

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2015 - 16, 21 October 2015

Ref No: SQ15-000774

OUTCOME: 1 - Population Health

Topic: Transparency

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Madigan, John

Question:

Will the Australian Government strengthen policies, processes and procedures to ensure that commercial, private sector and university research grants are without conditions and free from all conflicts of interest, and ensure complete and transparent public scrutiny of all grant applications, changes and reports, ensuring that all intellectual and profitable outcomes can be accounted for and seen to be for the direct benefit of the people of Australia?

Answer:

A strong research integrity framework is essential to the performance of high quality research and to community trust in its outcomes. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) provides leadership and guidance in this area and sets standards for research conducted in Australia. The *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2007* (the Code) guides institutions and researchers in responsible research practices. The Code promotes honesty and integrity in research, respect for participants (both humans and animals) and the environment, good stewardship of the resources used to conduct research, appropriate acknowledgement of the roles of others in research and responsible communication of research results. Part A of the Code sets out the responsibilities for the responsible conduct of research in Australia and Part B sets out the framework for investigation of allegations of research misconduct.

NHMRC and other government funding agencies, such as the Australian Research Council, require compliance with the Code as a condition of funding. While recipients of commercial and private sector grants are not required by law to comply with the Code, as the Australian standard for best practice research in Australia, there is an expectation that the Code is followed by all those conducting research in Australia.

The Code is currently under review and areas that will be strengthened include guidance on conflicts of interest. There is a section in the Code that outlines requirements for peer review. NHMRC has a robust peer review process in place for the assessment of grant applications; however, full public scrutiny of all commercial, private sector and university research grants is outside the remit of NHMRC's legislated responsibilities.

Under its Open Access Policy, NHMRC requires that any publication arising from NHMRC supported research must be deposited into an open access institutional repository and/or made available in another open access format within a twelve month period from the date of publication. Until such time as findings are published, grant proposals are confidential in order to protect the intellectual property rights of the Administering Institution, researcher, research trainees, and sponsors of the research, as appropriate. While appointed Peer Review Panel members are bound by strict confidentiality requirements, consulting with the wider community would risk a breach of intellectual property rights.