

# NATIONAL SAFETY AND QUALITY HEALTH SERVICE STANDARDS VERSION 2: CONSULTATION DRAFT

Response to the Consultation Draft

October 2015

**RESEARCH  
AUSTRALIA**



AN ALLIANCE FOR DISCOVERIES IN HEALTH

## About Research Australia

Research Australia is an alliance of 160 members and supporters advocating for health and medical research in Australia. Research Australia's activities are funded by its members, donors and supporters from leading research organisations, academic institutions, philanthropy, community special interest groups, peak industry bodies, biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies, small businesses and corporate Australia. It reflects the views of its diverse membership and represents the interests of the broader community.

Research Australia's mission is to make health and medical research a higher priority for the nation. We have four goals that support this mission:

- A society that is well informed and values the benefits of health and medical research.
- Greater investment in health and medical research from all sources.
- Ensure Australia captures the benefits of health and medical research.
- Promote Australia's global position in health and medical research.

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# NATIONAL SAFETY AND QUALITY HEALTH SERVICE STANDARDS VERSION 2: CONSULTATION DRAFT

**RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION DRAFT, OCTOBER 2015**

## INTRODUCTION

Research Australia welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation Draft of version 2 of the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards (the Draft Standards).

Australia has a world-class health system. We also have world-class health and medical research capability. This capability is set to increase significantly over the next decade with the creation of the Medical Research Future Fund, which is expected to provide an additional \$1 billion per annum for health and medical research and innovation by 2022. This funding is required to be directed towards addressing Australia's national health priorities and burden of disease, with the objectives of funding research that will provide practical benefits and value to Australians. These objectives cannot be met by researchers and innovators alone; nor can they be achieved by the health system. They can only be achieved through partnerships between Australia's health service organisations, health researchers and innovators.

Health and medical research is a key driver of improvements in healthcare and while many health service organisations have deep and longstanding connections with researchers, there is not currently the breadth and depth of partnerships required to optimise the outcomes for patients or value for money for the Australian community. Improving the safety and quality of healthcare is central to achieving these outcomes and the Draft Standards provide an excellent opportunity to drive the closer partnerships, collaboration and engagement that are needed. Unfortunately, as the Draft Standards are currently, this opportunity is lost. Research Australia's submission seeks to address this issue.

## The role of research in improving health care

There are two key ways in which health and medical research improves the safety and quality of health care.

### Adoption of research findings

Health and medical research is central to improvements in healthcare; however it can take between 10 and 20 years for proven treatments to be implemented routinely into healthcare. Reducing this timeframe, and promoting more effective and complete adoption of new evidence based practice is a sure way of improving the safety and quality of our health system. This needs a health system that monitors for new developments and is open to change.

### Engagement

Active engagement between researchers and the healthcare sector, to ensure the right questions are being addressed, is also a vital means of improving the safety and quality of our healthcare system. Unlike the (passive) adoption of research findings, engagement requires a two-way flow of information, resources, experience and expertise. Health services are enriched and improved when providers are engaged in health and medical research. Participation in research by health providers in all disciplines and in all settings:

- enables clinicians to more critically appraise new research outcomes;
- lifts the overall standard and quality of care; and
- promotes the more effective and timely translation of research outcomes into practice.

In turn, the engagement of researchers in healthcare delivery helps direct research to the issues that need to be addressed to improve the quality of healthcare. It also provides opportunities for patients to provide input into the direction of research and to participate in research through clinical trials.

Research Australia is of the view that the Draft Standards can and should play an active role in increasing the safety and quality of our health system by better supporting the adoption of research findings into health practice and through supporting greater engagement of the health system with research. This engagement involves not only implementing research findings but participating in framing the research questions, and working with the research community to identify solutions.

Unfortunately there are few references even to evidence based practice or guidelines in the Draft Standards, and no recognition of the broader contribution to safety and quality that more active engagement with health and medical research by healthcare organisations can make.

