

**CEO's Newsletter**  
**June 2007.**

**Brief news from NHMRC, June 2007:**

- International Review of NHMRC Processes
- 2007 Funding round
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  - Program Grant
  - Career development awards
  - Research Fellowships
  - Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)
- Statistics about NHMRC funding
- Implementation of the *Prohibition of Human Cloning for Reproduction and the Regulation of Human Embryo Research Amendment Act 2006*
- Expert Committees
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- Federal Budget 2007
- Council Activities
- Major Infrastructure needs for Health and Medical Research.

**INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF NHMRC PROCESSES**

One of the commitments made in the *Strategic Plan* and *Statement of Intent* to the Minister is to complete an International Review of NHMRC processes, including maintenance of public confidence in research, by December 2007. A Statement of Requirement for a consultant to facilitate an international panel to undertake the review has been prepared and a Request for Tender is scheduled for advertising on Saturday 23 June 2007.

An International Panel is being appointed, with Professor Alan Bernstein, President of the Canadian Institute for Health Research as chair. The Panel is scheduled to meet in late October 2007 and provide a final report by December 2007.

**2007 FUNDING ROUND**

***Project Grant funding commencing 2008***

2489 project grant applications have been received this year. The Assigner's Meeting was held in Canberra on 3 April to allocate applications to appropriate Grant Review Panels (GRPs) and select panel membership. 39 GRPs have been formed.

The Office is currently finalising GRP membership and the intense phase of the peer review is underway with members reviewing the applications assigned to them. The GRP meetings will be held in Melbourne between July 23 and August 10.

For a number of years now, the NHMRC has reviewed applications submitted through the Project Grants scheme for funding by the Cancer Council and/or the National Breast Cancer

Foundation. This year, we will also be reviewing an additional set of applications on behalf of Cancer Australia.

We have commenced a process to review the structure of GRPs, to better align with contemporary research approaches (which are often multidisciplinary) and with the objectives of the applications and NHMRC's Strategic Plan.

### ***Program Grants***

Interviews for Program Grants starting 2008 have been completed. For Program Grants beginning in 2009, applications may be made either later this year (the closing date is 24 August 2007 - successful applicants will not need to write "back up" project grants) or in February 2008 (as normal). After several years of operation of the new Program Grants scheme, NHMRC will review its achievements later this year.

### ***Career Development Awards***

We have received 348 applications for the revised career Development Awards Scheme, compared to 186 applications received in 2006.

### ***Research Fellowships***

A total of 197 applications have been received, and interviews were held between 4th and 7<sup>th</sup> June.

### ***Complementary and Alternative Medicine***

In 2006 NHMRC allocated \$5 million in funding for a "Special call for research applications into CAM" to investigate the use and effectiveness of CAM and to enhance the evidence base.

The call for research closed March 30 2007 with 141 proposals received from 37 Australian institutions. The applications cover a spectrum of research approaches from basic science, health services and clinical enquiries to socio-demographic research. The research proposals cover a wide range of CAM modalities and diseases/conditions.

Normal NHMRC peer review processes will apply.

The "Special call for research applications into CAM" will inform the planning of subsequent NHMRC initiatives in this area over the next triennium.

## **STATISTICS ABOUT NHMRC FUNDING**

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2007</b>
Basic Science	\$110,673,267	\$249,252,950
Clinical Medicine	\$37,351,033	\$151,118,950
Health Services Research	\$2,454,052	\$18,844,878
Preventive Medicine	\$2,722,481	\$8,699,798
Public Health	\$15,622,213	\$67,113,120
Other	\$2,349,200	\$8,371,065
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$171,172,247</b>	<b>\$503,400,762</b>

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROHIBITION OF HUMAN CLONING FOR REPRODUCTION AND THE REGULATION OF HUMAN EMBRYO RESEARCH AMENDMENT ACT 2006**

Following passage of the Amendment Act through Parliament last December, the Amendment Act came into operation on June 12, 2007. NHMRC has developed:

- The Application Form for a licence to use excess ART embryos, and the Application to permit a trainee to use excess ART embryos, have been updated.
- Undertaken information sessions in Sydney (x2), Melbourne (x2), Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart and Canberra.
- Issued the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.
- Through the Australian Health Ethics Committee, completed a revision of the *Ethical Guidelines for Assisted Reproductive technology in clinical practice and research* to bring it in line with the new legislation.

## **EXPERT COMMITTEES**

I have established a number of Expert Committees to help NHMRC achieve the objectives of our Strategic Plan. These are

- Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee
- Expert Advisory Group on Antimicrobial Resistance
- Cellular Therapies Advisory Committee (replaces the previous GTRAP)
- Advisory Committee on Health and Nanotechnology
- Water Quality Advisory Committee

## **NHMRC WORKSHOPS**

NHMRC will shortly begin a series of high level workshops to provide advice to us on how to tackle some of the major health issues facing the nation. The emphasis of the workshop will be to bring the research evidence into the formulation of NHMRC advice on these issues.

