

RESEARCH MATTERS **JULY 2019**

Welcome to Research Matters. With the Federal election quickly receding in the rearview mirror, we take a look at the implications for health and medical research and in particular, what might be coming up.

To contribute to or discuss any of the items in this edition, please email Greg Mullins, Head of Policy, at greg.mullins@researchaustralia.org, or on (03) 9662 9420.

Research Funding

MRFF

The start of 2019 saw a flurry of MRFF funding announcements and the Budget laid out a 10 year, \$5 billion plan for funding disbursements from the MRFF.

The ten successful applications for the first stage of the Frontiers Program have been announced, and details of this and other MRFF funding are available on the Research Australia website [here](#).

It is worth noting that the second funding round for the Frontiers Program is expected to open in October, a couple of months earlier than the first round last year.

Capital Injection

The next capital injection into the MRFF will occur on 23 July. At \$7.8 billion, this is by far the single largest addition and will take the total capital contributed to the MRFF to more than \$17 billion.

The final instalment, to be contributed in the second half of 2020, will take the MRFF to \$20 billion, and mark the delivery of the Government's full commitment to the Fund. .

The impact of this funding will be seen over the next few years, with the funding available from the MRFF rising from around \$400 million in this financial year to \$580 million in 2020/21.

This is a rapid increase in funding from the first allocation of \$53 million only three years ago. With annual investments in health and medical research and innovation on this scale, the MRFF has enormous potential to transform how medical research is undertaken and translated in Australia.

NHMRC

The NHMRC continues to work through the first full year of funding under its revised programs.

After receiving feedback from the sector, NHMRC has set the open, minimum data and close dates for the following major grant schemes in 2020.

Scheme	Open	Minimum data due	Close
Investigator Grants	2 Oct 2019	30 Oct 2019	27 Nov 2019
Synergy Grants	26 Feb 2020	25 March 2020	22 April 2020
CTCS Grants	4 March 2020	1 April 2020	29 April 2020
Ideas Grants	11 March 2020	8 April 2020	6 May 2020

Personal Health Information

Genetic testing and life Insurance

While health insurers are prevented from discriminating against people based on their medical history or conditions, the same is not true of life insurance. Individuals seeking life insurance and other products issued by life insurers, such as trauma and disability insurance, have a legal obligation to tell the insurer about any condition they might have which could be relevant, and the insurer is able to exclude cover for this condition.

There has been significant concern for several years that this disclosure obligation is discouraging people from undertaking genetic testing, including participating in clinical trials involving genetic testing.

With effect from 1 July, this obligation has been removed in relation to genetic tests where the insurance cover is less than \$500,000. The exemption takes the form of a standard issued by the Financial Services Council (FSC), the peak body for life insurers operating in Australia

In the press release announcing the moratorium FSC CEO Sally Loane said *“this means if you want to get a genetic test or take part in genomic research and not share the results with your life insurer - you now can.*

“We know the community benefits from genomic research and the Moratorium is key to giving Australians the reassurance they need and the flexibility to evolve as the science does.

“Genomic research has already led to better treatments for a number of illnesses, such as breast cancer, and has led to new ways for people to understand and better manage their health risks.”

Clinical Quality Registries

The role of Clinical Quality Registries (CQRs) in improving the safety, quality and effectiveness of healthcare delivery is well recognised, but CQRs are currently under-utilised and under resourced in the Australian health system.

The Australian Government has initiated the development of a National Strategy for CQRs with the objective of introducing standards and accreditation, as well as improving their efficiency.

The initial round of consultation has now closed, but significant work remains to implement this strategy over the next decade, including the critical issue of funding. CQRs are useful for research but primarily they are a quality assurance tool of the health system and should be seen (and funded) as such.

Data Sharing and Release

The proposed Data Sharing and Release legislation is part of the Government’s response to the Productivity Commission Report and implements key recommendations.

Early drafts include provisions to implement the Commission’s proposal for researchers to have ‘trusted user’ status and a purpose test against which access requests will be tested.

Research Australia has participated in a roundtable on the legislation which is

expected to reconvene in August ahead of the release of an exposure draft for broad consultation in late 2019.

VAHI Data Request Hub

The Victorian Agency for Health Innovation (VAHI) has launched a Data Request Hub to help improve the release of deidentified health data, including for research purposes (ethics approval required).

The Hub facilitates access to data across Victoria's health system, including hospitals and health services, mental health, alcohol and other drugs and perinatal data. The Hub can also be used to ask a question about the data or measures in an existing VAHI report.

Further information is available on the [VAHI website](#).

Prevention

Research Australia has welcomed the recent announcement by the Australian Health Minister Greg Hunt that he will establish an Australian Preventive Health Strategy.

'It is widely acknowledged that evidence-based preventive measures are typically the highest return investments that can be made to improve the health of our community. They include measures such as vaccination programs and consumer education and awareness campaigns' said Research Australia CEO, Nadia Levin.

'New prevention measures start with research, and research can refine and improve existing prevention measures. Research Australia will be advocating for a central role for research in the new Preventive Health Strategy.'

Research Australia has written to the Minister expressing support for the Strategy and emphasising the need for the health and

medical research sector to be represented at the Roundtable being convened to advance development of the Strategy.

R&D

Where now for the R&DTI changes?

On 11 February 2019, the Senate Committee handed down [its report](#) on the Government's proposed changes to the R&D TI.

The Committee recommended that *"the Senate defer consideration of the bill until further examination and analysis of the impact of schedules 1–3 is undertaken. In particular, the committee recommends that:*

- *the approach to the cap on the refundable portion of the Research and Development (R&D) tax incentive is refined, noting investment decisions already taken; and*
- *the formula for R&D intensity is refined, noting inherent differences in R&D intensity across industries and impacts on businesses with large operating costs."*

The Bill lapsed when the election was called, and any further attempt to amend the R&D Tax Incentive will require the introduction of a new Bill.

While the Treasurer has signalled that proceeding with changes to the R&DTI is a high priority, a new Bill has not been included in the proposed legislation to be introduced in the current Spring session of Parliament. Treasury officials are working on a new proposal and as yet there are no details or timeline.

Submissions and Consultations

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**.

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