



## DISCUSSION PAPER

# DEVELOPING ADVANCED HEALTH RESEARCH CENTRES IN AUSTRALIA:

Integrating leadership in research and research translation  
to  
improve patient care and health professional education.

December 2010

## AIMS OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

NHMRC aims to:

- build Australia's capacity to undertake essential health and medical research; and
- promote and accelerate the translation of evidence from research into improved care for patients, and thereby support a self-improving health system.

## PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT:

To seek your feedback on a draft NHMRC proposal to encourage the development of Advanced Health Research Centres through universities, medical research institutes and hospitals working together to support research and research translation.

## BACKGROUND:

### NHMRC's commitment to research translation

Since its establishment 74 years ago, NHMRC has had the twin goals of supporting the conduct of research and supporting the uptake of evidence from research into improving patient care.

In 1936, the then Minister for Health, the Hon Billy Hughes commented in his statement establishing NHMRC that “*Research must be actively pursued and developed and as fast as new knowledge is acquired it must be applied*”. The commitment by NHMRC to these two goals has seldom varied since that time.

NHMRC's commitment to creating *new knowledge* through original, high quality research, the foundation for improvements in health, is substantial. Our support for discovery research will be around \$500 million in 2011, through the Project and Program Grant schemes.

NHMRC also supports researchers through a series of Fellowships schemes for top Australian researchers working at the forefront of research and knowledge creation in all fields at the highest international levels.

We also support *translation of research into improved health policy and practice, and commercialisation*, through funding schemes such as Centres of Research Excellence in Clinical Research, Public Health Research and Health Services Research, the Practitioner Fellowship scheme, and Enabling Grants. A recent initiative has been the Partnerships for Better Health grants, where researchers apply with support from a health sector organisation with policy or practice specific research needs.

As well, NHMRC Development Grants support research into establishing proof of principle for ideas for commercial development that come from NHMRC (or other) supported research.

NHMRC also works to improve research translation more generally through our support and endorsement of high quality clinical and public health guidelines, and evidence based statements on health matters.

## **Promoting stronger leadership in research translation and implementation**

Over the last twenty years or more, clusters of research excellence have developed associated with our major university health faculties and major hospitals around Australia. The quality of many of these is at the highest level on an international comparison and they offer great potential for the enhancement of an evidence-based health system.

NHMRC Council recently discussed whether additional value could be gained by encouraging further collaboration between universities, hospitals and medical research institutes. This collaboration could include:

- sharing advanced technical equipment and databases essential for 21st century health research;
- sharing research laboratories and other facilities and providing access to facilities and labs to clinicians on the campus;
- making stronger links between research and patient care (to boost “bench to bedside” translation);
- making better research use of data and information within the hospital to improve knowledge and patient care;
- providing university medical, nursing and allied health students with enhanced access to research and translational activities and a wider educational experience;
- providing nodes of excellence across the nation in evidence-based clinical care; and
- providing national leadership in research translation and evidence based clinical care through example.

In December 2009, NHMRC conducted a roundtable to discuss this. A report of that meeting is available at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research/ahrc/index.htm>.

## PROPOSAL

NHMRC wishes to encourage the development of stronger collaboration on our major hospital campuses by formally recognising the best collaborating centres and working with others to the further development of collaboration in research and its translation into better patient care.

We propose to invite consortia of universities, hospitals and medical research institutes to apply for recognition for excellence in research and research translation.

NHMRC proposes that the aims of Advanced Health Research Centres should be to:

1. promote excellence in health and medical research where clinical care is provided;
2. encourage collaboration between researchers on these campuses;
3. promote the uptake of research into improving clinical practice at that centre;
4. develop innovative models of care;
5. ensure efficient use of research facilities on the campus;
6. foster increased training in research of health care professionals; and
7. provide national leadership in excellence in research translation, to provide “flagship” examples to the whole health care system.

NHMRC proposes to recognise the most outstanding campuses with the designation as an ‘NHMRC Advanced Health Research Centre’.

## Proposed Selection Criteria

### 1. Aims of the centre

How the Advanced Health Research Centre proposes to meet NHMRC's aims for this initiative, as described above.

### 2. Collaborative gain

How there will be enhancement of current activities in research and translation through increased collaboration in research, translation, evidence-based clinical care and research training.

### 3. Research Excellence

The quality of research of the partners in the Advanced Health Research Centre will be judged on the basis of:

- total amount of NHMRC and other competitive national and international research funding received
- awards and recognition of the Centre leaders
- other indices of research excellence.

### 4. Research Translation

Applicants will be assessed on the current level of research translation, nationally and internationally, and on the Centre's plans to develop translational activities further. These should include plans for the involvement of a wide range of health professionals and of consumers<sup>1</sup>.

### 5. Governance

Applicants will be assessed on the quality and effectiveness of the governance arrangements to achieve the aims of the Centre<sup>2</sup>.

## Application assessment

NHMRC proposes that an international panel with expertise and experience in research and its translation will judge applications.

It will be essential that applications convince the review panel and NHMRC that there are real, enforceable and effective governance arrangements to ensure that the aims of the Centre can be achieved.

All aspects of health research and research translation will be taken into account and the involvement of health consumers in accord with NHMRC policy will also be valued.

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<sup>1</sup> See NHMRC's *Statement on Consumer and Community Participation in Health and Medical Research* (2002).

<sup>2</sup> No governance model is proposed in this discussion document. We seek comments on whether such a preferred model should be specified in the final document.

## MAKING COMMENTS:

**We invite your comments on this proposal, including on**

- the aims of the centres
- selection criteria, and
- governance.

**You may also wish to comment on the following additional matters:**

- the best size of Centres and geographical distribution of Centres- campus or regional
- the best ways to link to primary care
- how best to take achievements, relative to opportunity, into account
- there are strong philanthropic and private sector and community contributions to universities, hospitals and medical research institutes for health and medical research in Australia. How should Centres best utilise this community, private sector and community support?