Health & Medical Research
Public Opinion Poll 2009
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- GSK GlaxoSmithKline
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Crosby|Textor
Research Australia thanks Crosby|Textor for conducting this public opinion poll and for supporting our activities.

Crosby|Textor is a boutique polling and communications consultancy that delivers actionable, quality-driven market research to corporations, industry associations and government. The combined experience of its staff in researching the opinions, hopes, concerns, motivations and values of people in over 35 countries, provides Crosby|Textor with unique and extensive insight into public opinion around the world.

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Foreword

This year’s poll showed that Australians appear to be absorbed with ‘battening down the hatches’ and hopefully getting through the global financial crisis relatively unscathed. Despite this, on a considered basis, health is put ahead of economic priorities. Prompted with what priorities government should be focusing on over the next 2–3 years, Australians rate ‘improving hospitals and the health system’ the highest priority for the fifth year running.

51% of Australians have been negatively affected by the global financial crisis, with the most commonly reported health effect being stress caused by increasing unemployment (including more partial employment) and financial insecurity, including the impact upon retirement incomes and plans. More than a quarter of Australians have avoided or delayed visiting the doctor in the last six months, with people aged 35–49, living in South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory most affected. This suggests an important link between the economy and health, and the community response to increased financial pressure.

Despite pressured household budgets and concerns about employment, there is still strong support for medical research. Most Australians agree that the rate of NHMRC funding should continue to substantially increase beyond 2010.

‘Medical and health research on prevention, treatment and cures for illnesses and diseases’ achieves the highest rated agreement as a sector that will play an important role in Australia’s future, mentioned by 90% of those surveyed. The poll found that 64% support a tax on junk foods to help reduce excessive consumption and to avoid the damaging health effects and costs. In a strong show of support for improving men’s health, 84% agreed that the introduction of a comprehensive annual men’s health check-up, fully covered by Medicare, would encourage Australian men to seek regular advice about the early warning signs of ill health. For young people, Australians consider the most important health issues requiring action are related to smoking, alcohol and drugs.

The poll identified strong community support for regular public reporting of quality, safety and performance indicators by hospitals. However, qualitative research revealed concerns that the health system, which is largely perceived to be struggling, may further suffer if hospital reporting concentrated professional, public and media criticism on the lower performers.

Despite repeated serious disease outbreaks in recent times, including the swine flu, bird flu and Dengue fever, Australians are not overly concerned about catching serious infectious diseases themselves. Just 8% say they are extremely concerned, with 13% being very concerned. This suggests that the majority of Australians are not very likely to take actions against a serious infectious disease outbreak.

The survey findings are particularly relevant in the broad context of government reviews and reports on health system reform, primary health care, innovation and preventive health.

Dr Chris Roberts
Chairman

Rebecca James
Chief Executive Officer
Methodology

Research Australia commissioned Crosby|Textor to conduct qualitative and quantitative research on the attitudes and perceptions of the community toward health and medical research. Qualitative research was conducted through focus groups and quantitative research conducted through an online survey.

Focus groups

Two focus groups were conducted in Brisbane in May 2009: one group amongst retirees and semi-retirees aged 55 and older (including a 50/50 mix of pensioners and self-funded retirees) and one group of 25–54 year olds where men were employed full-time and women were either employed full-time or on home duties with dependent children aged under 18 living in their care. No 25–54 year-olds relied on government benefits for the majority of their income.

Insights from focus groups

Asked why governments should spend more money on health and medical research than health itself (e.g. hospitals, doctors and nurses), Australians see the ‘return on investment’ as greater:

“It is an area where if you spend money you will make money.”

“The system at the moment is wrong and near collapse and so it will save money in the future if we change now.”

“An extra 2% will make a bigger difference in health and medical research than in health.”

The economic benefit to Australia of health and medical research is well recognised, especially as traditional industries wane and people see the need for replacement business and government revenues.

“We can’t compete with the labour resources of China. They have people laid on. We don’t have the manpower so we have to have the brain power to get over that.”
Demographic profile

Quantitative
Quantitative research consisted of an online survey, with an effective national sample of n=806 people over 18 years of age, conducted between 2–7 July 2009. The maximum margin of error for a sample size of approximately n=800 is ± 3.5 percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases.

