

Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes

AAMRI

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AAMRI RESPONSE TO WEST REVIEW

The Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes (AAMRI) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the West Review into Higher Education Financing and Policy. In particular, we note with interest those sections of the Review pertaining to research in higher education, and issues of funding thereof.

AAMRI's interest in the Review relates mainly to the recommendations it makes regarding the necessity of funding research infrastructure in Australian research institutions.

AAMRI strongly endorses the principle of infrastructure funding.

Of the three funding models proposed by the Review committee, the third, (Model 3), entitled 'Large competitive block grants programme' is most applicable to independent institutions, as it does not depend solely on the academic community for its operation.

AAMRI supports the model's recommendations of maintaining the 40 cents in the dollar target for infrastructure funding.

Whilst accepting these recommendations, and applauding the current practice, AAMRI nevertheless sees several anomalies in this situation and makes the point that, while public universities, and other government funded organisations attract this much needed infrastructure funding, autonomous research institutions do not.

We submit that this situation is detrimental to the nation as a whole.

Australian research institutions enjoy an international reputation as highly respected and valuable contributors to medical research, and in this respect, I refer you to an article published recently in the Medical Journal of Australia (Vol 167, 1/15 December 1997, 'Mapping Australia's basic research in the medical and health sciences', Bourke, Paul, Butler, Linda).

The article discusses in great detail the quality of research output of all Australian research organisations.

The data supplied in the report strongly confirms the role of AAMRI members, and other independent institutions as leaders in the international medical research community and suggests that autonomous research institutions carry out significant work in various fields of medical research.

In addition to the world class research output of Medical Research Institutes (MRI's), they are also leading providers of education, in the form of postdoctoral fellowships, PHD's and Masters and Honours studies.

The West Review recognises the importance of funding these educational areas, not only through the traditional university. It is limiting to fund only these institutions when valuable study is being undertaken in other independent organisations.

In these circumstances, the lack of access to infrastructure support for Medical Research Institutes is both inequitable and shortsighted.

If we are to recognise the importance of research in higher education institutions, then we must also recognise the importance of research carried out in independent organisations.

In today's society, when health issues are a major concern, the value of medical research is inestimable, and should be treated as such.

MRI's are not only valuable in terms of their scientific operations.

Much of the new technology developed through the research they undertake acts as a stimulus to the Australian economy. Industries develop through the manufacture of products stemming from the introduction of these technologies - products which have great market value, as well as the potential to earn significant export dollars.

AAMRI applauds the West Review in its recognition of the definite need to provide research institutions with some form of infrastructure funding separate to monies already allocated to direct project grants.

Whilst the Review is concerned with funding in higher education institutions, we argue that the thrust of its recommendations is equally applicable to all Australian organisations engaged in research practices that have the potential to lead to vital breakthroughs in medical science.

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AAMRI**The Association of Australian
Medical Research Institutes**

The Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes was formed in 1993, to facilitate communication amongst independent medical research institutes and to better represent the needs of these institutes to governments, business and the public. There were 18 founding institutes, and subsequently an additional 5 have been admitted to membership.

Medical research institutes are an internationally-recognised component of Australian biomedical research, and perform over one-quarter of all the non-commercial biomedical research in this country. The aggregate budget for AAMRI members is well over \$100 million per year, and they employ over 2000 scientists. They also contribute enormously to the scientific labour supply by training BSc Honours, Masters and PhD students and postdoctoral fellows. The institutes have a close relationship with Australian and multinational pharmaceutical companies, CRCs and research syndicates, and thus they are a major partner in commercialisation of Australian biomedical discoveries.

The research carried out by Australian medical research institutes involves practically every aspect of human health and disease, from cancer and AIDS to schizophrenia; from Aboriginal health to international health; and from fundamental laboratory research to the design, implementation and evaluation of practical disease prevention programs.

The goals of AAMRI are to:

- Insure that governments, business and the public are aware of the contributions that medical research institutes make to improving human health.
- Coordinate communication between research institutes, improve scientific and administrative collaboration amongst those institutes, and to facilitate expression of the collective views of institutes to governments and the public.
- Represent the interests of medical research institutes to governments and industry.
- Facilitate the creation of a fiscal and regulatory environment which will ensure the efficient conduct of research, and the practical application of that research, by AAMRI members.

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