Research Australia's submission proposes some ways in which the Draft Standards could more effectively embed research in the delivery of healthcare. Research Australia does not seek to prescribe specific wording for inclusion in the Draft Standards- this is not our area of expertise. Our submission does, however, point to the broad areas in which changes can be made by looking at how the different participants in health care can be more active partners with researchers.

## ROLES FOR SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTHCARE

The Draft Standards describe the role of the different participants in the healthcare system and their role in improving the quality and safety in healthcare. Considering the ways in which each can participate in and/or influence health and medical research is a useful way of identifying how and where the Draft Standards should be modified.

### Consumers

The Australian public directly encounters health and medical research through interaction with the health care system as consumers of health care services. In this context they are often contributors to research in a variety of ways, from active participation in a clinical trial or other study through to more passive participation as a source of data. Their participation provides vital information and insights that lead to new therapies, protocols and approaches that improve the safety and quality of healthcare. This contribution is not addressed in the description of consumers provided with the Draft Standard. (The other role that is not addressed is the role of patients as contributors to the training of healthcare professionals.)

**Research Australia submits that the description of consumers in the Draft Standards should acknowledge the contribution that consumers make as ‘partners’ in research conducted in our health care system.**

### Clinicians

Research Australia agrees that

*‘The system can be improved when clinicians actively participate in organisational processes, safety systems and improvement initiatives, and are trained in the roles and services for which they are accountable. Clinicians can make healthcare systems safer and more effective if they:*

- *understand their broad responsibility for safety and quality in health care*
- *follow safety and quality procedures*
- *supervise and educate other members of the workforce*
- *participate in the review of performance procedures individually, or as part of a team.’ (Draft Standards, page 63)*

There are other ways that clinicians contribute to safety and quality in the workplace. While Research Australia agrees that clinicians should turn a critical eye inward on their own workplace, there is also an essential role for them in engaging outside their own organisation with their profession and beyond.

Clinicians are the primary source of information and knowledge about innovation in healthcare practice through their engagement with other practitioners, their professional associations and professional journals. Remaining open to new developments in their discipline and participating actively in professional development are key ways in which clinicians can acquire new knowledge and maintain a critical and inquiring approach to their own practice and the practices of the organisations in which they work.

**Research Australia submits that the Draft Standards should emphasise the contribution of these activities to improving the safety and quality of healthcare.**

The Standards recognise the importance of evidence based guidelines and emphasise the importance of clinicians being aware of current evidence based guidelines. We also know that there are many areas in which the evidence base for current health practice is lacking. While researchers can help to fill the knowledge gaps, the identification of these gaps and the development of new, effective and practical evidence based guidelines requires an active partnership between researchers and clinicians. Individuals who combine the roles of clinician and researcher are especially critical to this endeavour.

**Research Australia submits that the Draft Standards should emphasise the role of clinicians in identifying gaps in the evidence base for their own health practice and the contribution they can make to the research needed to address the gaps.**

## Managers of health service organisations

*‘Managers of health service organisations implement and maintain systems, materials, education and training that ensure that clinicians deliver safe, effective and reliable health care. They support the establishment of partnerships with consumers when designing, implementing and maintaining systems. Their key role is managing performance and facilitating compliance across the organisation and within individual areas of responsibility for the governance of safety and quality systems. They are leaders who can model behaviours that optimise safe and high-quality care. Safer systems can be achieved when managers of health service organisations consider safety and quality implications in their decision-making processes.’ (Draft Standard, page 63)*

There are many organisations that develop and/or promote innovation with the health system including the Health Roundtable, the Australian Centre for Health Innovation, the Australian Centre for Health Services Innovation, and various government agencies and initiatives, including the Commission for Hospital Improvement (Vic), and the Agency for Clinical Innovation (NSW). Active participation in and with these organisations by managers can lead to improved safety, quality and efficiency in health service organisations.

