

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Funding and Resourcing for the CSIRO

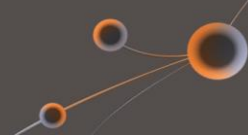
Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the Senate Inquiry into Funding and Resourcing for the CSIRO.

As the national peak body for the health and medical research and innovation sector, Research Australia is deeply concerned by the recent announcement of further job and program cuts to the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). The termination of 300-350 full-time roles at the CSIRO represents a 6% decrease in the current workforce, in addition to the 818 pre-existing job cuts made in the past 18 months. Australia faces a confluence of national challenges including the rising chronic disease burden, ongoing inequities in access to healthcare and health outcomes, and limited economic diversification and productivity. Now is the time for government to position public investment in health and medical research and innovation as a catalyst to delivering long-term and equitable social, economic and productivity dividends - not overseeing the decline of our national research capabilities.

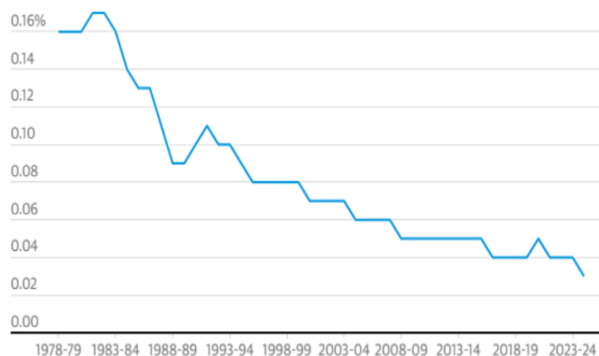
Around a quarter (24%) of all Australian research and development (R&D) spending is on health and medical research, amounting to an annual investment of around \$10.44 billion. A portion of this funding supports the CSIRO, which directly contributes to the health and medical research and innovation sector in a multitude of ways, from supporting foundational and applied research, to diagnostics and vaccine development, as well as enabling technologies and our understanding of public health and prevention. We acknowledge there are economic constraints of running such a large research organisation with aging infrastructure and other assets, however as a critical organisation within the health and medical research and innovation system, investments in the CSIRO should not be viewed as discretionary spending, but as strategic public investment towards achieving a future-ready, prosperous and thriving Australia. Research Australia offers the following perspectives and recommendations, drawing on the insights of our members and ongoing advocacy to ensure sufficient long-term and sustainable investment in the sector and the workforce which underpins it.

Australia's flatlining R&D expenditure

Nationally, Australian gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) as a percentage of GDP has been in a state of decline over the past decade – 1.69% in 2023-24 compared to 1.88% in 2015-16¹. Beyond domestic comparisons, Australian government R&D investment is at an historic low, flagging behind the OECD average by \$1.8 billion per annum². This concerning trend in national R&D investment has been mirrored at the CSIRO, as demonstrated in the chart below which shows sustained declines in funding as a percentage of GDP over a near-50-year period from 0.16% of GDP in 1978-79 to just 0.03% of GDP in 2024-25³.



CSIRO funding as a percentage of GDP



Research Australia acknowledges that there have been increases in the total funding allocated to the CSIRO and other bodies administering research funding, such as the NHMRC, over time. Over the last 15 years CSIRO's appropriation funding rose by 1.3 per cent per annum, however critically funding increases are not keeping pace with the rising costs of undertaking research – with inflation rising by an average of 2.7 per cent over the same period⁴.

Source: Guardian graphic / Parliamentary Library

Researchers across the nation are struggling under the pressure of the rising costs of conducting research, particularly for infrastructure and technology, and higher competition for increasingly finite public funding. This dynamic is resulting in real terms financial cuts to the CSIRO and other research bodies reliant on public investment and, by extension, causing a cycle of decline and job insecurity/cuts which is undermining the nation's future research capacity, as well as the health and wealth of the nation.

If Australia is to remain world-leading in research and development outputs and health outcomes, we need to stop chronic underinvestment and fund the research, workforce, systems and infrastructure which enable growth, prosperity and equity. To enable this, government must commit to ongoing annual funding increases for the CSIRO and other bodies administering public funding for health and medical research and innovation at a minimum in line with the CPI-rate to prevent real terms cuts to funding, while also defining a pathway to fund the full costs of research, including infrastructure, in a rational and sustainable way. These increases should form part of the development of a measurable path to R&D investment of 3% of GDP to ensure Australia remains globally competitive and future ready.

