



diabetes research
western australia

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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Inquiry into Diabetes

We thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Diabetes in Australia (**Inquiry**).

Diabetes Research WA – Who are we?

Diabetes Research WA (**DRWA**) is a Perth-based medical research foundation established in 1974, dedicated to the funding and support of research into the prevention, control and cure of diabetes. DRWA's objective is to fund the best researchers to investigate the causes and complications of all forms of diabetes, to search for new ways to prevent and control diabetes, and ultimately to facilitate the discovery of a cure for the disease.

DRWA raises funds from bequests, event initiatives, workplace and corporate giving programs and generous personal, family and corporate donations. It is governed by a Board of dedicated volunteer members drawn from the Western Australian business, legal, medical and scientific research community, most of whom have direct links to diabetes. DRWA has funded over \$5 million for more than 80 research projects to date, with a number of these projects evolving into successful scientific and clinical developments for the understanding of diabetes and the medical treatment of those living with the disease. Some of the projects supported by DRWA have gone on to attract significant further financial support from research funding organisations and government agencies.

Current Environment

The cost of diabetes to individuals, families, healthcare systems and governments is substantial and increasing, and is well documented in Government and third party materials. These costs relate not only to the most prevalent forms of diabetes, known as Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, but also to other forms of the disease such as gestational diabetes.

The disease is inherently complex. Research advances have accelerated over recent years, particularly in relation to diabetes control and management, but a cure remains elusive. As a result, various diabetes-focused research organisations in Australia and globally continue to focus their efforts on further advances in the fundamental scientific understanding of the disease, as well as the clinical management of the disease, for those who live with it.

Our submission to the Inquiry is focused on the funding of research into diabetes in Australia, where the scientific understanding of the disease and treatment options is at the forefront of global knowledge. This submission focuses primarily on the Inquiry's Terms of Reference items 2, 3 and 5.

Critical Research

Discussion regarding research advances into diabetes in Australia should, in our view, be focused on two main areas:

- (i) the organisations that are set up or could be set up to achieve the best outcomes; and
- (ii) increasing the amount of Australian Government funding to facilitate meaningful scientific and clinical advances, leading to broader healthcare and national economic benefits.

Diabetes research organisations in Australia

A number of Governmental research agencies, university-linked organisations and other not-for-profit research organisations in Australia, including DRWA, are focused on making tangible advances in diabetes research. They each have considerable knowledge regarding research developments. Over many years these organisations have assisted in the creation of "pools" of research scientists who require funding and who can be accessed to generate substantial new research if such funding becomes more readily available. The key issue for most of these organisations is that funding is very difficult and slow to obtain in Australia, with limited predictability based on existing funding sources and government grant processes.

Many of these organisations already collaborate and share ideas – for example the relationship between DRWA and the global Type 1 diabetes-focused group JDRF is something both organisations are seeking to expand. However, the competitive and limited access to research funding means that some organisations frequently prefer to operate separately and, naturally, to guard their funding sources. Accordingly, there is potential for a focused Government-funded diabetes research organisation to work with these existing research organisations to maximise the efficiency of research spend in both basic science and translational clinical projects. Stronger collaboration and increased efficiency would, in our view, lead to advances which have tangible benefits for those with diabetes, including a reduction in their dependency on healthcare services and Government funding.

Access to, and the engagement of, these existing research organisations will be a critical factor for success, should the Australian Government determine to increase research funding in this area. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

Research funding in Australia

DRWA submits that the funding level for diabetes research in Australia is presently well below that needed for substantial near-term advances. We frequently hear that serious global advances into the understanding and management of the disease are more likely to originate from North America or Europe. We contend that the knowledge and research capability of scientists and medical practitioners is already here in Australia, at world class levels, along with established advanced research facilities that can be better leveraged. Organisations such as DRWA are effectively agnostic as to where research advances are derived, but there is a strong argument that the Australian scientific and medical research community offers real hope.

We encourage the Inquiry to:

- review the research capabilities and funding needs for advances in diabetes research in Australia; and
- consider the significant benefits that would accrue to this country if the Australian Government committed to a substantial increase in dedicated funding into diabetes research.

Conclusion

We strongly support significantly increased Government funding into diabetes research in Australia. This will not only benefit those that have or will have the disease, but also the overall population, as the draw on healthcare services and Government healthcare funding will increase substantially if positive near-term research outcomes do not arise.

Australia has the facilities and scientific capabilities to utilise increased research funding in efficient and impactful ways, and we strongly encourage the Inquiry to review and recommend advances for the increase of diabetes-focused research in Australia.

We trust you find this brief submission helpful and to the point. Should you have any queries about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned directly.

Yours sincerely

PETER KERR
Chairman, Diabetes Research WA