

South Australian Productivity Commission
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Dear Commissioners,

Submission in response to the Inquiry into Health and Medical Research in South Australia

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia working to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. It is the pre-eminent voice for the public's health in Australia, and seeks to drive better health outcomes through increased knowledge, better access and equity, evidence informed policy and effective population-based practice in public health. PHAA has clear policies on health promotion and illness prevention, including the Health Promotion and Illness Prevention Policy Position Statement (<https://www.phaa.net.au/documents/item/2880>), with the intention of improved population health.

We write further to the release of the Issues Paper on the 13 March 2020, reporting the Inquiry into Health and Medical Research in South Australia. The Issues Paper is comprehensive in its identification of the factors that relate to South Australia's capacity to attract investment in health and medical research.

Nothing highlights the importance of public health research more clearly than the current environment, whereby our community has been faced with a public health issue never before seen, COVID-19. The effectiveness of evidence-based public health prevention strategies and a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach has seen the health status of South Australian population remain largely unimpacted. Despite the effectiveness of such strategies, recent years have seen de-investment in prevention research in this state. The PHAA believes that direction of more funding toward the public health research component of health and medical research should be a key recommendation of the Productivity Commission's report.

Further to the need to focus funding in the direction of public health research, we wish to address some of the Information requests outlined in the Issues Paper, as follows:

Information request 4.1, measurement and data: we believe that clear process, impact, and outcome evaluation frameworks should be established for all research. Process evaluation is often overlooked in research planning yet is integral in demonstrating a causal link between observed outcomes and intervention theory. A comprehensive evaluation plan should be a key requirement of all research funding applications.

Information request 5.4, collaboration: we believe that collaboration between universities and research institutes in South Australia should be encouraged through the provision of funding for collaborative projects. Strengthening South Australian collaborative research will make the state more competitive

nationally, thereby bringing more research funding to South Australia and realising the associated benefits of research translation for better health outcomes. This will also provide opportunities to build local capacity, attract high performing researchers, and further develop existing research expertise in South Australia.

Much of the focus in health and medical research appears to be on clinical trials and laboratory-based research, rather than health protection, health promotion, and prevention approaches. We urge the Commission to consider that investment in public health leads to protection of the health of the public. An increased focus on this, to elevate public health in South Australia, as a complement to commercialisation of research outcomes, should be an objective of a reformed approach to health and medical research in South Australia.

PHAA looks forward to the outcomes of the submission process, and the opportunity to be involved in the consultation process following the release of draft recommendations.

Yours sincerely



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