The critical importance of strategic public investment in research

The benefits of sustained investment in health and medical research and innovation are multi-faceted and wide ranging through the CSIRO and beyond. Rising health system demand, demographic changes and an ageing population, as well as chronic disease and stagnant productivity and economic dynamism, represent key barriers to the future prosperity of the nation. A well-supported and flourishing health and medical research and innovation sector is a catalyst to reducing these national burdens, whether through the generation of new high-value industries, novel treatments which enable workforce participation, or optimising models of care – strong investment in research underpins our health and national wealth. With every \$1 invested in Australian health and medical research yielding close to \$4 back to the Australian economy⁵, any cuts to public investment represent a missed opportunity to support economically generative activity which strengthens national prosperity and inclusive growth.

While more public funding is essential, it is also critical that future investment is strategically allocated. Alignment with existing and emerging policy frameworks, including the National

Health and Medical Research Strategy, Strategic Examination of Research and Development (SERD) and National Science and Research Priorities, as well as the 2026 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap, is key to prevent duplication and further fragmentation of disparate parts of the R&D pipeline. Research Australia also strongly supports the scaling of co-investment models, bringing together government, industry, philanthropy and other funders to diversify and grow investment and research capacity.

Public resourcing of Australian sovereign scientific capability

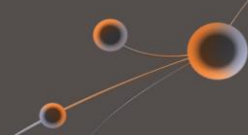
It is crucial that development of our sovereign scientific capabilities is safeguarded through sustainable public resourcing in organisations such as the CSIRO. Publicly funded science underpins our ability to respond to security threats, pandemics and health emergencies with evidence-informed interventions, therefore maintaining national security and population health. Furthermore, it builds economic dynamism through the development of local high-growth industries and manufacturing via commercialisation pathways, while also contributing to increasing the skilled domestic workforce. Together, these lead to increased economic resilience and productivity dividends in the face of increasing geopolitical instability, while elevating Australia as an attractive investment destination for domestic and international partners. We can only develop our sovereign scientific capability and capitalise on the benefits of doing so with strong and strategic public investment informed by the national interest and policy agenda. Cuts to the CSIRO directly undermines this capacity development and should be reversed as an immediate priority.

Addressing workforce security and pathways for early-mid-career researchers

Research Australia is deeply concerned by the significant ongoing staff cuts at the CSIRO and the impact of this on the sector as well as researcher wellbeing and morale at all career stages both within the CSIRO and more broadly. Large scale redundancies as a method of budget saving, such as is being implemented at the CSIRO, risks the loss of irreplaceable skills and talents that will be hard to be rebuild, if at all, in the future. Research Australia questions if the job losses will create the financial stability intended and, as the public is being asked to support such measures, calls for further transparency around the nature of the cuts and research units, projects and capabilities impacted at the organisation, as and when available.

A strong and sustainable health and medical research and innovation workforce underpin the capacity of Australia's health and innovation system to generate, translate, and apply evidence that improves health outcomes, supports innovation, and drives economic growth. Without a well-supported and diverse workforce, the health and medical research and innovation sector will not flourish. Furthermore, the retention of expertise, knowledge and learning within the workforce is a critical enabler for a high-functioning system and the development of sovereign capabilities and should be protected, not superseded by job insecurity and increased competition for short-term and increasingly finite funding.

As Australia's national science agency, the scale of job cuts at the CSIRO sets a disappointing tone for aspiring researchers, particularly Early-Mid-Career Researchers/Academics (going forward - EMCRs), leading to further perceptions of research as an unstable career path. Research Australia has identified significant challenges in supporting and retaining this critical

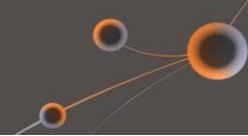


workforce segment more broadly across the sector, with EMCs frequently reporting difficulties such as poor work-life balance, underpayment relative to qualification, inadequate career development and support, and stress. Data collection must be improved to monitor these trends and quantify the workforce through the development of a bi-annual National Early-Mid Career Researcher Survey. This should happen in tandem with the development and central funding of professional development, networks and mentorship opportunities and improvements to the accessibility and duration of grant funding to increase job security. Attracting and retaining this critical workforce segment is vital to prevent breaks in the workforce pipeline and protect the future functioning of the sector. As well as reversing staff attrition, further reform is needed to improve the long-term retention of researchers. Previous Research Australia analysis highlighted how short-term contract employment (particularly under a 12-month term) was commonplace across the sector and far higher than the national average for contract employment use across different sectors in the economy⁶. This is supported by findings in the Universities Accord, which highlighted a considerable rise in casual staff employment in the higher education sector since 1995⁷. This trend is again mirrored in the CSIRO, which according to the agency's Annual Report 2024-25, classed 26% of staff as non-ongoing employees (including casual employees) as of June 30, 2025⁸.

