

## **New Zealand Health Research Strategy: Submission from the Research Committee of Universities New Zealand – Te Pōkai Tara**

### **Summary**

Universities New Zealand welcomes the formulation of a health research strategy. A clear research strategy will help in making decisions on how scarce resources should be deployed and properly planned research is essential to help support the health strategy. We believe the success of both the health strategy and the health research strategy will depend on regular increases in funding and the full funding of research and overheads to ensure that research providers and other funders do not have to subsidise health research.

### **Background**

This submission is made by Universities New Zealand – Te Pōkai Tara (Universities NZ) on behalf of the Universities NZ Research Committee. Universities NZ is the operating name of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee, a body established under Part 19 of the Education Act 1989. It has statutory responsibilities for university quality assurance, the approval and accreditation of university academic programmes, entrance to universities, and scholarships. It also represents the interests of the universities on a wide range of other matters, such as education and research policies. The Research Committee is made up of the senior officer in each university, typically at Deputy Vice-Chancellor level, with responsibility for research policy issues.

### **Comment**

- Universities NZ believes that the formulation of a health research strategy is a timely adjunct to the recent update of the New Zealand Health Strategy; the two are closely related, but could be even more closely aligned. However, it is important that the research strategy itself is research centred and does not become a health delivery strategy.
- New Zealand health researchers are well-regarded internationally, with their work featuring prominently in international journals and contributing to global health issues; a health research strategy should seek to leverage off these connections to demonstrate our international role and to ensure our basic and translational discoveries are benchmarked against international best practice.
- Without properly planned research it will not be possible to fulfil the aspirations of the health strategy and the research strategy must act upon supporting the role that research plays in delivering better health outcomes. A clear strategy will help decide how scarce resources should be deployed.
- While spending on health research in New Zealand is below international levels, the move in Budget 2016 to increase funding to the Health Research Council is a positive move. However, the success of both the health and health research strategies will depend on regular additions to health and HRC funding.
- The costs of health research should be fully funded in order to maintain the necessary investment in facilities and infrastructure in our research organisations. Much current health research, including from international agencies, philanthropic

organisations and from some government agencies, is currently being subsidised by research providers.

- New Zealand health researchers have strong links to their counterparts overseas and it will be important to capitalise on these linkages to ensure the best research outcomes. Learning from the experiences of other researchers may be a more productive use of resources than attempting to duplicate research conducted elsewhere, although there will be cases where local challenges and a New Zealand perspective are important.
- While international linkages are important, the strategy should also help develop and retain world class researchers in New Zealand.
- The strategy should take a broad view of what constitutes health research – including biomedical research, epidemiological studies, allied health and health services research as well as studies of behavioral, social, and economic factors that affect health.
- A health research strategy should recognise the role of data analytics in making informed health investment and therapeutic decisions to optimise social and economic outcomes. The use of data analytics in health research and the development of new models around therapies, and government and health board determination of priorities will become increasingly important in the years ahead.
- It is important that the health research strategy is developed in conjunction with the goals set out in the National Statement of Science Investment and that both impact and excellence are taken into consideration in future funding signals.
- It is important that the health research strategy is aligned with the National Science Challenges, not just *Aging Well*, *A Better Start* and *Healthier Lives* with direct application but also those such as *High-Value Nutrition*, *Science for Technological Innovation* and *Building Better Homes, Towns and Cities* that also have an impact on the health and well-being of society.
- The health research strategy should also recognise and integrate with research priorities set through the Tertiary Education Commission's research funding streams, particularly the Performance Based Research Fund (including helping to ensure that the PBRF recognises both the excellence and impact agenda that both the health research strategy and NSSI espouse), Centres of Research Excellence (including the *MedTech CoRE*, *Rangahau Roro Aotearoa* and *The Maurice Wilkins Centre*), and other agencies, such as the Ministry for Primary Industries.
- A balanced portfolio of health research is important. The health research strategy should not ignore the role that basic medical and health research plays in improving health outcomes over time. Thus the strategy needs to encourage discovery and innovation.
- While the development of new technologies will undoubtedly be of benefit to the New Zealand economy, this should not be the primary focus; the health and well-being of society is paramount with commercial returns welcome but of secondary importance.

Universities New Zealand Research Committee  
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