



WORKING TO BUILD A HEALTHY AUSTRALIA
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The Hon Tony Abbott MP
Minister for Health and Ageing
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Minister

**NATIONAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
STATEMENT OF INTENT (2007-08)**

I am pleased to provide you with my *Statement of Intent* for the 2007-08 financial year which sets out my plan for NHMRC to achieve the activities outlined in your *Statement of Expectation*.

Announcements over two successive budgets, with \$905 million in 2006/07 towards health and medical research, and over \$485 million in 2007/08 to support health and medical research facilities confirms the Government's commitment towards improving the health of Australians, and the clear expectations the government has on NHMRC to support our health and medical research sector.

Since becoming a Statutory Agency in July 2006, NHMRC has positioned itself to tackle the health challenges facing all Australians. We have made significant progress in a number of key areas, particularly towards the establishment of a new initiative to better provide the research evidence to underpin Australia's national public health policy and clinical practice.

I will continue to develop NHMRC as both a sapiential authority and Australia's peak source of balanced and independent, evidence based health and medical research advice. My aim to enhance NHMRC's reputation for independence and to build a responsive organisation founded on evidence and excellence.

This *Statement of Intent* builds on our excellent work of the past 12 months, and provides the clear blueprint for our activities over the coming year.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Government and the Department of Health and Ageing as we work to further improve the health of all Australians.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Warwick Anderson', written over a blue line.

Professor Warwick Anderson
Chief Executive Officer

16 October 2007

**NATIONAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
STATEMENT OF INTENT (2007-08)**

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<i>Program Priorities for 2007-2008</i>	
<p>Implement the <i>Prohibition of Human Cloning for Reproduction and the Regulation of Human Embryo Research Act 2006</i> including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring there is, within the NHMRC, appropriate administrative and technical capacity to manage and assess applications and monitor compliance with the increased scope of the legislation; • Establishment of procedures to ensure expertise is available to support the deliberations of the NHMRC Embryo Research Licensing Committee; and • Ensuring researchers, institutions, human research ethics committees and the public are aware of the changed legislation and their responsibilities. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer the <i>Prohibition of Human Cloning for Reproduction and the Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2006</i> in accordance with the wishes of Parliament; • Increase the capacity of our compliance monitoring; • Continue to recruit appropriate expertise to support deliberations of the Licensing Committee and the administrative requirements of the legislation; and • Continue our active educational processes with researchers, institutions and ethics committees, and expand our development of public education material consistent with resources available.
<p>Support the best research by funding health and medical research that builds on our past successes. In particular by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to administer research grants with a high degree of integrity and probity; • Funding more world standard health and medical research projects; • Recognising the actual cost of research; • Supporting longer-term research projects; • Continuing to foster and retain health and medical research expertise in Australia; • Increasing support for the translation of health and medical research outcomes through commercialisation; and • Establishing a bilateral fellowship exchange program between Australia and other countries (starting with China, India and Indonesia) 	<p>With the advice of Research Committee and Council, we will undertake both an internal and international external reviews of our funding schemes to ensure that NHMRC identifies and supports the best health and medical research. In particular, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to refine our administration of research grants, increase transparency and develop new and more transparent processes to ensure integrity and probity; • Subject all NHMRC peer review and decision making processes to international scrutiny; • Ensure that funding recommendations reflect actual costs of research; • Commit five per cent funding from the MREA for research relevant to Indigenous people; • Undertake a review of the <i>NHMRC Road Map: A Strategic Framework for Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health through Research</i>; • Encourage applicants to apply for research funding for grants of up to 5 years in duration; • Develop support for targeted programmatic approaches to major health issues through specific funding vehicles such as Request for Applications; • Improve our development grants to enhance translation of outcomes into commercialisation, and continue to seek input and advice from the private sector; • Review future health and medical research workforce needs and balances; including the evidence-based health sector workforce; and