Employment
59% of participants were in paid employment and 41% were not in paid employment.

State

Work and Household Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>VIC 24%</th>
<th>NSW/ACT 35%</th>
<th>QLD 20%</th>
<th>SA 8%</th>
<th>TAS 2%</th>
<th>WA 10%</th>
<th>NT 1%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>18–24</th>
<th>25–34</th>
<th>35–44</th>
<th>45–54</th>
<th>55–64</th>
<th>65+</th>
<th>65+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some secondary school</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed year 10/School certificate</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed year 12/ high school certificate</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical or trade certificate</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma/University</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post graduate degree</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Employment
59% of participants were in paid employment and 41% were not in paid employment.
Hospitals and health system remain the highest priority

Q: Firstly, please think about what priorities you think the Federal Government should be focusing on over the next 2–3 years. As you read through the following list of issues, please rate how important you personally think each issue is, as an important priority for the Federal Government to be focusing on over the next 2–3 years. Please use a 0 to 10 scale where a 0 means that it is not so important a priority up to a 10 means that it is an extremely important or critical priority for the Federal Government to be focusing on over the next 2–3 years.

- 80% of Australians think more funding for health and medical research is an important priority for the Federal Government over the next 2–3 years.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Support Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving hospitals and the health care system</td>
<td>94% 91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping the national economy strong</td>
<td>85% 87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving education standards and outcomes</td>
<td>84% 83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving national infrastructure, including roads, rail, ports, airports and water quality and supply</td>
<td>86% 83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing more to keep prices and the cost of living down</td>
<td>80% 88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving employment opportunities</td>
<td>77% 80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More research funding for health and medical research</td>
<td>82% 80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing crime and improving law and order</td>
<td>81% 79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating more skilled jobs and apprenticeships</td>
<td>78% 78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having policies and programs for the aged and ageing, including for pensioners and self-funded</td>
<td>79% 77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing funding and programs for preventative health care</td>
<td>75% 82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing and controlling debt (NEW)</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Australia’s overseas trade and exports</td>
<td>66% 70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping home mortgage and business interest rates low</td>
<td>70% 78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing more for regional and rural Australia</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting small business (NEW)</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping the environment in practical ways</td>
<td>66% 72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing more support for homeless and those living in poverty</td>
<td>64% 72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing climate change and sustainable energy supplies</td>
<td>64% 71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More focus and funding for scientific research and development</td>
<td>65% 64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowering taxes</td>
<td>62% 71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a strong defence force for military, peace-keeping and border control operations</td>
<td>62% 62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Australia’s immigration and mandatory detention policies</td>
<td>52% 61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing more help and assistance for families with children</td>
<td>56% 66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing the inequity in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders</td>
<td>53% 54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce an emissions trading scheme to reduce carbon pollution</td>
<td>51% 61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In cooperation with our allies, helping to fight the global war or terror</td>
<td>51% 49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Medical and health research most important industry for Australia’s future.

Q: Following are a list of industries and sectors that may or may not play an important role in Australia’s future. For each industry or sector please rate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that it WILL play an important role in Australia’s future.

• 90% of Australians believe medical and health research on prevention, treatment and cures for illnesses and diseases will play an important role in Australia’s future.
• There is increasing support for economic and production sectors, including manufacturing and construction.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical and health research on prevention, treatment and cures for illnesses and diseases</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary and secondary education</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and community services</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventative medicine and health promotion</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific research and development</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and resources</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism and hospitality</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information technology (IT) and communication services</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aging and aged care</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale and retail trade</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Insurance</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biotechnology</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and business services</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural, sporting and recreational services</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Australians increasingly support more NHMRC funding beyond 2010

Q: Federal Government budget allocations for the National Health and Medical Research Council (Australia’s peak government funding agency for health and medical research) increased five-fold from 1995 to 2010. But beyond 2009–2010, only minor funding increases are planned. Do you agree or disagree (and is that somewhat or strongly agree or disagree) that the rate of NHMRC funding should continue to substantially increase beyond 2010?

