



Bigger picture for healthcare

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The \$20 billion Medical Research Future Fund will favour efforts to improve systems and structures, rather than pursue any single cure or miracle therapy, in an attempt to maximise the impact of health spending in Australia.

Last week Health Minister Sussan Ley announced six so-called strategic platforms for grants in coming years to "ensure that Australia is research ready to prepare for future challenges".

"Without health and medical research our health system would be static," Ms Ley told the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes. "With it, our health system can be innovative and sustainable."

The priorities focus on areas including data and infrastructure, health services and systems, the translation of research into practice, collaboration with the healthcare sector and research commercialisation.

Sally Redman, chief executive of the Sax Institute, said the emphasis on data and infrastructure would complement big datasets from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, state hospital systems and large cohort students.

She said a feasibility study into a national institute to focus on evidence-based and cost-effective healthcare and public and preventive health also would be of enormous value to the research community.

"The UK is a role model in this area, leading the way with its National Institute for Health Research, which has a focus on applying health research to make a difference on the ground," Professor Redman said.

A similar institute in Australia would rapidly make a real impact on the effective delivery of health services, improving their quality and reducing their costs, she said.

The British experience showed

such an institute could bring stakeholders together in the development and implementation of research and the translation of findings into practice.

"We're seeing growing recognition of the need for researchers, service providers and policy-makers to work in partnership to identify critical questions and

undertake research," Professor Redman said. "We'll get smarter research that can make a bigger impact on the health system."

The NIHR also has been effective at pulling in additional non-government funds to maximise the research effort and focus on key issues in the health system, she said.

Research Australia chief executive Nadia Levin said that with almost two in three Australian adults and one in four children overweight or obese, and one in six Australians living with chronic back pain, the MRFF's strategy set out the road map for addressing some of Australia's biggest health issues.

"It has the potential to bridge the gap between research and delivering real health outcomes. It will help bring lifesaving treatments from the laboratory and into hospitals and clinics," she said.

Alan Cass, director of the Menzies School of Health Research, said the fund's focus on data and infrastructure, health services and systems, building research capacity and clinical trials and their translation would drive a research agenda that should translate into patient outcomes.

"Sharing linked data across health services and systems represents a crucial tool to enable the delivery of better healthcare," he

said. "It has the potential to contribute to greater efficiency through reducing duplication of unnecessary testing, and to improve quality of healthcare through sharing of key information with a range of

health providers."

Ms Levin said Research Australia looked forward to the announcement of the first funding to be made in line with the priorities "as a first down payment on the promise the MRFF holds".



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