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Submission to Senate Inquiry

Financial and Public Administration Committees

*The progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the 1999 Joint Expert Technical Advisory Committee on Antibiotic Resistance*

The Australia Institute welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into *The progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the 1999 Joint Expert Technical Advisory Committee on Antibiotic Resistance*

Our submission includes this statement and the Australia Institute's Policy Brief "*Culture of Resistance - Australia's Response to the inappropriate use of antimicrobials*" which is attached. This policy brief looks at how Australian governments have responded to AMR since the problem became evident in the 1980s. .

The Joint Expert Technical Advisory Committee on Antibiotic Resistance (JETACAR) was established to provide independent expert scientific advice on the threat posed by antibiotic resistant bacteria to human health by the selective effect of agricultural use and medical over use of antibiotics. The Report of JETACAR provided a "five point plan" covering regulation, monitoring and surveillance, infection prevention, education and research, the basics of which were equally applicable to human and veterinary medicine. The Government generally accepted the recommendations of The Report; stating that there was international concern about AMR and that Australia needed to respond with strategies that were "*consistent with and complementary to global initiatives*".

Initially there appeared to be strong commitment to implementing the recommendations of the 1999 JETACAR Report however many initiatives failed to result in any comprehensive systematic response to the issue. Committees, taskforces and groups were set up but disbanded, strategies were developed but not implemented, pilot programmes failed to be anything other than pilot programs, undertakings were not carried out.

Of particular concern is the failure to develop a comprehensive national surveillance system of both usage and resistance to antibiotics, as recommended by the JETACAR. Such a system provides an essential evidence base for management of AMR and appropriate regulation. Calls for a comprehensive surveillance monitoring system were made as early as the 1980s by the National Health and Medical Research Council (Working Party on Antibiotics). The 1999 JETACAR report recommended the same, and a strategy was developed in 2003. This strategy included a commitment for "*ongoing evaluation to monitor progress against the strategy*". This did not occur. Another strategy was developed for the then Expert Advisory Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance in 2006. Neither of these strategies appears to have been actioned in any meaningful way. In 2012 a new Advisory Committee on AMR was set up by the Government and their first task was to oversee the production of a scoping study and development of a business case for national surveillance of AMR and antimicrobial usage. This study initially was only to look at

issues regarding human health and resistance.

It is of great concern that despite the calls of the World Health Organization, and various expert groups so many years have passed and Australia still does not have a national comprehensive surveillance system of the use of and resistance to antimicrobials.

In fact most of the underlying factors listed by the World Health Organization as drivers of AMR are evident in Australia. Including that there is: inadequate national commitment to a comprehensive and coordinated response; ill-defined accountability and insufficient engagement of communities; weak or absent surveillance and monitoring systems; potentially inappropriate and irrational use of medicines, including in animal husbandry; a need for improvement in infection prevention and control practices, as well as insufficient research and development on new products.

For Australia, a developed country, this is a significant failure, not only in terms of protecting public health domestically but also in the global fight against AMR. It is necessary to devise a much more accountable and transparent system of management of AMR in Australia if we are to avoid another largely wasted decade. Successful development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy and action plan to reduce AMR requires there be:

- strong political awareness, leadership and will
- transparent and accountable public sector practice
- one Government Department/Minister with overall responsibility for reducing AMR
- a long term view and commitment with appropriate and ongoing resourcing;
- a coordinated cross sectoral approach including political, public, community and private interests
- a single independent management body with its own legislative base who reports regularly and directly to the parliament. The body should be empowered to self-initiate reports where necessary and should itself be reviewed, at a minimum, every three years by an independent expert individual or body

Given the pressing nature of the problem and the catastrophic impact of antimicrobial resistance, effective action must be taken urgently. The current Senate Inquiry into AMR by the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees provides an opportunity for development of a strong and credible Australian response to this global public health threat.

Yours sincerely  
Kerrie Tucker

**Kerrie Tucker**  
**The Australia Institute**

