



Australian Government
Australian Research Council

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, Legislation Committee
Inquiry into the *Medical Research Future Fund Bill 2015* and the
Medical Research Future Fund (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2015

Submission by the Australian Research Council

The Australian Research Council (ARC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee in relation to the Inquiry into the *Medical Research Future Fund Bill 2015* and the *Medical Research Future Fund (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2015*. This submission addresses the ARC's role in funding and supporting medical and health research.

The ARC is a Commonwealth entity that provides advice to the Government on research matters and administers the National Competitive Grants Program, a significant component of Australia's investment in research and development. The ARC's mission is to deliver policy and programmes that advance Australian research and innovation globally and benefit the community.

In seeking to achieve its mission, the ARC supports the highest quality fundamental and applied research and research training, through national competition across all disciplines, either in concert with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) or directly. To address specific Australian Government health and medical research priorities the ARC encourages partnerships between researchers and the industry, and is responsible for identifying excellence in research in Australia and creating incentives to improve the quality of research.

Medical research is strongly connected to other disciplines. As reflected in the Treasurer's Second Reading Speech on the *Medical Research Future Fund Bill 2015*, it is important to "support investment across the research spectrum" to contribute to "a better health system and improved health outcomes". To maximise the national and commercial benefits of research, it is vital that researchers are attracted to medical and health research from fields beyond clinical and medical disciplines. The ARC has a proven ability to support multidisciplinary research that takes a broad view of the implications of medical and health issues.

Through its existing policies and processes, the ARC is well placed to contribute to the administration of funding for Australian scientists and medical researchers under the Medical Research Future Fund.

The ARC provides considerable funding for health and medical research. For example, in the period since 2011, Medical and Health Sciences has ranked fourth among all FoR codes, accounting for 13.5 per cent of the total funding provided through ARC grants (as at 7 July 2015). In 2014, the ARC provided nearly \$174 million for projects encompassing Medical and Health Sciences research (as classified under the Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification Fields of Research (FoR) codes).

The ARC is working closely with the NHMRC to implement the Government's Boosting Dementia Research initiative, including by providing \$26 million to fund a cross-disciplinary approach to research focused on the social, economic and cultural impacts and complex consequences of dementia.

The ARC's Special Research Initiatives (SRI) scheme provides funding for new and emerging fields of research and builds capacity in strategically important areas. Historically, a significant proportion of projects funded under this scheme have had a medical and health focus. In 2014, the ARC commenced funding for two major health and medical research initiatives under the SRI scheme:

- the Special Research Initiative for Tropical Health and Medicine, providing \$42 million to the Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine at the James Cook University over four years
- the Special Research Initiative for Type 1 Juvenile Diabetes, providing up to \$35 million for a period of up to five years to fund a national collaborative network to coordinate team-based cross-disciplinary research projects working towards finding a cure for Type 1 Juvenile Diabetes.

Previous projects funded under the SRI scheme have included:

- the Stem Cell Science Initiative, providing \$21 million over seven years to further build Australia's capacity to conduct world class research and keep its stem cell researchers at the forefront of this rapidly developing field (commenced 2011)
- the Bionic Vision Science and Technology Initiative, providing \$60 million between 2010 and 2014 to support the development of a functional bionic eye.

The ARC notes the *Medical Research Future Fund Bill 2015* and the *Medical Research Future Fund (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2015* and looks forward to contributing to continued discussion of the Medical Research Future Fund. The ARC would welcome the possibility of delivering appropriate funding opportunities under the Medical Research Future Fund that maximises the benefits for the health of Australians and support Australian scientists and medical researchers to become the best in the world.