



Public, Political, Scientific Advocacy

The Australian Society for Medical Research

5 July 2024

Submission to the Western Australian Parliament Inquiry into support for health and medical research funding and priorities.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the inquiry into Western Australian health and medical research priorities.

ASMR commends the Western Australian Government for the positive effects of the Future Health Research and Innovation fund on Western Australian health and medical research. This fund has been vital to supporting world class medical research in Western Australia, especially when national grant success rates have been steadily dropping. This decline in grant success is particularly evident in Western Australia, one of the states most impacted by the severe underfunding of the medical research sector¹.

Inflation and the increased cost of conducting research, combined with over a decade of static investment in the NHMRC has led to a halving in the number of funded grants over the last decade. In 2013, the national average success rate was 21.9% (1,226 grants worth \$812 million), compared to 14.0% (689 grants worth \$908 million) in 2023¹. With the number of successful grant applications halving, this affects the entire health and medical research workforce and is posing a particularly significant threat to early- and mid-career researchers².

The Australian Health and Medical Research Sector is unsustainable and at risk of losing a generation of research talent, and with it, the collapse of the sector.

Western Australia has the lowest funded NHMRC success rate in Australia: in 2023 only 8.8% of applications were funded compared to the national average of 14.0%¹. In 2013, the gap was smaller with Western Australia having a funded success rate of 18.9% compared to the national average of 21.9%¹. This represents 67 successful grants totalling \$43 million in 2013 compared to 23 successful grants totalling \$35 million in 2023¹. Success rates in Western Australia are a third of what they were a decade ago and the total amount of funding has decreased.

ASMR supports an inquiry into Western Australia's drop in funding success.

However, while Western Australia is one of the states most impacted by the current severe underfunding of the medical research sector¹, lobbying to increase grant success rates in Western Australia without increasing the total amount of funding available nationally will not be sufficient. Increasing medical research funding, such as by increasing the funds available to the Future Health Research and Innovation fund, will go a long way to supporting the sector. The Western Australia government lobbying at a federal level to increase the funds to the NHMRC will also work to secure the future of medical research in Western Australia.

Inquiries into funding priorities and the impact of specific types of research, while needed, will be met with limited success without an immediate increase in research funding.

ASMR will continue to lobby for an increase in the national funding available for medical research in Australia. ASMR provided the following recommendations for the 2024/2025 Federal Budget:

1. Ensuring a sustainable, world class medical research sector in Australia by increasing funding success rates to 20%.

How: *An immediate doubling of investment into medical research grant schemes, followed by a commitment to incrementally increase annual health and medical research investment to reach 3% of total health system expenditure.*

2. Ensuring a future for the medical research sector by investing in researchers of all career stages.

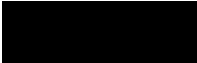
How: *Committing to a 20% success rate for researchers across all stages of their career.*

We ask that the Western Australian Parliament also lobby for increased funding to medical research on a national scale and work at a state level to bridge the gap in funding in Western Australia that is caused by the 10% drop in NHMRC grant success seen over the past decade. We also ask that future research priorities in Western Australia equally support both basic and clinical research as both are needed to develop and translate medical research findings into health outcomes.

ASMR supports the Western Australian Parliament Inquiry into support for health and medical research funding and priorities. Do not hesitate to contact the ASMR for further discussion of the concerns raised here.

With best regards,


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ASMR WA Convenor


Dr Dona Jayakody
ASMR-Executive Director

References:

1. National Health and Medical Research Council Grant Funding Outcomes
<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/funding/data-research/outcomes>
2. Christian K. et.al., *A survey of early-career researchers in Australia*, Elife 10: e60613, 2021