a global level, so that innovation, wherever it may occur, can be rapidly applied to improve health outcomes for the people of Australia.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this important inquiry.

Yours sincerely

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