- In line with the continuing high priority placed on health as a current issue and an important industry sector for the future, 78% of Australians (up 6 points since 2008) agree that the rate of NHMRC funding should continue to substantially increase beyond 2010. Only 5% overall disagree (down 4 points).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>Total 2008</th>
<th>Total 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t say</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Australia can be a world leader in health and medical research.

Q: It has been suggested that if Australian Governments continued to invest heavily into health and medical research then Australia could in fact become a world leader in this field. Please rate how whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following reasons for why Australian Governments should continue to invest heavily into health and medical research with the aim of Australia becoming a world leader in this field.

- 85% agree that by aiming to be the world’s best we can attract the best and brightest people to Australia
- 80% agree that we should not aim for anything except the best
- 85% agree that by developing Australia as a leader, it will have a multiplier effect, bringing about economic benefits.

By aiming to be the world’s best in health and medical research, we could attract the best and brightest people from other countries to Australia, rather than losing our best people and ideas overseas.

Rewards will come from striving to be the best in the world. Australia’s international sporting, military and theatrical achievements prove that despite our relatively small population, we should confidently set our goals high. We should not aim for anything except the best because when we set our hearts, minds and resources to being the best we are likely to succeed.

Developing Australia as a leader and a centre of excellence for health and medical research would have a multiplier effect and bring about new and added economic and employment benefits.
Alcohol and smoking considered least important preventive health research areas.

Q: In your opinion, what, specifically, are the three most important health and medical problems, issues or diseases to you, your family or to Australia as a whole that should receive a significant increase in funding for research into their prevention and cure? Please be as specific as you can, using a minimum of 3–5 words to describe the issue or disease.

The most important areas of research for prevention or cures are cancer, heart related conditions, diabetes and obesity. Smoking, alcohol, illicit drugs, HIV/AIDS and childhood obesity, are identified as lower priorities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cancer NFI</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart/cardio vascular</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer research</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression/mental health</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital access/staff shortages/waiting time</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast cancer</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alzheimer’s</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostate cancer</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age care</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS/HIV/STD</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood obesity</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illicit drugs</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Youth need more education and information about mental health

Q: Thinking specifically about youth mental health issues, which include issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, suicide, self harm, self esteem and self confidence. Do you think there is enough education and information available to youth on the issue of mental health?

• Three quarters of Australians think there is not enough information available to youth about mental health. Only 4% think there is definitely enough.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitely enough</th>
<th>4%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probably enough</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL ENOUGH</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably not enough</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely not enough</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL NOT ENOUGH</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t say</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Youth need help to recognise the symptoms and how to get help with mental health issues

Q: Which ONE of the following reasons do you think is the MOST important reason schools should teach today’s youth about mental health issues?

- 30% of Australians believe it is important to teach youth about mental health issues so that they recognise the symptoms and can get help.
- Families without children are equally concerned about youth mental health issues.
- Handling peer group pressure is recognised as a significant youth issue.
Economic uncertainty puts healthcare on hold for some

Q: There have been reports of people taking various health related actions as a result of the global financial crisis and increasing financial pressures and concerns over the last 6 months. In the last 6 months, have you or your household attempted to save money by taking any of the following health related actions as a result of the global financial crisis and increasing financial pressures and concerns?

To counter tightening household budgets:
• 28% have ‘Avoided or delayed visits to a GP, dentist or specialist doctor’
• 20% have ‘Put off buying new or replacement prescription glasses’
• 13% have ‘Reduced the use of allied health services’ and
• 115 have ‘Reduced or cancelled private healthcare membership.’

