

Research Australia response to the Health Technology Assessment Policy and Methods Review

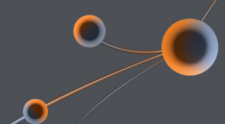
5 June 2023

Background

The Health Technology Assessment Policy and Methods Review is a commitment in the 2022-2027 Strategic Agreement between the Commonwealth and Medicines Australia, being conducted by the Department of Health.

The HTA Review is being undertaken by a Reference Committee. In this initial phase of the consultation, the Committee has sought feedback on specific questions, with responses to be made by electronic submission.

Research Australia has responded to two questions in the survey. We acknowledge the support of our members in formulating this submission in particular, Macquarie University Centre for the Health Economy.



Current or future barriers to earliest possible access

Reducing time to access for Australians so that they can access new health technologies as early as possible is recognised as a shared goal of both the Government and Medicines Australia as agreed under clause 5.1 of the Strategic Agreement.

Details of elements and features of HTA policy and methods in Australia that you think are acting as a current or future barrier to earliest possible access.

Question:

What are the elements and features of HTA policy and methods that are acting as a current barrier to earliest possible access?

Where possible, please detail:

- Specific examples or experiences
- The specific policy, method and/or mechanism that is causing the barrier
- The group/s being impacted
- The magnitude of the impact
- The group/s in the HTA approval pathway contributing to these issues.

Research Australia's response:

Modern life is underpinned by science, and nowhere is this more evident or important than in medicine. Enormous advances have been made in the last century in the development of new medicines and medical technologies, which have saved innumerable lives and improved the quality of life for tens of millions. This progress is continuing, with new knowledge being acquired and applied every day in ways that bring new drugs and medical technologies to the patient.

Keeping up with this increasing pipeline of new products is an ongoing challenge for regulators, our health professionals and our health system.

There are many new drugs and technologies that cross over traditional boundaries. Some new treatments incorporate drugs and delivery technologies, or combine diagnosis, monitoring and treatment. The recent broadening of the National Medicines Policy to include medicines related services and devices used to administer and monitor the response to medicines, or in combination with medicines, is evidence of this change. The recent experience around autologous treatments, which has allowed therapies that used an individual's own stem cells to proceed without effective oversight or regulation, are an example of the problems that can be created when we draw the boundaries too rigidly, creating loopholes that can be exposed and/or place patients at risk.

There is also a blurring of boundaries between consumer devices and medical devices and this is likely to continue, particularly with the growth of telehealth and the rise of products designed to be used in the home setting to monitor health and/or symptoms. Regulatory

overreach could be detrimental to consumers and patients by stifling innovation and making products more expensive, while a lack of oversight can place lives at risk. Any response needs to be proportionate to the risk of the therapy/ device.

This is no easy task, and there are no simple solutions. It requires a regulator that is well placed to collect information about emerging trends in Australia and overseas and is able to consult quickly and effectively with product manufacturers, innovators, health professionals and consumers. This horizon-scanning should inform the kinds of HTA methodologies that Australia must invest in, ensuring our health economics community is supported to deliver assessments across complex, emerging technologies as our health system evolves and changes.

Question:

Would you like to provide feasible options or suggestions you have to improve elements of HTA policy and methods that are acting as a current or future barrier to earliest possible access?

Where possible, please detail:

- Specific examples or experiences
- The specific policy, method and/or mechanism being suggested
- The group/s in the HTA approval pathway that will need to contribute to the solution
- The outcome the suggestion is expected to achieve
- Any foreseeable risks or negative impacts the suggested change may have and possible ways to mitigate them.

Research Australia's response:

Investing in the health technology assessment workforce

The health technology assessment workforce is vital to ensuring the Government makes informed decisions on whether to subsidise medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and services through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS).

Large evaluation teams located within universities are responsible for evaluating nearly all submissions to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC). Evaluators require specialist skills, gained through post graduate training in health economics and on-the-job training that takes up to two years for an individual to become an independently competent evaluator.

A lack of funding from NHMRC and MRFF to evaluate health technology assessment methods means many evaluators find it challenging to progress through traditional university career pathways. Many evaluators move over to the pharmaceutical sector where wages are higher and career paths are clearer. This puts pressure on the Department of Health and Aged Care and evaluator teams.

For too long Australia has relied on other countries, in particular the UK, to progress health technology methods research. Australia has gone from leading the world with the introduction of PBAC to becoming a laggard. This is to the detriment of developing skills and experience among Australian evaluators. It has created substantial barriers for the health economics community to create a viable and progressive evaluation ecosystem.

Research Australia recommends that training and research grants be established by the Department of Health and Aged Care to support training university based evaluation teams. Training grants would help evaluator teams become more consistent in their approach to evaluations, thereby reducing the need to revise draft evaluations. Research grants would provide opportunities for evaluators to pursue health technology assessment methods research.

The grants could be funded by the Department of Health and Aged Care on a cost recovery basis. The most viable option is to charge a modest, additional fee for each medicine application that the sponsor pays. Revenue from these fees would sit within a fund managed by the Department of Health and Aged Care. The Department could draw from this fund for training evaluators and to allocate competitive grants for health technology assessment methods. The topics for research could be guided by strategies and priorities jointly determined by the Department of Health and Aged Care and the evaluator community.

Current limited capacity and capability means the evaluation community is ill-equipped to meet future evaluation challenges posed by new technologies. The Department of Health and Aged Care must better support the development of a vibrant and sustainable university based evaluation community by investing more in training and research if it wants to ensure a sustainable evaluation community and lead the world in evaluating medicines.

Nadia Levin
CEO & Managing Director
02 9295 8547
nadia.levin@researchaustralia.org

ABOUT RESEARCH AUSTRALIA

Established with the assistance of the Federal Government in 2002, Research Australia is the national alliance representing the entire health and medical research (HMR) pipeline, from the laboratory to the patient and the marketplace. Research Australia works to position Australian HMR as a significant driver of a healthy population and a healthy economy.

Our vision: Research Australia envisions a world where Australia unlocks the full potential of its world-leading health and medical research sector to deliver the best possible healthcare and global leadership in health innovation.

Our mission: To use our unique convening power to position health and medical research as a significant driver of a healthy population and contributor to a healthy economy.

Our role:

Engage

Australia in a conversation about the health benefits and economic value of its investment in health and medical research.

Connect

researchers, funders and consumers to increase investment in health and medical research from all sources.

Influence

government policies that support effective health and medical research and its routine translation into evidence-based practices and better health outcomes

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