



THE GEORGE INSTITUTE  
*for International Health*

“Helping China Address Key Health Issues”

Submission from

The George Institute for International Health

to

The Senate Enquiry

into Australia-China Relations

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## **Executive Summary**

The following submission from the George Institute for International Health is provided to assist the Senate Enquiry into Australia-China Relations in the area of “Opportunities for strengthening the deepening political, social and cultural links between Australia and China”.

The submission provides an outline of the work of the Institute in helping China address key health issues which it now faces due to its rapid growth and industrialization. The George Institute for International Health is an Australian-based research institute that seeks to address the growing problems of heart and vascular disease, injury, mental illness and neurological diseases through high-quality research, evidence-based policy development and a range of capacity development programs. The Institute's activities in China are facilitated by the Institute's China Program. Through a range of research, policy and training activities, the China Program aims to promote evidence-based approaches to improving health outcomes and, specifically, to reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases and injuries in China.

The George Institute has, and will continue to, develop new health-related projects in China through:

- the opening of the George Institute’s Beijing office;
- the establishment of an MOU between The George Institute and the Ministry of Health of the People’s Republic of China;
- the creation of a China Advisory Board to provide advice on China’s priority health issues; and
- the development of China-Australia Partnership for Health aimed at strengthening research capacity and the development of policy and guidelines, focusing on chronic disease control and injury prevention.

The Institute’s work should be viewed in the wider context of Australia’s overall relationship-building with China, and is a core part of the Institute’s commitment to assisting developing economies with building sustainable healthcare systems. The George Institute welcomes the opportunity to make the Senate Committee aware of the scope and depth of the Institute’s work in China, and to work more closely with the Australian government to develop better relations with China in the medical research, healthcare and capacity-building areas.

## **Background**

China’s recent social and economic development has brought with it a need for varied, comprehensive and high-quality healthcare. An ageing population, due to increased life expectancy, will create new pressures for China’s social and economic infrastructure. To address this situation, and ensure that the country’s healthcare services are effective and sustainable, the China State Council and the Ministry of Health recognize that strategies are required to increase spending on health and improve the quality of medical and healthcare services.

China’s rapid growth has also revealed health problems that are growing in significance. For example, as in most industrialized countries, the burden of cardiovascular disease is increasing in China. According to estimates from the Global Burden of Disease Study, cardiovascular diseases are responsible for about 2.6 million deaths annually in China. By 2020, this figure is projected to increase to 4 million deaths every year. It has also been identified that injuries are now the leading cause of death among 1-44 year olds in China, accounting for approximately 750,000 deaths and 3.5 million hospitalisations each year. Economic progress and increasing urbanisation in China has meant that fewer people are now walk or use bicycles, but instead are using motorcycles and motor vehicles. In 2002, over three-quarters of a million traffic crashes were recorded across China.

Internationally, mental health problems and disorders now account for up to 20% of the global disease burden. The World Health Organization has predicted that depression will be the second biggest health burden worldwide by 2020. China is working towards developing effective and sustainable healthcare for the prevention and treatment of mental health disorders amongst its citizens.

## **The George Institute for International Health**

The George Institute for International Health is an Australian-based research institute that seeks to gather evidence to address the growing problems of heart and vascular disease, injury, mental illness and neurological diseases through high-quality research, evidence-based policy development and a range of capacity development programs. The Institute has over 100 staff working on projects in almost 30 countries with the collaboration of more than 300 hospitals and universities worldwide.

The George Institute's activities in China are facilitated by the Institute's China Program. Through a range of research, policy and training activities developed in consultation with other divisions, the China Program aims to promote evidence-based approaches to improve health outcomes and, specifically, to reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases and injuries in China.

In April 2004, The George Institute's opened an office in Beijing to expand and enhance its work in China.

## **Developing Australia – China Relations in the Healthcare Sector**

The George Institute for International Health has ten years of clinical research experience in China. Through a range of research, policy and capacity development activities, the Institute's China Program aims to improve health outcomes in China using the best available evidence.

The China Program steers health policy initiatives in cooperation with the following sectors:

- Academic (research academics, scientists, clinicians)
- Government (China, Australia)
- International (World Health Organization, AusAID, Department for International Development)
- Corporate (multi-national and local industrial partners)
- Community

The program strives to build capacity in population and clinical research by knowledge and skill transfer, and team building.

The China-Australia Partnership for Health is the primary mechanism for developing and implementing the strategy of the China Program. It is an initiative established between The George Institute and Peking University Health Science Center and links Peking University with the University of Sydney. The Partnership aims to strengthen research capacity and the development of policy and guidelines, focusing on chronic disease control and injury prevention in both populations. The broader aim of this collaboration is to ensure a sustained commitment to address the burden of disease in China.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between The George Institute and the Department of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China governs collaboration on the delivery of a series of roundtable discussions addressing priority health issues for the Chinese healthcare system. Two successful 'roundtables' have been held in China to date, in 2003 and 2005 (see further details below).