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the China-Australia Fellowship Exchange scheme between Australia and China immediately, and establish additional fellowship exchange programs in the Asia-Pacific region.
<p>Produce the highest quality evidence-based guidelines and other forms of advice.</p> <p>Work to further implement the recommendations of the <i>Investment Review of Health and Medical Research</i> (the Grant Review) on policy and practice focused research, and to provide more active assistance to inform policy development in health.</p>	<p>To ensure NHMRC is positioned to be Australia's leading agency for the provision of rigorous evidence-based public health and clinical practice advice and guidelines, we will provide increased access to the best research evidence and advice. To support this, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement NHMRC Strategic Plan Objective 2 – Evidence base for health policy and practice – this includes policy and practice focused research and development of policy and practice partnerships; • Complete a review of the scope and scale of clinical practice guidelines in Australia through the National Institute of Clinical Studies (NICS); • Review and reform the NHMRC's role of publishing guidelines and setting standards for human health in health care and public health, with an emphasis on increased responsiveness without jeopardising quality; and • Place special emphasis on developing the evidence base to address the health issues confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
<p>Ensure the smooth transition of the NICS into the NHMRC and work with the Department in developing clinical best practice policy.</p>	<p>In order to complete the transition and integration of NICS and NHMRC's work plans; we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop and promote NICS leadership capabilities and the expertise of its staff in the implementation of evidence into clinical practice; and • Establish independent external processes in the development of clinical practice guidelines and other forms of evidence to inform clinical practice. • Continue to promote and support the adoption of public health and clinical practice guidelines in hospitals and community settings.
<p>Pursue research at the highest of ethical standards.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with research organisations to ensure effective implementation of the <i>Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research</i> and establish transparent NHMRC processes for instances of research misconduct; • Work with institutions, researchers, and Human Research Ethics Committees to ensure effective roll-out of the <i>National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research</i>; • Commence implementing arrangements to coordinate and harmonise ethical assessments of multi-site, multi-jurisdictional research; • Review existing processes and develop a proposal for a national system that meets the needs of participants, researchers and produces increased assurance to the public that research is conducted ethically; • Continue to improve the probity of our peer review and decision making processes; • Develop standards to guide the research sector's interaction with private sector sponsors; and • Continue to develop ethical standards for health and medical researchers in Australia.
<p>Encourage new avenues of investment and</p>	<p>We will:</p>

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increase leverage from Government investment in health and medical research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase investor awareness of opportunities arising from high quality NHMRC funded health and medical research, including commissioning a study to demonstrate the returns on investment in health and medical research; • Work with the Management Advisory Committee and the private sector to explore new ways to promote the commercial development of Australian health and medical research; and • Work collaboratively with the national and international charitable funding sector to support priority health and medical research.
Implement a communications strategy that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • informs the Australian public about NHMRC activities and research impacts and achievements resulting from the Government's investment in health and medical research; • fosters community debate on ethical issues; and • fosters linkages, partnerships and networks with stakeholders in government, the health and medical research professions and the community. 	We will improve and implement our communications strategy which will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop proposals for elevating the profile of health and medical research including opportunities to excite young minds to the wonders of science, medicine and health; • Lead community debate on significant issues in health and medical research, including issues relating to ethics; and • Strengthen existing relationships with key Australian and international health policy and research funding organisations, including DoHA.
Work with my Department in response to sectoral reviews by the Productivity Commission of regulatory burdens on business arising from the stock of Commonwealth Government legislation.	We will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen collaboration with DoHA and provide timely input into sector reviews undertaken by the Productivity Commission, including the <i>Annual Review of Regulatory Burdens on Business - Commissioned Study</i>; and • Review and streamline our compliance requirements for administering institutions.
Reporting	
Report to the Minister and to the Parliamentary Secretary regularly.	I will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report regularly on progress on the issues outlined in this <i>Statement of Intent</i>, on the NHMRC Strategic Plan (2006-2009) and the NHMRC Business Plan;
Report annually on your operations, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • details of all regulatory and interim regulatory recommendations; • details relating to the operations of the Licensing Committee as set out in the Act. 	I will provide an annual report in accordance with requirements outlined in the <i>Public Service Act 1999</i> and the <i>NHMRC Act 1992</i> .
Ensure that the Licensing Committee reports to Parliament in June and December, including information on the operation of, <i>Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002</i> and licenses issued under this Act.	I will provide biannual Licensing Committee reports on the operation of, and licences issued, in accordance with the <i>Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002</i> .
Culture	
Ensure that robust arrangements are in place to monitor, assess, report and review to identify and address potential weaknesses	We will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure continued compliance with NHMRC's legislative responsibility as a statutory agency;