Addressing workforce security requires a range of measures such as increased investment, robust workforce data capture, monitoring and evaluation, as well as the implementation of tailored supports for priority populations and workforce segments. Research Australia notes the proposal in the SERD issues paper *Foundational research* to allocate a minimum share of grants that run for 5 years or longer, which could be used as an approach to safeguard some job security within the sector. This must be developed alongside incentives and institutional accountability for workforce stability and the strengthening of employment protections and workforce standards across the sector. The National Health and Medical Research Workforce Plan presents a timely opportunity to address these long-standing issues for the benefit of the whole sector, including the CSIRO.

The effects of cuts on the program of scientific work conducted by the CSIRO

Strong and sustainable investment in broad base fundamental and basic scientific study is essential for our understanding of human health and healthcare solutions, particularly given the cross-disciplinary and intersectional nature of health and medical research and innovation. Taking the proposed cuts to the Environment Research Unit at the CSIRO as an example, reductions to the generation of evidence in this field will directly undermine future understanding of the impact of planetary health on human health, health system resilience and health equity – all of which are essential to our future prosperity in the face of the growing threat of climate change. Evidence-based solutions to these challenges and their intersectional impacts requires strategic investment across the research ecosystem and the bridging of climate science, health, and social science disciplines. Pulling back from developing a multidisciplinary, integrated research agenda will harm the creation of holistic interventions which serve all Australians and must be reversed without delay.



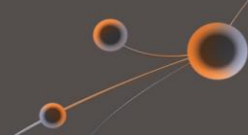
Recommendations

- Commit to ongoing annual funding increases for the CSIRO and other bodies administering public funding for health and medical research and innovation at a minimum in line with the CPI-rate to prevent real terms cuts to funding.
- Define a pathway to fund the full costs of research, including infrastructure, in a rational and sustainable way.
- Develop a measurable path to national R&D investment of 3% of GDP.
- Align new public investment with existing and emerging policy frameworks, including the National Health and Medical Research Strategy, SERD, the National Science and Research Priorities, as well as the 2026 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap.
- Scale co-investment models which bring together government, industry, philanthropy and other funders to diversify and grow investment and research capacity.
- Government funders such as the NHMRC, MRFF and ARC to allocate a minimum share of grants that run for 5 years or longer to safeguard job security within the sector.
- Government should initiate further transparency around the nature of the cuts and research units, projects and capabilities impacted at the organisation, as and when available.
- Undertake a comprehensive annual Health and Medical Research and Innovation Workforce Data Collection to ensure ongoing monitoring and evaluation of workforce trends.
- Government to fund the implementation of a bi-annual EMCR Survey.
- Create centrally funded national programs for EMCRs to increase professional development, networks, and mentorship opportunities.
- Develop incentives and institutional accountability for workforce stability and the strengthening of employment protections and workforce standards across the sector.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the Senate Inquiry into Funding and Resourcing for the CSIRO. We look forward to continuing partnering with government, our members and all relevant stakeholders to elevate the critical role of sustainable, scaled, smarter investment in health and medical research and innovation and the workforce which underpins it, to benefit the health and wealth of all Australians.

For further information regarding this submission please contact Dr Talia Avrahamzon, Head of Policy, Projects and Advocacy at talia.avrahamzon@researchaustralia.org, or policy@researchaustralia.org.



Warm regards,



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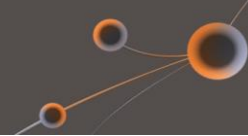
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About Research Australia

Setup by government following a landmark review in 2000, Research Australia is the national peak body for the health and medical research and innovation sector. Our membership is drawn from the whole pipeline of health and medical research and innovation, from universities and medical research institutes to charities and patient groups, and health care providers and companies commercialising new health technologies. Our priorities include a whole of systems approach to health and medical research and innovation, smarter investment, workforce and advancing prevention. Underpinning these priorities are equitable health outcomes; collaboration; AI and digital health, data and data linkage.

Declaration of interest

The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) is a member of Research Australia, however the policy positions and views expressed in this document are our own.



References

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