

There's certainly been a lot of activity over a range of issues and policy areas recently and we've consolidated the key areas for our members in this month's Research Matters update. We encourage you to forward this internally to your colleagues.

This communication features important information on:

1. **Policy & Advocacy** - Your Voice
2. **Consultations, Enquiries & Reviews**; Mental Health & Aged Care
3. **MRFF**; Grants & Priorities
4. **In Parliament**; MHR, R&D Tax Incentives, Electoral Funding Reform
5. **COAG**; Obesity, Human Tissue Acts
6. **Submissions** Update

1) Help shape national policy - we need your voice

We recently sent an email to members reminding you how much we need you to contribute to Research Australia's policy advocacy. All input from members on policy issues affecting the health and medical research and innovation sectors is welcome. You can contribute by:

- identifying policy areas where Research Australia should make a contribution;
- proposing better ways of doing things; and/or
- providing cases studies of what does and doesn't work.

To contribute or discuss please email **Greg Mullins, Head of Policy**, at greg.mullins@researchaustralia.org, or phone on (03) 9662 9420.

2) Consultations, Enquiries & Reviews

Productivity Commission inquiry into Mental Health

Earlier this month Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg announced a Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health. 'This comprehensive inquiry will reveal the true impact of mental illness on the economy and provide recommendations on how the Government can most effectively improve population mental health, and social and economic participation'. The Terms of Reference and period for the Inquiry are yet to be set. Research Australia will continue to monitor developments and provide updates.

Royal Commission into Aged Care Health and Safety

Further details of the Royal Commission, including the appointment of the two Commissioners and the Terms Of Reference, were released on 9 October. The Terms of Reference are broad, and Research Australia believes researchers will play a critical role assisting the Commissioners identify how Australia can deliver safer, higher quality aged care. [Read the announcement here.](#)

Aged Care Workforce Strategy

Discussion of the Royal Commission overshadowed the release of the [Report of the Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce](#) at the end of September. Recommendation 12 proposes establishing an 'Aged Care Centre for Growth and Translational Research (CGTR), (which) will foster formalised collaboration between end users, leading aged care researchers, investors and workforce educators

that provide the skills, knowledge and infrastructure to support translation of aged care workforce related research and technology from conception to market'. The Recommendation envisages the Centre drawing on MRFF funding among other sources.

The Government has yet to respond to the Report.

3) In Parliament

R&D Tax Incentive

There is currently a Bill before the House of Representatives that seeks to impose a cap on the refundable R&D Tax Incentive, exempt clinical trials from the cap and lower the rate of the refundable and non- refundable R&D Incentives. (These measures stem from the Review of the R&D tax Incentive undertaken in 2016 and announced in the Budget in May 2018.)

While the proposed reduction in the rates is a negative, we expect the exemption of clinical trials from the cap will protect many companies in the health and medical research and innovation sectors from the greatest impact. [The Treasury Laws Amendment \(Making Sure Multinationals Pay Their Fair Share of Tax in Australia and Other Measures\) Bill 2018](#) (the R&D Tax Incentive is one of the 'Other Measures') is expected to pass the House of Representatives and to then be the subject of a Senate Inquiry. Research Australia is continuing to monitor developments.

My Health Records (Strengthening Privacy) Bill 2018

In response to the public concerns expressed during the opt out campaign for the My Health Records, the Government is seeking to tighten third party access to individuals' My Health Records. Applications by law enforcement and other government agencies will require a court order if this Bill is legislated. It has been passed by the House of Representatives and is currently before the Senate, where it is the subject of a Senate Committee Inquiry Report, which recommended on 12 October that the Bill be passed. Research Australia's submission to the Inquiry is available [here](#). On 16 October the Coalition caucus approved further amendments to the Bill, which appear likely to be introduced in the Senate. The ALP and the Greens are expected to seek further amendments to the Bill.

My Health Records System Inquiry

Another parallel Senate Inquiry into the MHR system more broadly has also been conducted by the Senate and the Report is available [here](#). [Research Australia also made a submission to this Inquiry](#).

The Committee has recommended further amendments be made to the legislation, including to impose higher default settings for access, and better privacy protections for 14 to 17 year olds. In a measure that could have implications for research, The Committee has also recommended 'data

which is likely to be identifiable from an individual's My Health Record not be made available for secondary use without the individual's explicit consent.' Exactly what 'likely to be identifiable from an individual's My Health Record' is not immediately clear.

The Coalition Senators on the Committee have opposed this recommendation on the grounds that 'making the system 'opt-in' for research purposes would greatly diminish the potential data pool and limit the potential benefits highlighted above. It could also lead to distortions in data sets and individuals who chose to opt-in under this approach may not be a representative sample of the wider Australian public.'

