

Media Release – Inquiry into Health and Medical Research in SA

Commission proposes reforms to SA health research system

The South Australian Productivity Commission (SAPC) today released the draft report for its inquiry into health and medical research in South Australia.

The SAPC was asked by the South Australian Government in February 2020 to recommend actions the government might take to increase the state's share of Australian Government funding for health and medical research (HMR) and increase the scale and productivity HMR in the public sector, medical research institution and private sector and its impact on the state's economic growth.

The Commission was also asked to recommend changes to the structure, governance and operation of publicly funded HMR to increase research output, productivity and translational impact.

The Commission received more than 50 submissions and correspondence, and consulted widely in preparing the draft report. It acknowledges with thanks the assistance from state government departments, universities, research institutions, industry, relevant peak bodies and other stakeholders.

"South Australia's health and medical research effort is critically important to the state becoming vibrant, modern competitive," Dr Butlin said. "Historically SA HMR was highly competitive by national standards, but its position in gaining competitive national research grant funding fell significantly over the past two decades."

The draft report concluded that national funding priorities had changed to emphasise impact and larger projects, the competition from other jurisdictions became harder and HMR was de-emphasised in the public health system over the past decade. One negative outcome has been the reduction in clinical research by researchers jointly appointed to hospitals and to collaborating universities and medical research institutes.

"Excellent clinical research is a key foundation for excellent medical staff and for improving health care, and is the essential foundation of any sustainable local health and medical industries sector," Dr Butlin said. "This is a key area that SA needs to rebuild to lift the impact of HMR on the health system and health outcomes for South Australia."

The draft report argues the HMR position can be fixed with a practical and staged long term plan that ensures all relevant South Australian government affiliated or associated entities:

- eliminate complexity and duplication
- establish alignment among the components of the HMR system, including budgets, measures and accountability
- focus on grass roots revival of clinician research in the public hospital system with effective partnerships with SA universities and medical research institutes.

"Our draft report sets out some directions for reform and identifies some options for discussion," Dr Butlin said. "Further consultation will improve the final recommendations the Commission will make in November. I welcome contributions from interested parties."

The South Australian Productivity Commission is an independent body established to make recommendations to the government to facilitate productivity growth, unlock new economic opportunities, support job creation and remove existing regulatory barriers within South Australia.

It provides the government with advice and recommendations based on evidence, rigorous analysis and impartial assessment.

BACKGROUND

- In February 2020, the SAPC was asked to assess the performance of Health and Medical Research (HMR) in SA. The terms of reference for the inquiry are available on the SAPC website at www.sapc.sa.gov.au

DRAFT REPORT

- The Commission has released its draft report to this inquiry. The draft report is available on the SAPC website at www.sapc.sa.gov.au
- The draft report set out the SAPC's analysis, current conclusions and draft recommendations for comment and consultation with interested parties.
- The SAPC encourages input from participants, with a deadline for written submissions of 9 October 2020.

NEXT STEPS

- The Commission will consult further with stakeholders on the draft report's findings, information requests for greater clarity of some issues and draft recommendations.
- The Commission will publish its final report in February 2021.

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