

28 June 2018

Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

By online submission

Dear Committee Secretary,

**Re: Inquiry into Funding Australia's Research**

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Inquiry into Funding Australia's Research.

The RANZCP is a membership organisation responsible for training, educating and representing psychiatrists in Australia and New Zealand. The RANZCP represents almost 6000 qualified psychiatrists, who, as experts in the field of psychiatry are committed to research that supports clinical practice and contributes to improved health outcomes. This submission has been developed in consultation with the Committee for Research, which brings together members with an active interest in the conduct and development of mental health research.

It would be valuable to review the funding, infrastructure and support for clinical research, especially in mental health. Research applications tend to be overly complex, time consuming and often duplicated across multiple systems and programs. This limits the time researchers can devote to actual research and clinical practice. Analysis of activities across the mental sector indicates there is a lack of experienced researchers and that mental health research would benefit from greater resources and incentives. As many health systems and services have transitioned to Activity Based Funding models, this has prioritised specific services over research. This mostly impacts early career researchers and psychiatrists who take on small and medium sized research work, in addition to their practice.

Research funding was raised as a key concern by members of the RANZCP. The majority of government funding for medical research is investigator-driven, which reflects the strong and healthy research community in Australia. However, this can leave certain areas, such as mental health, with limited resources that do not reflect the burden of disease. The RANZCP encourages the Federal Government to implement processes to streamline applications for research funding and pursue a more balanced approach to priority-driven and investigator-driven research. It is important that this approach is developed in consultation with researchers in the field and mindful of the burden of mental health in Australia.

Our members noted that the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) represents a very important development, which has re-energised health and medical research and innovation in Australia. The RANZCP remains supportive of the Fund and notes the commitment of the



MRFF to 'focus on research that has potential to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians'. Concerns have been noted around the lack of transparency, and potential for decisions to be influenced by political priorities, rather than adhering to a sound strategic platform. Greater transparency and clearer means for consultation and engagement would strengthen the MRFF.

The RANZCP is also very supportive of the Million Minds Mission (MMM), and welcomes the commitment by the MMM to support priorities under the Fifth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan. The 2018-19 Federal Budget included an allocation of \$125 million for the MMM, which offers great promise for future mental health research. Funding allocated over a 10-year period will also enable more meaningful research that is not constrained by shorter timeframes. The RANZCP looks forward to joining the MMM Advisory Panel, and supporting this work into the future.

It is important that the Australian Government continues to engage with stakeholders on changes in the research sector. As a significant body supporting clinical and research experience, the RANZCP would welcome opportunities to contribute to further reform and development.

If you would like to discuss any of the points raised in this letter, please contact Rosie Forster, Executive Manager, Practice, Policy and Partnerships via [rosie.forster@ranzcp.org](mailto:rosie.forster@ranzcp.org) or by phone on (03) 9601 4943.

Yours faithfully



Dr Kym Jenkins  
**President**

Ref: 1154o