Research translators: powering the MRFF to save lives and create jobs

To the Editor: The Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) should be a policy triumph for the Australian Government, tackling unmet clinical needs through transformative research that saves lives, creates jobs and strengthens the industry.[1] However, to deliver these objectives, medical research findings must be translated from the laboratory and library to achieve impact on the clinic, community and companies.

The capacity for efficient health research translation has been limited in Australia.[2] The MRFF provided $20 million per year, finishing in 2021, to pump-prime Australia's ten health research translation centres designated by the National Health and Medical Research Council, in which we work. The Translation Centres bring health services and consumers together with health researchers from universities and medical research institutes. Distributed across the nation, the Centres have come together to form the Australian Health Research Alliance (AHRA), providing a "go to" destination for those seeking expertise in health research translation.[3]

We want to see that research- and translation-trained practitioners in medicine, nursing, allied health disciplines, clinical laboratories, pharmacy, health informatics and other frontline services have time stably funded to deploy their skills in a role we describe as "research translators".[4] Alongside conventional health care duties, such staff will have dedicated time to engage consumers, recruit participants to clinical research, partner with industry, prove the relevance of research to their service, promote best evidenced practice, and champion the adoption of innovation.

While overseas governments invest heavily in such roles, funding time for frontline clinical staff to deliver research and translation alongside their clinical work, Australia does not. For example, the National Institute of Health Research in the United Kingdom commits approximately $20 per citizen per year, with an impressive impact on lives saved, jobs created and industry invigorated.[5]

Australia should address this translational workforce gap or risk failure to achieve full beneficial impact from the MRFF.

About $65 million per year (about 10% of the MRFF investment income) would support a cadre of research translators broadly proportional to the provision from comparable research budgets overseas, with AHRA's Centres best placed to provide efficient coordination.

Thus, the MRFF would be powered for success by investing in research translators through AHRA, ensuring the triumph of an exciting new policy that promises benefit to all Australians.

John Savill[1]
Christopher Levi[2]
Gary Geelhoed[3]

1 Melbourne Academic Centre for Health, Melbourne, VIC.
2 Sydney Partnership for Health, Education, Research and Enterprise, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW.
3 Western Australian Health Translation Network, University of Western Australia, Perth, WA.

john.savill@unimelb.edu.au

Competing interests: No relevant disclosures. ∎

References are available online.

1 Australian Government, Department of Health. Medical Research Future Fund 10-year plan. https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/01/medical-research-future-fund-mrff-10-year-investment-plan.pdf (viewed Mar 2021).

2 Australian Government, Department of Health and Ageing. Strategic review of health and medical research: summary report (February 2013). https://cheba.unsw.edu.au/sites/cheba2/files/blog/pdf/Strategic_Review_of_Health_and_Medical_Research_Feb_2013-Summary_Report.pdf (viewed Mar 2021).

3 Teede HJ, Johnson A, Buttery J, et al. Australian Health Research Alliance: national priorities in data-driven health care improvement. *Med J Aust* 2019; 211: 494–497. https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2019/211/11/australian-health-research-alliance-national-priorities-data-driven-health-care

4 Geelhoed G, Jennings G, Levi C, et al. Research translators to improve healthcare outcomes and boost the economy. Australian Health Research Alliance, 2020. https://ahra.org.au/2020/10/01/research-translators-to-improve-healthcare-outcomes-and-boost-the-economy/ (viewed Mar 2021).

5 National Institute for Health Research. Impact and Value Report [website]. NIHR, 2019. https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/impact-and-value-report/21427?pr (viewed Mar 2021). ∎