Other recommendations include extending the opt out period and a more targeted comprehensive education campaign about the MHR, and greater efforts to educate and support vulnerable and hard to reach communities.

The next step will be for the Government to respond to the report.

Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform

Research Australia's submission to the initial draft of the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017, in January 2018, highlighted that the Bill would have a disproportionate and unintended impact on the not for profit sector, including many health and medical research organisations. We, along with many others, called for the Bill to be amended to avoid these unintended consequences. Recent exposure draft amendments appear to address [these concerns and have been supported by Research Australia](#).

The Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters has considered the amendments and concluded that the 'amendments address the recommendations made by the Committee in its April 2018 Advisory Report on the Electoral Finance and Disclosure Bill 2017. A number of recommendations are made in this report aimed at further strengthening the Bill.' The Committee has [recommended several further amendments to the Bill](#) and to the Explanatory Memorandum.

The next step will be for the Government to respond to the report and for new amendments to be introduced and passed by Parliament.

4) MRFF

MRFF grants to universities could be eligible for indirect research costs funding

The Draft 2019 HERDC Specifications for the collection of 2018 data categorise MRFF competitive grants as Category 1 funding. If retained in the final version of the specification, this means that MRFF grants to universities will attract the same level of support for indirect research costs as those from the NHMRC and ARC. The consultation on the Draft closed on 17 October.

While this is a very welcome development, and one Research Australia has been advocating for, it is important the pool of funding for the Research Support Program is increased proportionally to reflect the larger pool of grants to which the RSP now relates. This will be a subject of Research Australia's

Pre Budget submission, together with a continued call for a whole-of-Government review of support for indirect research funding costs.

MRFF Priorities

The public consultation on the next MRFF Priorities has concluded, and the new Priorities are expected to be published by the Australian Medical Research Advisory Board in November.

The latest information on MRFF funding opportunities and announcements is available on Research Australia's dedicated [MRFF webpage](#).

5) COAG

Obesity

The Council of Health Ministers on 12 October considered a number of agenda items relating to obesity. It was agreed that 'a national strategy be developed on obesity with a strong focus on the primary and secondary prevention measures, social determinants of health, especially in relation to early childhood and rural and regional issues.'

National review of Human Tissue Acts in Australia

The Council of Health Ministers also noted that it is 40 years since all Australian jurisdictions enacted laws to regulate the use of human tissue. The Council has asked the 'Attorney-General of Australia to request the Australian Law Reform Commission to review existing human tissue laws to ensure they are contemporary, based on principles that can accommodate emerging technologies, promote national consistency across Australia and are do not contribute to barriers to organ and tissue donation. This should include consideration of the current Commonwealth review. A national review is timely to ensure modernisation and harmonisation legislation across the jurisdictions to support a consistent and responsive framework for human tissue donation, transplantation, address deficiencies and use for therapeutic purposes, education and research.'

Research Australia will monitor developments.

6) Research Australia's latest submissions

Keep up to date with policy announcements affecting our sector. Click to view our [current consultations](#) and [latest submissions](#).

f mental illness on the economy and provide recommendations on how the Government can most effectively improve population mental health, and social and economic participation'. The Terms of

Reference and period for the Inquiry are yet to be set. Research Australia will continue to monitor developments and provide updates.

Royal Commission into Aged Care Health and Safety

Further details of the Royal Commission, including the appointment of the two Commissioners and the Terms of Reference, were released on 9 October. The Terms of Reference are broad, and Research Australia believes researchers will play a critical role assisting the Commissioners identify how Australia can deliver safer, higher quality aged care. Read the announcement [here](#).

Aged Care Workforce Strategy

Discussion of the Royal Commission overshadowed the release of the [Report of the Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce](#) at the end of September. Recommendation 12 proposes establishing an 'Aged Care Centre for Growth and Translational Research (CGTR), (which) will foster formalised collaboration between end users, leading aged care researchers, investors and workforce educators that provide the skills, knowledge and infrastructure to support translation of aged care workforce related research and technology from conception to market'. The Recommendation envisages the Centre drawing on MRFF funding among other sources.

The Government has yet to respond to the Report.

MRFF

MRFF grants to universities could be eligible for indirect research costs funding

The *Draft 2019 HERDC Specifications for the collection of 2018 data* categorise MRFF competitive grants as Category 1 funding. If retained in the final version of the specification, this means that MRFF grants to universities will attract the same level of support for indirect research costs as those from the NHMRC and ARC. The consultation on the Draft closed on 17 October.

While this is a very welcome development, and one Research Australia has been advocating for, it is important the pool of funding for the Research Support Program is increased proportionally to reflect the larger pool of grants to which the RSP now relates. This will be a subject of Research Australia's Pre Budget submission, together with a continued call for a whole-of-Government review of support for indirect research funding costs.