Managers of health service organisations need to be aware of developments in respect of health care systems and the physical environment that are relevant to healthcare - for example in infection control and management of patients with cognitive deficits. They also need to be cognisant of developments in workflow management, and innovations in areas such as team approaches to care and multidisciplinary care. Many of these areas go beyond the responsibilities of individual clinicians and departments. Managers are responsible for facilitating, and removing barriers to, innovation in these areas.

The collection, storage and use of data are critical to the operation of any health service organisation. The role of data in risk management, particularly in relation to infection and antimicrobial resistance, is identified in the Standards. The broader role for data in monitoring the safety and quality of performance of institutions and in improving quality is not specifically recognised. Similarly, the contribution health records and other data can make to research is not considered.

Research Australia submits that the Draft Standard should emphasise the importance of data for these purposes and explicitly recognise the role of management in:

- providing systems and staff to support the collection, use and analysis of data;
- providing appropriate access to data for monitoring, quality improvement and research purposes; and
- utilising data to improve the safety and quality of healthcare.

Managers are responsible for employment policies and work structures. **Research Australia submits that the standards should include the need for flexible work practices that support clinicians who want to engage with research and/or increase their research skills. The Draft Standards should also commit health service managers to supporting the continuing professional development of their workforces, including management, as an important element of continuous quality improvement.**

**Research Australia submits that the Draft Standards should recognise the role for managers to incorporate health and medical research into the operation and management of the health service organisation and in its workforce and human resources policies.**

The field of communication with patients is one in which there have been numerous studies highlighting different strategies and approaches and addressing what does and doesn't work.

**Research Australia submits that the *Partnering with Consumers* and *Communicating for Safety* Draft Standards should both incorporate the use of current research findings into the development of communications with consumers, patients and carers.**

## Health service executives and owners/highest level of governance

*'Explicit support for the role of consumers in safety, models of care, program design and review of the organisation's performance is key to the establishment of effective partnerships with consumers by health service managers and the clinical workforce.'* (Draft Standard, page 63)

Explicit support for the role of research and innovation within the health service organisation is also key to driving improvements in safety and quality.

**Research Australia submits that the Draft Standards should support explicit recognition by governing bodies that participation by health service organisations in research can improve the safety and quality of an organisation's healthcare delivery.**

The governing body of each health service organisation is responsible for setting the strategic direction.

*It provides the strategic direction on safety and quality matters, and leadership on the safety culture of the organisation. It also monitors performance of the organisation. The highest level of*



*governance is also key to setting the organisation's approach to partnering with consumers. (Draft Standard, page 64)*

The same is equally true of setting the organisation's approach to health and medical research, and to partnering with health and medical researchers. A strategy that recognises that engaging with researchers and innovators is one way of continually improving the safety and quality of healthcare provides endorsement for:

- building partnerships with researchers, consumers and research organisations;
- conducting research in the organisation; and
- supporting staff to engage in research activities and professional development.

**Research Australia submits that the Draft Standards should support the consideration of how a healthcare organisation will engage with health and medical research, including partnering with research organisations, as part of the organisation's strategy.**

## CONCLUSION

The Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research undertaken by an expert panel chaired by Simon McKeon, reported to the Australian Health Minister in 2013. One of its key themes was the need to build greater links between the research community and the health system to ensure that publicly funded research was relevant and would better support real improvements in health.

Achieving this improvement requires changes to the way we conduct and fund health and medical research in Australia, and Research Australia is actively engaged in this ongoing conversation. Equally it requires changes to the ways health service organisations use research and engage with researchers. As noted in the Introduction, the Draft Standards provide an excellent opportunity to drive closer partnerships, collaboration and engagement between researchers and health providers, which will in turn improve the safety and quality of healthcare.

Research Australia believes the proposals put forward in this submission will, if implemented, better integrate research into the health system and lead to significant improvements in the safety and quality of healthcare. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further and to provide more specific information about how the Draft Standards could be amended to achieve this aim.

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