



Western Australian
Future Health Research
& Innovation Fund

FHRI Fund Communique #2

16 August 2022 meeting

It was my pleasure to welcome Director General of Department of Health, Dr David Russell-Weisz and incoming Director of the WA Office of Medical Research and Innovation (OMRI), Professor S.S. Vasan, to the August meeting of the Future Health Research and Innovation (FHRI) Fund Advisory Council (AC).

Dr Russell-Weisz acknowledged the importance of health and medical research and innovation as a key strategic priority for the State Government. To emphasise this, OMRI now reports directly to the Deputy Director General, Ms Angela Kelly PSM, and the Director General will be attending the AC meetings moving forward.

I am happy to see the introduction of a guest presentation in every AC meeting. We heard from Dr Craig Willers of Deloss Consulting on his recommendations for a WA biobanking model that incorporates Australian and global best practices. In our next meeting, a PwC team will present their evaluation on the effectiveness of the Fund.

Over the first 2 years our Fund has awarded \$63.6million in grants to 364 recipients. This is a significant achievement. Reaping the rewards of this funding are our WA researchers and innovators – academic, public, private and non-for-profit sectors – across diverse areas including Aboriginal health, rural and remote, and mental health.

Themes, priority goals and focus areas

The August meeting was an opportunity for our council to endorse the mapping of 8 priority goals to the themes of people, partners and platforms. We have also identified 4 focus areas for the next 3 years:

- A (Aboriginal, rural and remote health)
- B (burden of diseases)
- C (living with COVID-19 and Long-Covid)
- M (mental health, kept distinct to ensure parity of esteem).

Please see our [‘Strategy on a page’](#) for further details.

These improvements incorporate our learnings over the last 2 years as well as feedback on the Commonwealth’s Medical Research Future Fund, which was established in 2015.

Streamlining programs and initiatives

To enable greater clarity and certainty for the sector and more planning time for applicants, the process for funding programs has been streamlined into 4-monthly cycles starting in November, March, July.

OMRI will ensure a smooth transition period for the 2 programs currently open – Major Research Application Support (MRAS) and Co-Funding Partnerships – until the new cycles come in to effect in November.

Each cycle will be launched with an ‘Open Day’, as is common practice in the USA. The open days will be hosted at different WA locations and/or organisations, offering ample opportunities for stakeholder engagement with the AC, and clarification on the programs and initiatives advertised in the current cycle.

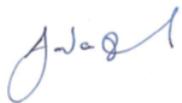
A recording from the day will be made available on the [FHRI Fund website](#), along with Q and A’s from the session.

From the November 2022 cycle, all programs and initiatives will have defined start and end dates, including a date by which minimum data must be submitted – this is consistent with the NHMRC process. For each program and initiative, detailed guidelines will be made available on the FHRI Fund website.

Key and new programs update

The MRAS is the mechanism by which WA could commit co-funding, up to a \$1 million cap, to support competitive grant applications to national and international sources. The \$1 million cap has been temporarily lifted for 3 consecutive rounds – with the deadlines of 27 July, 11 October, 8 December 2022 – and will revert to \$1 million from the March 2023 cycle, pending review. The MRAS program, along with the Co-Funding Partnerships, will recur every cycle.

The fund is also considering a Clinician Researcher Training Program to support postgraduate research degrees for medical and non-medical WA clinicians. Prestigious FHRI Fellowships are also being considered, with salary and research funding to attract outstanding researchers to WA for 5 years.



Mr John Van Der Wielen
FHRI Fund Advisory Council Chair

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