The George Institute has also established a China Advisory Board, which provides advice on China's priority health issues. This Advisory Board meets annually and facilitates both the planning of new projects and the implementation of research findings into policy and practice. Members of the China Advisory Board comprise individuals from academic and government sectors, including members from the China National People's Congress, Ministry of Health, China Center for Disease Control and WHO China. The China Advisory Board will ensure that the Institute's work continues to contribute to the areas of highest need.

With the opening of the George Institute's Beijing office, and the establishment of the MOU, the China Advisory Board and the China-Australia Partnership for Health, the George Institute will continue to develop new projects in China, some of which are detailed below.

## **Current Research in China by The George Institute for International Health**

### ASIA PACIFIC COHORT STUDIES COLLABORATION (APCSC)

The largest epidemiological collaboration in the Asia-Pacific, the APCSC aims to provide direct, reliable evidence about determinants of stroke, coronary heart disease and other common causes of death in Asia-Pacific populations. The Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, Beijing, is one of the project collaborators.

### CHINA SALT SUBSTITUTE STUDY (CSSS)

CSSS is a project that aims to determine the long-term effects of a low-sodium, high-potassium salt substitute on blood pressure among people at high risk from cardiovascular disease in Northern China. Six hundred participants have been recruited to the study. Fu Wai Medical Hospital, Beijing, is one of the project collaborators.

### CLINICAL PATHWAYS FOR ACUTE CORONARY SYNDROMES IN CHINA (CPACS)

Acute coronary cases are projected to rise significantly in China over the coming years. This project aims to develop, implement and evaluate clinical pathways for the management of acute coronary syndromes in China. The Institute is collaborating with the Chinese Society of Cardiology, and Peking University Health Science Center, on this project.

### ACTION IN DIABETES AND VASCULAR DISEASE: PRETERAX AND DIAMICRON MR CONTROLLED EVALUATION (ADVANCE)

Over 38 million adults in China have diabetes. This trial of over 11,000 participants in 20 countries (with over 3,000 from China) investigates the effects of intensive blood pressure lowering and glucose control on the risks of major cardiovascular events in high-risk patients with diabetes. The Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, Beijing, is one of the project collaborators.

### MUSCULOSKELETAL DISABILITY AMONGST OLDER PEOPLE IN CHINA, CCPACH

The two most common musculoskeletal disorders in older people in China are osteoarthritis and osteoporotic fractures. This study aims to examine the prevalence of these disorders in 20,000 participants aged 50 and over in Shanghai. Evidence from other populations demonstrate that about 10% of men and 18% of women aged 60 years and over will report chronic knee or hip pain and disability. Limited access to highly beneficial joint replacement is likely to increase the social burdens caused by osteoarthritis.

### CHINA PLANT STEROL TRIAL (CPST)

This trial aims to evaluate the effectiveness of plant sterols in lowering serum cholesterol levels in an adult Chinese population, and involves 300 participants from urban Beijing.

### CHINA SEATBELT INTERVENTION

This project aims to increase the use of seatbelts in China's Guangzhou province from 15% to 40%, thereby reducing road fatalities. The findings will be used to develop social marketing materials, such as television and radio advertising, billboards and posters, which will be used during the intervention phase.

### SHANTOU MOTORCYCLE HELMET STUDY

This study is aimed at increasing the use of properly fastened motorcycle helmets in China's Shantou City by 20% and increase knowledge about helmet wearing practices amongst Shantou City residents. The Institute is collaborating with the Cheung Kong School of Journalism and Communication and Shantou University on the project.

## **Translating Research into Practice**

A unique feature of The George Institute's approach is its commitment to translating research into practice. The Institute's three-year Memorandum of Understanding with the China Ministry of Health is aimed to facilitate practical implementation of research via the delivery of a series of Roundtable meetings concerning priority health issues. Major themes include urban hospital reform, pharmaceutical regulation, urban health financing and system development to meet the needs of an ageing population. Themes are reviewed annually to ensure high priority health issues are incorporated into the discussions. The first Roundtable was held in Dalian in 2003 for senior officials from national and provincial governments to discuss public/private partnerships in health care delivery. The second Roundtable was held in Beijing in April 2005 with the theme of 'China Health Care Safety'.

## **Developing Capacity for Healthcare in China**

Another key feature of The George Institute is its commitment to regional capacity development, education and training via a number of activities throughout Asia. The Institute teaches a series of short courses in epidemiology and biostatistics in China. The George Institute also regularly hosts visiting scholars, and its China Program has received numerous visitors as part of this academic exchange. In addition, a co-tutelle arrangement between the University of Sydney and Peking University enables a doctoral student to study at and gain qualifications from both universities. The first participant of this exchange program visited The George Institute in 2005.

In late September 2005, the Institute will also be co-hosting a visit by China's Minister for Health, Mr GAO Qiang, who will meet with George Institute personnel, staff from The Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, as well as Federal and State health officials. The visit is part of the Minister's initiatives to improve health practices in China, particularly in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention, control and care. To assist with the establishment of a robust public health system in China, the Minister will look at how governments in Australia finance and support healthcare, and how private and public sector health providers contribute to the system.

## **Further Information**

Further information on the George Institute's activities in China is available from either:

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