MRFF Priorities

The public consultation on the next MRFF Priorities has concluded, and the new Priorities are expected to be published by the Australian Medical Research Advisory Board in November.

The latest information on MRFF funding opportunities and announcements is available on Research Australia's dedicated [MRFF webpage](#).

In Parliament

R&D Tax Incentive

There is currently a Bill before the House of Representatives that seeks to impose a cap on the refundable R&D Tax Incentive, exempt clinical trials from the cap and lower the rate of the refundable and non-refundable R&D Incentives. (These measures stem from the Review of the R&D tax Incentive undertaken in 2016 and announced in the Budget in May 2018.)

While the proposed reduction in the rates is a negative, we expect the exemption of clinical trials from the cap will protect many companies in the health and medical research and innovation sectors from the greatest impact.

The [Treasury Laws Amendment \(Making Sure Multinationals Pay Their Fair Share of Tax in Australia and Other Measures\) Bill 2018](#) (the R&D Tax Incentive is one of the 'Other Measures') is expected to pass the House of Representatives and to then be the subject of a Senate Inquiry. Research Australia is continuing to monitor developments.

My Health Records (Strengthening Privacy) Bill 2018

In response to the public concerns expressed during the opt out campaign for the My Health Records, the Government is seeking to tighten third party access to individuals' My Health Records. Applications by law enforcement and other government agencies will require a court order if this Bill is legislated. It has been passed by the House of Representatives and is currently before the Senate, where it is the subject of a [Senate Committee Inquiry Report](#), which recommended on 12 October that the Bill be passed. Research Australia's submission to the Inquiry is available [here](#). On 16 October the Coalition caucus approved further amendments to the Bill, which appear likely to be introduced in the Senate. The ALP and the Greens are expected to seek further amendments to the Bill.

My Health Records System Inquiry

Another parallel Senate Inquiry into the MHR system more broadly has also been conducted by the Senate and the Report is available [here](#). [Research Australia also made a submission](#) to this Inquiry.

The Committee has recommended further amendments be made to the legislation, including to impose higher default settings for access, and better privacy protections for 14 to 17 year olds. In a measure that could have implications for research, The Committee has also recommended *'data which is likely to be identifiable from an individual's My Health Record not be made available for secondary use without the individual's explicit consent.'* Exactly what 'likely to be identifiable from an individual's My Health Record' is not immediately clear. The Coalition Senators on the Committee have opposed this recommendation on the grounds that *'making the system 'opt-in' for research purposes would greatly diminish the potential data pool and limit the potential benefits highlighted above. It could also lead to distortions in data sets and individuals who chose to opt-in under this approach may not be a representative sample of the wider Australian public.'*

Other recommendations include extending the opt out period and a more targeted comprehensive education campaign about the MHR, and greater efforts to educate and support vulnerable and hard to reach communities.

The next step will be for the Government to respond to the report.

Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform

Research Australia's submission to the initial draft of the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017, in January 2018, highlighted that the Bill would have a disproportionate and unintended impact on the not for profit sector, including many health and medical research organisations. We, along with many others, called for the Bill to be amended to avoid these unintended consequences. Recent exposure draft amendments appear to address these concerns [and have been supported by Research Australia](#).

The Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters has considered the amendments and concluded that the *'amendments address the recommendations made by the Committee in its April 2018 Advisory Report on the Electoral Finance and Disclosure Bill 2017. A number of recommendations are made in this report aimed at further strengthening the Bill.'* The Committee has [recommended several further amendments to the Bill](#) and to the Explanatory Memorandum.

The next step will be for the Government to respond to the report and for new amendments to be introduced and passed by Parliament.

COAG

Obesity

The Council of Health Ministers on 12 October considered a number of agenda items relating to obesity. It was agreed that *'a national strategy be developed on obesity with a strong focus on the primary and secondary prevention measures, social determinants of health, especially in relation to early childhood and rural and regional issues.'*

National review of Human Tissue Acts in Australia

The Council of Health Ministers also noted that it is 40 years since all Australian jurisdictions enacted laws to regulate the use of human tissue. The Council has asked the *'Attorney-General of Australia to request the Australian Law Reform Commission to review existing human tissue laws to ensure they are contemporary, based on principles that can accommodate emerging technologies, promote national consistency across Australia and are do not contribute to barriers to organ and tissue donation. This should include consideration of the current Commonwealth review. A national review is timely to ensure modernisation and harmonisation legislation across the jurisdictions to support a consistent and responsive framework for human tissue donation, transplantation, address deficiencies and use for therapeutic purposes, education and research.'*

Research Australia will monitor developments.

Research Australia's latest submissions

Keep up to date with policy announcements affecting our sector. Research Australia's website is regularly updated with information about [current consultations](#) and our [latest submissions](#).

Follow us on

