

**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE**  
**Department of Health and Aged Care**  
**Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport**  
**Inquiry into Childhood Rheumatic Diseases**  
**17 February 2022**

**PDR Number:** IQ22-000025

**Research projects through the MRFF**

**Spoken**

**Hansard page number:** 2

**Member:** Trent Zimmerman

**Question:**

CHAIR: Thank you. My next question was about the research. You mention in your submission some of the research work that is happening through the Medical Research Future Fund, although I note that your submission indicates that none of the funding available for that has specifically gone to juvenile manifestation of rheumatic disease. But you also highlight the \$12 million that has been spent through the NHMRC. Have those research projects been completed or are they ongoing? It might be one you want to take on notice. I'm interested in, of that \$12 million, how many have been completed and how many are ongoing and whether there is a snapshot of the outcomes of that research that we might be able to get. And I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Ms Wallbank: That would be wonderful. Someone gave me a list of the names of the research projects, but I don't have that detail with me, unfortunately. But we can get that to you, I'd say, in the next day or two.

**Answer:**

Childhood rheumatic disease research is in scope under the \$20 million grant opportunity targeted at chronic musculoskeletal conditions in children and adolescents, funded through the MRFF's Emerging Priorities and Consumer Driven Research Initiative.

The grant opportunity will fund projects in three streams of research:

- Stream 1: Chronic autoimmune diseases that affect the musculoskeletal system, and
- Stream 2: Chronic musculoskeletal pain; and Stream 3: Congenital musculoskeletal diseases.

Applications focusing on childhood rheumatic diseases could be funded under Stream 1 or Stream 2.

The exact amount of funding that could be awarded to childhood rheumatic diseases cannot be determined at this time. However once applications are assessed, and funding decisions made the amount of funding towards on childhood rheumatic diseases related research will be known.

The attached spreadsheet (Attachment A) provides details of all the grants that we were able to identify as being relevant to childhood rheumatic disease, that add up to the \$12 million in total research funding. Applications have closed and assessment of applications is anticipated in April-May 2022 with announcement of outcomes currently expected in June 2022.





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**PDR Number:** IQ22-000028

**Commonwealth plan to manage emerging treatments for juvenile rheumatoid arthritis**

**Spoken**

**Hansard page number:** 3

**Member:** Mike Freelander

**Question:**

Dr FREELANDER: Could you take that on notice and see whether there is some Commonwealth mechanism that could be used to fund training positions, even if it's through supporting the colleges to do it?

Ms Wallbank: Yes. A scholarship or something along those lines?

Dr FREELANDER: Yes. Is there some Commonwealth plan to deal with the emerging treatments for childhood juvenile rheumatoid arthritis?

Ms Wallbank: There is an area of the department that looks at new treatments. Let me find the notes so I use the right words on that.

Dr FREELANDER: While you're looking: we've had a lot of submissions about workforce issues and new emerging treatments, but there doesn't seem to be any plan to deal with all of this.

Ms Wallbank: Workforce and emerging treatments are probably dealt with separately—in the department, at least. There's the health technology assessment process, which is undertaken by a particular part of the department. They do look at emerging technology. You'd be pleased to know there are a lot of doctors who work there, unlike myself, and so they're very technical experts. They're the people who also work with PBAC, BAC and those groups.

**Answer:**

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport *Inquiry into Approval Processes for New Drugs and Novel Medical Technologies* was tabled on 25 November 2021. The report's 31 recommendations address matters including the assessment process for new medicines, access to emerging treatments, and support for clinical trials for new medicines and technologies within Australia. The Government is currently in the process of responding to these recommendations.

The Government currently works with state and territory governments to consider new and emerging treatments through arrangements developed under Schedule C to the Addendum to the National Health Reform Agreement 2020-2025 (Long Term Health Reform Principles).

Under the *National Health Act 1953*, the Government may fund a medicine through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) if the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC), an independent and expert advisory body, makes a recommendation in favour of PBS listing.

When considering a medicine proposed for PBS listing, the PBAC is required to consider the clinical effectiveness (how well it works) and cost-effectiveness (value for money), compared with other available treatments.

The PBAC also takes into account whether the product has been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), Australia's regulator of medicines. Medicines are not generally made available on the PBS to treat conditions for which they have not been approved by the TGA.

The Government has committed to list all medicines on the PBS following a positive recommendation by the PBAC.

The Australian Government's Specialist Training Program (STP) supports around seven per cent of specialist medical training in Australia, with the remainder of specialist training supported by state and territory governments and the private sector. Commencing on 1 January 2010, the STP funds extended training for specialist registrars into settings outside traditional metropolitan public teaching hospitals, including regional, rural and remote and private facilities. The program was developed to positively influence on future specialist medical workforce distribution, providing a contribution to trainee salary with state and territory government and/or the private sector meeting any residual trainee costs.

The STP funds 13 non-GP specialist medical colleges, including the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) which oversees the specialty of paediatric rheumatology. The Australian Government does not determine which subspecialties are allocated training positions under the STP – this is a matter for colleges. All posts approved for funding under the STP require approval of colleges, state and territory governments and the department.

Across 2022-2025, \$708.6 million will be provided under the STP, supporting 920 fulltime equivalent (FTE) specialist training places and an additional 100 FTE places under the Integrated Rural Training Pipeline annually. All places are fully allocated across colleges.

*Existing Rheumatology places under the STP*

In 2020, 4.93 FTE places for rheumatology positions are funded under the STP. There are no specific paediatric rheumatology positions.

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**PDR Number:** IQ22-000030

**Emerging treatments for childhood rheumatic diseases**

**Spoken**

**Hansard page number:** 2

**Member:** Trent Zimmerman

**Question:**

CHAIR: The final question from me was about emerging treatments. Again, I'm not quite sure whether this is your area of expertise. I'm wondering whether the department is aware of emerging treatments that are not yet available in Australia.

Ms Wallbank: I'll have to take that one on notice, unfortunately. Sorry.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

**Answer:**

As part of the *Strategic Agreement in relation to reimbursement, health technology assessment and other matters*, the Commonwealth and Medicines Australia have agreed to share and develop greater insight into the new medicines, vaccines, and new and emerging technologies, coming through development pipelines, in order to facilitate faster access for Australian patients.

As pharmaceutical companies are in the best position to advise on emerging treatments in development, Medicines Australia committed to convene an annual forum with Government and the innovator medicines sector to:

- identify major therapeutic advances which may enter the regulatory or reimbursement systems (or both) over the following 18-24 months and which may represent a significant disruption in the treatment paradigm and/or require innovation in health care system planning, and
- understand the potential implications for the Commonwealth from the introduction of these advances in terms of resources, systems and processes.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport *Inquiry into Approval Processes for New Drugs and Novel Medical Technologies* was tabled on 25 November 2021. The report's 31 recommendations address matters including the assessment process for new medicines, access to emerging treatments, and support for clinical trials for new medicines and technologies within Australia. The Government is currently in the process of responding to these recommendations.