Almost half have taken no action, including 52% of those with private health insurance.
Put off buying new or replacement prescription glasses

Avoided or delayed visits to a GP, dentist or specialist doctor

Reduced or cancelled private healthcare membership

Reduced the use of allied health services such as the chiropractor or physiotherapist

Stopped or scaled back on prescription drugs

Sought assistance for stress or anxiety

Increased consumption of complementary medicines

Reduced consumption of complementary medicines

Put off elective surgery

Increased consumption of complementary medicines

Decreased consumption of complementary medicines

Something else

Can’t say

None of these

Decreased consumption of complementary medicines

Increased consumption of complementary medicines

Reduced or cancelled a fitness and exercise related membership, such as a gym, pool or aerobics membership

Reduced the use of allied health services such as the chiropractor or physiotherapist

Put off elective surgery

Reduced consumption of complementary medicines

Increased consumption of complementary medicines

Decreased consumption of complementary medicines

Something else

Can’t say

None of these

Decreased consumption of complementary medicines

Increased consumption of complementary medicines

Reduced or cancelled a fitness and exercise related membership, such as a gym, pool or aerobics membership

Reduced or cancelled private healthcare membership

Reduced the use of allied health services such as the chiropractor or physiotherapist

Put off buying new or replacement prescription glasses

Avoided or delayed visits to a GP, dentist or specialist doctor

Stopped or scaled back on prescription drugs

Sought assistance for stress or anxiety
Little concern about risk of infectious diseases such as swine flu

Q: How concerned are you about you or someone in your household contracting an infectious disease such as the swine flu, the bird flu or Dengue fever?

- Only 8% of Australians are extremely concerned, and 13% very concerned about catching an infectious disease such as swine flu.
- Women are more likely to be concerned, and people over the age of 50 are the age group most likely to be ‘somewhat concerned.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern Level</th>
<th>Total Concerned</th>
<th>Total Not Concerned</th>
<th>Can’t Say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Concerned</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Concerned</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Concerned</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very Concerned</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Concerned</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t Say</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Women are more likely to be concerned, and people over the age of 50 are the age group most likely to be ‘somewhat concerned.’
Access to medicines through the PBS could be improved.

**Q:** Australia has a subsidized prescription medicine scheme called the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). The intention of the PBS is to allow reliable, timely access to essential medicines at a cost individuals can afford. Some argue that the time required for approval and PBS listing, especially for medicines requiring government approval, can sometimes be too lengthy and worsen health outcomes for those waiting. Others argue that the time taken is necessary to properly consider the medical and financial merit of all the new applications competing for PBS funding. Do you think Australians have reliable, timely and affordable access to needed medicines through the PBS or could the system be expanded or improved?
Taxpayer funded health checks for men get thumbs up

Q: Today the average Australian life expectancy at birth is up to five years less for men than it is for women. Some Australian men have been shown to ignore or delay seeking advice about early warning signs of ill health and as a solution the introduction of a comprehensive annual men’s health check-up fully covered by Medicare has been suggested. Do you think the introduction of a comprehensive annual men’s health check-up fully covered by Medicare is a good solution to encourage Australian men to seek regular advice about the early warning signs of ill health?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL YES</th>
<th>84%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, definitely</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, probably</td>
<td>32%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL NO</th>
<th>12%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, probably not</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, definitely not</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t say</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</table>
Two-thirds of Australians support a health tax on junk foods

Q: Partly to reduce consumption and the damaging health effects and costs, the Australian Government currently imposes high taxes on products such as alcohol and cigarettes. Do you support or oppose a tax on junk foods to help reduce excessive consumption and to avoid the damaging health effects and costs of too much junk food?
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Research and Education Foundation, RACP
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Sports Medicine Australia
The Menzies Foundation

Medical Research Institutes
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Bionic Ear Institute
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Sax Institute
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St Vincent’s Institute of Medical Research
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Walter & Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research
Western Australian Institute for Medical Research
Westmead Millennium Institute
Women’s and Children’s Health Research Institute
Woolcock Institute

Government Agencies
Cancer Australia
Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Victoria
NSW Office for Science & Medical Research
Victorian Neurotrauma Initiative Pty Ltd

Universities/Academic Institutions
Australian Catholic University
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– Australian National University Medical School
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– Centre for Mental Health Research
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– School of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
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– Faculty of Science
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Edith Cowan University
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Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators
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  – Bosch Institute
  – The Medical Foundation
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– School of Psychology
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