We have already held workshops on

- Nanotechnology
- Air Quality
- Complementary Medicines

Reports on these workshops can be found at

<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/news/noticeboard/index.htm>

There will be workshops over the next year on:

- Obesity
- Recycled water
- Water fluoridation
- Antimicrobial resistance
- Health towards the end of life.
- Mental health
- Screening and Genetics
- Synchrotron imaging
- Business Investment to develop the outcomes of health research
- Regenerative Medicine

As well, October this year will see the Biennial National Ethics Conference, where the focus will be on the ethics of good research.

### **POLICY AND PRACTICE PROGRAM**

We signalled in our Strategic Plan that NHMRC would undertake a major new initiative over this triennium to bridge the gaps between the creation of research evidence and its adoption into improving the practice of health care, and it being available to inform development of health policies by policy makers. A consultation paper is being prepared, so that we can benefit in the development of this comprehensive program from the experience and insights of researchers, clinical practice leaders, and policy makers.

NHMRC's Research Committee has already recommended the application of some of the 2006 federal budget announcement of increased funding for NHMRC to policy and practice focused research, in line with the recommendations of the *2004 Investment Review of Health and Medical Research*, chaired by John Grant. There will be a number of funding vehicles with an emphasis on partnerships.

### **NHMRC OFFICE RESTRUCTURE**

I am pleased to announce two new senior appointments to the staff of NHMRC. The Chief Operations Officer will be Ms Hilary Russell and the Chief Knowledge and Development Officer will be Dr Clive Morris. We are well advanced with our recruitment of four new high level "research-literate" staff.

We are also finalising arrangements for new "intern" positions, for students or researchers who might wish to spend periods of weeks/months with us, contributing to the wide range of research, advice and ethics work of the NHMRC.

### **FEDERAL BUDGET 2007**

As part of the 2007 budget package, the Treasurer announced the allocation of an additional \$435.8 million in grants to medical research facilities to be administered by the Department of Health and Ageing. These are capital grants (not for research) and the full announcement can be found at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/budget/publishing.nsf/content/budget2007-hfact17.htm>.

Recipients organisations include:

- Western Australian Institutes of Health;
- Princess Alexandra Hospital and University of Queensland;
- Queensland Institute of Medical Research;
- Murdoch Children's Research Institute;
- Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute;
- Institute of Immunology and Infectious Diseases at Murdoch University;
- Westmead Millennium Institute;
- Australian Regenerative Medicine Institute;
- Baker Heart Research Institute;
- Sydney Cancer Centre;
- Flinders Centre for Innovation in Cancer;
- Brain and Mind Research Institute;
- Macfarlane Burnet Institute for Medical Research and Public Health; and
- Menzies School of Health Research.

## **COUNCIL ACTIVITIES**

### **What's on Council Agenda**

- Air quality in and around Traffic Tunnels
- Recreational water guidelines
- Fluoride in dental health
- Australian immunisation handbook
- Research funding: Program Grants, Development Grants

### **What's on the Research Committee agenda**

- MREA budget
- Considering the links between NHMRC support for fellowships (post doc, career development, leading Fellowships) and the amount of funding available for research.
- Review of the program development and enabling grants scheme.
- Planning for the new “Requests for Application” strategic approach (see Strategic Plan).

### **What's on Australian Health Ethics Committee's agenda**

- Guidelines on Assisted reproduction technology
- End of Life decisions and issues (See also [http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/186\\_12\\_180607/cla11246\\_fm.html](http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/186_12_180607/cla11246_fm.html))
- Streamlining scientific and ethics review of multicentre research
- National ethics application form

### **What's on the National Health Committee's agenda**

- Mental Health
- Alcohol Guidelines
- Obesity and Public Policy
- Indigenous health

### **What's on Human Genetics Advisory Committee's agenda**

- Amendment to the Privacy Act
- DNA Testing Guidelines
- Human genetics research databases and biobanks
- Education – medical students, health professionals and the community

## **MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS FOR HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH – YOUR VIEWS ARE SOUGHT.**

The Commonwealth Government has announced the allocation of \$50 million towards the operating costs of the Australian Synchrotron. The new imaging facilities planned for the synchrotron represents a new and exciting opportunity for researchers in Australia. Another major investment in necessary infrastructure, this time facilitating data linkage in health for population health studies, is under consideration as part of the NCRIS program.

The announcements in the last two budgets of capital funding for research institutes, and the investments by a number of Universities in new health and medical research buildings, will all increase the ability of our researchers to remain at the forefront of research. However, that forefront keeps changing, and we must as a nation work hard to ensure that our researchers have the tools needed.

Research in all domains becomes increasingly complex. In molecular and cellular sciences, our understanding grows deeper and deeper – witness the looming potential of regenerative medicine. In clinical research and the translational medicine area, the need for excellent research and experimental treatment facilities, located in our best clinical care settings, is an urgent need (here and around the world). And in health services research, and in public health research, the ability to develop, maintain and link data from the health system and wider domains that impact on health could deliver greatly improved research evidence to improve the health system and individual health.

As we address these needs, and as we tackle the more complex problems in health, there is also a need to the research community and organisations to pool its efforts and work cooperatively. Australia has the benefit of a diversified health and medical research sector and there is now an increased need to harness the mutual strengths of the independent institutes and the universities.

I am seeking the views of the Australian health and medical research community on this and encourage your input and thoughts to [nhmrc@nhmrc.gov.au](mailto:nhmrc@nhmrc.gov.au).