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within the agency, including arrangements for early feedback and corrective action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue to promote and assess our performance against NHMRC's: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic Plan (2006-2009) - Annual Business Plan - Risk Management Framework - Business Continuity Plan - Fraud Control Plan • Strengthen procedures to ensure compliance with Government policy, including the APS Code of Conduct, and relevant Occupational Health and Safety legislation, and establish protocols for identifying and correcting possible breaches; and • Continue to support the NHMRC's Audit Committee established under section 46 of the <i>Financial Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) 1997</i>.
<i>Stakeholder Relationships and Consultative Arrangements</i>	
Operate in accordance with the agreed relationship protocol, recognising the Secretary is the principal source of advice to the Minister(s) on all matters within the portfolio and that NHMRC has independent statutory responsibility	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work closely with the Department of Health and Ageing; and • Ensure the Minister and the Department of Health and Ageing are briefed on emerging issues which may arise during this reporting period.
<i>NHMRC as an employer</i>	
As an employer in the APS, NHMRC should model APS standards and values.	<p>In accordance with the <i>Public Service Act 1999</i>, the <i>Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997</i>, and the Public Services Code of Conduct, we will effectively implement and maintain high standards of corporate governance and accountability through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with all relevant government legislation and policies; • Maintenance, regular review and promulgation of all policies and guidelines; and • Timely presentation of NHMRC's annual report to Parliament.
NHMRC as good place to work, family friendly and inclusive of our diverse community.	<p>As an independent agency within the Australian Government and with its evolving role under its new governance arrangements, I will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to develop the organisation as an exemplary public service organisation; • Develop a People Plan, including a workplace diversity program; • Develop an exciting new vision for the NHMRC which attracts and retains high quality staff; and • Promote a safe and family orientated workplace, fostering and developing the expertise of all staff.
NHMRC is well placed to effectively implement the Government's workplace policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will continue to fulfil NHMRC's obligations under the Government's <i>Workplace Relations Act 1996</i> (as amended); and • Implement strategies to ensure NHMRC becomes a high performing organisation cultivating an environment of commitment, innovation and achievement.

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<i>Any other issues of which the Minister should be made aware of</i>	
<p>Work plans for the Council and Principal Committees to address issues of major importance and significance. These are based on NHMRC Strategic Plan, as required by the <i>NHMRC Act 1992</i>, and address both the reduction of the burden of the major health issues of the country, and address the emerging health issues.</p>	<p>NHMRC principal committees, having defined issues of major and central importance to Australia's health, will tackle the major items set out below, including new major areas in health and research ethics.</p> <p><i>Australian Health Ethics Committee</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of life matters; • Commercialisation of human tissue; and • Post-coma unresponsiveness. <p><i>Human Genetics Advisory Committee</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidelines pursuant to s 95AA(1) of the <i>Privacy Legislation Amendment Act 2006</i>; • Ethical aspects of human genetic testing; • Guidelines for Genetic Registers; • Defining core competencies for health professionals in human genetics; and • Advice to the community on issues in genetics. <p><i>National Health Committee</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health; • Obesity; and • Complexity of the health system. <p><i>Research Committee</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New targeted funding schemes such as Requests for Applications; • Review all NHMRC research funding schemes; • New funding schemes to support policy and practice focussed research; and • New proposals for public health and medical research training <p>Finally, we will continue to provide advice through our Expert Committees on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antimicrobial resistance; • Transmissible spongiform encephalopathies; • Water quality; • Nanotechnology; • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health; and • Cellular therapies.